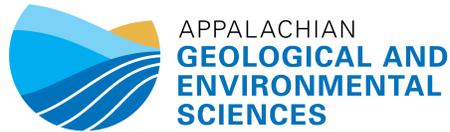


# URGE

## Unlearning Racism in Geoscience



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### Hiring and/or Admissions Policies for the Department of Geological and Environmental Sciences (GES) at Appalachian State University (ASU)

This is what was found by Appalachian Geological and Environmental Sciences Pod at ASU on Hiring and/or Admissions Policies, as well as what the pod would propose to change and improve.

*As we are a teaching-intensive department that does not have a graduate program, we did not answer these questions in the context of graduate admissions. However, we do have an annual Graduate School FAQ night each fall, which is an evening presentation (with food!) by younger faculty members that explains how graduate study is funded in the geosciences, when to apply (or if you should apply right away), how to apply, contacting potential advisors, what types of programs to apply to based on your career goals, what to expect as a graduate student, etc. This program is very well received by students, and many credit this FAQ night as the reason they pursued graduate education.*

- **What EEO (Equal Employment Opportunity) statement is included in a standard job or admissions advertisement? Are there other inclusion statements and resources publicly available?**

The following EEO statement is mandated by ASU to be part of all job ads:

“Appalachian State University is committed to providing equal opportunity in education and employment to all applicants, students, and employees. The university does not discriminate in access to its educational programs and activities, or with respect to hiring or the terms and conditions of employment, on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity and expression, political affiliation, age, disability, veteran status, genetic information or sexual orientation. The university actively promotes diversity among students and employees. The university is committed to its affirmative action plans and seeks to deepen its applicant pools by attracting interest from a diverse group of qualified individuals. Individuals with disabilities may request accommodations in the application process by contacting XXX. Any offer of employment to a successful candidate will be conditioned upon the University's receipt of a satisfactory criminal background report. Documentation of identity and employability of the applicant will be required before the hiring process can be finalized.”

- **Where are advertisements posted or sent? Are there other strategies for reaching applicants for hiring and/or admissions, e.g. job fairs, showcases?**

Applications are sent to various geoscience listservs (ES\_JOBS\_NET, other disciplinary-specific ones as appropriate), additional listserv suggestions by Dr. Willie Fleming (Chief Diversity Officer), social media advertising (departmental facebook, twitter, instagram where sharing is encouraged), Geoscience Job Board on the Geological Society of America website, Chronicle of Higher Ed and HigherEdJobs, etc. We also request that HR distribute to additional networks such as the National Association of Black Geologists and Geophysicists. We used to have job pre-interviews at the Geological Society of America annual meeting, but have abandoned that process for a variety of reasons.

- **What are the requirements for an applicant, e.g. letters of recommendations, fees/test scores<sup>3</sup>/grades? Is providing any of these a potential barrier that could be further lowered or removed? Are there any problematic questions asked?**

Our most recent tenure-track job description had the following requirements:

*“Applications must include a letter of interest, curriculum vitae, statements of teaching and research interests, informal copies of transcripts of all college and university work (official copies due upon employment), and the names and contact information (including e-mail) of three referees familiar with the applicant’s teaching and scholarship.”*

We do not think that there are any problematic questions here, nor undue burdens on applicants at the application stage for the following reasons:

- As transcripts are informal rather than certified at the application stage, applicants do not have to pay fees or deal with long wait times for certified transcripts until they are short-listed or offered the job.
- Letters of reference are *not* required with the application, as we contact references by phone only once candidates have been shortlisted. References are all asked the same exact questions and we cannot deviate from the standard question block, aside to ask for clarification. These questions are determined by committee prior to contacting references.
- We are prohibited from asking questions about a candidate’s race, family situation, identity, religion, politics, etc. We are free to answer questions from candidates related to these topics (if they ask) but we are not allowed to ask them anything outside of the job requirements (within the broad context of teaching/research/service). Searches can be failed by the Dean if these questions are asked at any time.

- In the past we have not required a statement about a candidate's commitment to diversity, but we will be including this requirement in future faculty searches if we are ever given another faculty line.
- While we do require a background check of the final candidate prior to their ultimate hiring, this is a state mandated policy.
- **How are applicants/applications evaluated? Is that process and/or rubric<sup>4,5</sup> public? What kind of biases are introduced in this process and what strategies are used to address these, e.g. removing applicant names?**

Applications for faculty positions are evaluated as follows:

1. The application must be fully complete for consideration (all requested statements, CV, and unofficial transcripts).
2. Prior to evaluating applications, the search committee creates a rubric that characterizes candidates according to the job requirements:
  - a. Does the candidate have the necessary credentials, or will they by the time they are hired? (i.e. Ph.D. or M.S., depending on the position)
  - b. Does the candidate have experience in the specialty requested by the job ad? This is particularly important in situations where the advertised position could be construed as broadly interdisciplinary; this generally happens in cases where someone may have a degree in engineering, geography, chemistry, biology, or physics rather than the geosciences. In cases where a candidate's expertise/background is not obviously aligned with the needs of the position, the candidate would have to persuade the search committee that their expertise is relevant to the job duties. *For example, if our job ad says we are looking for a geophysicist, whose duties would be to teach near-surface geophysics field techniques in classes geared towards environmental science majors and to collaborate on environmental projects with other faculty, we would be less interested in hiring someone with a physics degree whose expertise is in planetary dynamo modeling unless they can convince us in their application that they have the necessary skill set and experience.*

If a candidate passes requirements 1 and 2, their application moves on to a more detailed rubric, which includes the following:

- c. Does the candidate's teaching statement complement departmental needs? This is where there is considerable gray area, as these needs change depending on student numbers, anticipated faculty reassigned administrative time or upcoming retirements, institutional initiatives, space requirements, and other factors that are not appropriate to put in a job ad.

- d. Does the candidate's research complement departmental needs? This factor is to avoid duplication of subfields; while it is useful to have multiple faculty who can teach a single course, we would prefer to have faculty whose work complements but does not wholly duplicate the expertise of other faculty members. For example, from 2004-2016 we had three paleontologists but they all had very different types of expertise and all developed different teaching and collaborative research niches.
- e. What is the experience (or potential, in cases where experience is lacking) for successful scholarship, teaching, and service? This is one of the more challenging parts of the rubric, as some candidates have significant experience while others do not have any. We do not wish to punish applicants who did not have opportunities to teach or write grants at their graduate institutions or postdoctoral institutions. We rank the service component of the rubric quite low compared to the teaching/scholarship, as most new faculty have no idea what service opportunities there are at a particular institution, and as most early career scientists have very little opportunity to do service work that is analogous to what faculty at our institution are expected to do. However, it is very hard to rate "potential" vs. experience. Essentially, we rank their proposed directions in research and their teaching statement on how successful their plans are likely to be as they relate to the duties outlined in the job description. This part of the rubric is really dependent on the candidate's teaching and research statement.

Rubric scores above a certain number move forward for further consideration (typically this would be the top 10 candidates or where there is a natural break differentiating the top scores from lower scores). These top candidates are then contacted to ask for permission for the search committee to contact both listed (indicated) as well as non-indicated references for phone interviews that are conducted with a set list of questions. Non-indicated references may include co-authors, former advisors, former employers, etc., depending on the candidate's current work situation. Most candidates agree, although others request we do not contact non-indicated references until after a job offer has been extended (as they do not want their colleagues to know they are on the job market).

To avoid potential implicit bias in future job searches, we are considering instructing that future search committee chairs redact the names, universities, and all identifying information from all candidates prior to 1st pass review by the search committee. This may be problematic for the more detailed parts of the search but it could certainly work for the first part of the search process.

- **Who is on selection committees and who makes the final decisions? Who interacts with the applicants?**

All tenure-track professors are on the selection committee, all interact with the candidate in individual and group settings, and all are involved in making the final decision. Students (undergraduates) also meet with each candidate during a group informal “meet the candidate” lunch in our undergraduate study area, with food provided by the department, and they weigh in on the final decision as well. As students do not see any of the candidates’ applications, members of the search committee only ask them “if hired, do you see this candidate as an asset to the department?” and followup questions based on their responses. On campus interviewees also meet with non-tenure track faculty and an associate dean. This process typically lasts two days for each candidate, and involves breakfast, coffee breaks/walks, lunch, and dinners. We provide limited “quiet time” breaks during the day, as well - typically these are closed door breaks in someone’s empty office so the candidate can have some alone time.

- **Has your hiring and/or admissions process been evaluated by outside consultants? What is the process for changing it?**

Our departmental process has not been evaluated by outside consultants, but every search process is identical at ASU, and must meet all of HR requirements and approvals - it is a very strict, top-down process with no wiggle room except within one or two paragraphs of the job description and parts of the rubric for evaluating candidates. The job description is also strictly vetted by HR, and the rubric is examined to be sure it does not violate any rules or laws prior to making an offer - if it does, the search is considered a “failed search” and the candidate is not offered a tenure track position. Failed searches can and do happen, so departments are incentivized to follow this process to the letter to avoid wasting everyone’s time. It is very likely that the University’s process has been evaluated by outside consultants. At the department level, there is no process for changing it. Any changes would have to happen via the Office of General Counsel, HR, and the Title IX Office, with input from the Chief Diversity Officer.

At the start of a new search, the rubrics and criteria are updated from previous searches by the search committee and revised as needed to comply with any new regulations. These rubrics are later evaluated by HR to be sure they comply with all university, federal, and state regulations prior to offering a position to a candidate. All correspondence must be saved (including handwritten notes of all search committee members during interviews) and the entire application package is archived for each applicant at a secure storage facility off campus where only HR has access.

- **Has your university or company implemented or considered strategies like cohort hiring, mentoring, dual career support and partner hires, re-visioning your work culture, or other considerations outlined in “Leveraging Promising Practices”<sup>6</sup>?**  
As a state university in an extremely rural and demographically homogeneous region (>90% white), ASU has implemented many of these strategies to recruit diverse candidates.
  - Partner hires are common, but they are typically not immediate. In general, a trailing spouse/partner would be provided with a non-tenure-track position (such as Visiting Assistant Professor), which eventually (typically within 1-5 years) can be converted to a tenure-track position but is classified as a national search and the spouse must apply for the position they are currently holding. This process and timeline depends on state budgets and allocation of faculty tenure lines, which is a top-down, micromanagerial process in the UNC system. Although the Dean’s office decides on which departments get any new or reassigned tenure lines, the number and broad distribution of tenure lines is determined by the Provost.
  - ASU used to do cohort/cluster hires with the “Faculty Fellows” program to increase diversity (see Shinnar, R. S., & Williams, H. L. (2008). Promoting Faculty Diversity: The Faculty Fellows Program at Appalachian State University. *Planning for Higher Education*, 36(2), 42-53), but this initiative was discontinued after ~2013 when a Republican supermajority in the state legislature and governor slashed the higher education budget for the UNC system. This cut was unfortunate, as the GES department (at the time it was just the Geology Department) gained two excellent faculty members from this program.
  - Mentoring at ASU is inconsistent; there are on-again-off-again formal mentorship partnerships at the University and College level, but most mentoring is informal and (in the case of GES) occurs within the department.
  - The culture in GES is supportive, collaborative rather than competitive, cheerfully social, and overall is characterized by pod members as “highly functional.” URGE pod members compared graduate school experiences to their GES faculty experience, and noted a clear network of support and camaraderie within our department. During the hiring process we look for colleagues who will have our same commitment to effective teaching and involving undergraduates in research, and who are happy to collaborate with other members of the department. In fact, all GES tenure track faculty have developed organic research partnerships with each other, and we are always sharing our teaching ideas with each other. Essentially, our departmental ethos is one in which “a rising tide lifts all boats.”