

Week 5: Racism and Accessibility

Admissions and Hiring Policies

We have all experienced undergraduate admissions and the student side of academic hiring, and some of us have experienced the graduate admissions program and hiring at non-academic institutions. As with last session, we reflected on our own experiences and discussed changes we would like to see.

Suggested Questions

What was your experience like going through hiring and/or admissions, start to finish?

Who is on your hiring and/or admissions committees? Who interfaces with applicants?

Does your organization make their hiring/admissions policies public? Are they reviewed?

Reflections:

- In some of our experiences, undergrad students are included in new faculty hiring decisions, however these pools of finalists rarely included faculty of color. How are these institutions recruiting faculty? How are these initial reviews being conducted?

Betony

- I've been an active participant in faculty hiring from a student representative perspective for (as well as participating in final candidate talks/ lunches/teaching demos as just a student) visiting professorships, and while I was glad that the candidates we eventually settled on had solid diversity statements as well as the other features we were looking for, everyone hired in my time in undergrad was white. Being privy to the applicant pool for a temporary hire as a student representative, the lack of diversity in the pool of qualified candidates is logically a huge barrier in getting more diverse hires, in spite of departmental efforts.
 - Having only been part of the conversation once the applications were in, and having the context of the last URGE session, I wonder what the recruitment process was like. I don't know if it was just a position posted into the void, or if there was a more active recruitment effort. At the same time, however, how much resources can a department spend on recruitment for a temporary hire?
 - Maybe recruitment isn't the root issue. Context is hugely important. I think the applicant pool's lack of diversity could speak to problems such as location (rural midwest isn't appealing to everyone), school size/type, and the largely stagnant rates of BIPOC entering the geosciences. Clearly we need to address systemic racism in all areas from making grad schools more accessible, to undergraduate programs more accessible (hello expensive and inaccessible field work), to even outreach in high schools (so many geoscientists have had very little exposure to geoscience prior to college, and this is only amplified for high schoolers with marginalized identities)
- From a position of a student looking at graduate schools, the discussions around barriers to entry in graduate admissions is really interesting and important to reflect on.
 - As a white student with the privilege of having field work experience, research experience, and from a fairly prestigious undergraduate institution with access to close mentorship, I know that I am positioned very differently in the application process than

someone who hasn't had access to these opportunities. I think it's really important to reflect on that as someone who wants to enter academic spaces in terms of evaluating whether I'm perpetuating cycles of prestige-seeking-prestige, and continuing to define/value merit in a way that disproportionately privileges myself as a white person

- The other aspect in this process that I've been reflecting on is how terrifying and stressful it is to apply to graduate school as someone with other marginalized identities. Reaching out to faculty is hugely important in the graduate application process, and having to consider "how well will I be treated if I put my pronouns in the email" is a barrier. Feeling the need to reach out to current graduate students to ask "will I be safe let alone supported in this environment" is a barrier. So if I, a white person with a lot of privilege in academia, have trouble through this process, I can only imagine it's greatly amplified for BIPOC students.

Kate

- It's been interesting to reflect on my own graduate admissions process through this framework
 - I am absolutely a product of prestige -- went to a prestigious undergraduate institution, am headed to a prestigious graduate institution, there are connections between my undergraduate and graduate advisors, I had access to research throughout undergraduate experience and was able to take the GRE...
 - We discussed redefining success and working to define ourselves by more than our academic merit/perceived prestige, which really hit home for me -- important to continue to deconstruct my own bias towards prestigious institutions, "well-educated" people, etc.
 - When I picked schools to apply to, I tried to look for environments that were actually committed to anti-racist work -- but it's often hard to look past "lip service" statements on a website or outreach efforts to determine whether these are actually done well and whether there is commitment to changing climate at an institution
- I have also sat on a student hiring committee for a geoscience faculty position
 - Was helpful to meet with faculty candidates in an informal setting, to get an idea of how we might interact with them; but we only saw the finalists in one meeting, didn't have as complete a picture
 - Lack of diversity in the pool, no real discussion of bias in student evaluations -- but I also don't know how much our voices were taken into account

Mariah

- My admission process was very stressful there . From the inside, I saw the effort PZ put to address race and inequality in their admissions process they had:
 - Diversity committees sit in on all faculty hiring, students sat on these committees as well
 - No test scores were required for undergraduates
 - Undergrads gave most of the undergrad interviews, lots of peer-to-peer support. As an admission ambassador I personally spent my time putting inclusion at the heart of all my work

- They had several “diversity weekend” - thinkinking about it now maybe we should have had a different name here
- This weekend brought in students who may not have had the chance to visit campus in the past. They really prioritize folks from underrepresented backgrounds.
- Even with all this work, our school was driven by \$ at the end of the day. I think that this was a huge barrier to our own institutional success. It’s not enough to shift these practices.
- Ideas
 - More interested in that longer term overhaul
 - Get folks to actively challenged there “self fulfilling prophecy” → redefining success
 - Planning for longer retention rate → plan for these unique barriers (i.e outdoor access and comfort, research opportunity)
 - I like the emphasis on not just best practice, but really engaging w/ current students of color

Ideas:

- Students on hiring committees
 - VERY important to continue this practice while also making sure it’s not putting students in the position of:
 - lying to applicants about their experiences
 - taking on extra, unpaid work (especially important because the burden of this work often falls upon people of color and white women)
 - inflicting their own biases on evaluations of candidates (think course evaluations and how biased these are)
- Transparency on hiring committees to undergraduates and potential candidates -- what are they evaluating, whose voices are heard in the decision process
- Some way to make sure that potential graduate students have the chance to get honest perspectives on the institution’s work and the experiences that students sharing their (marginalized) identities have at that institution
 - Make those connections for the applicants, because not everyone knows to do this -- but also really important that these meetings are truly confidential with absolutely no impact on admission so that authentic conversations can be had
- Active recruitment -- focus on engaging applicants earlier in the process, because sitting on a diversity committee in hiring doesn’t do anything if you’re only getting white applicants
 - Again, be honest with applicants -- location, campus culture, etc.
 - Everything has to be taken from the context of the situation
- Our field, specifically, is hostile to people of color -- comes from our institutional roots, comes from our field focus, comes from our culture
- It is important to redefine success for both candidates and established professors. If professors in charge of admissions or hiring only view success as the ways in which they are successful, then the people they hire/admit will only reinforce the same pathways.