



Hiring and/or Admissions Policies for The Ocean Pod at Goddard Space Flight Center

This is what was found by The Ocean Pod at Goddard Space Flight Center on Hiring and/or Admissions Policies, as well as what the pod would propose to change and improve.

Note: We acknowledge this information is not always accessible to students and even staff. If you do not have access to this information, please reflect on your own experience and outline what admissions and/or hiring should be like to foster a diverse and inclusive community.

- **What EEO (Equal Employment Opportunity) statement¹ is included in a standard job or admissions advertisement? Are there other inclusion statements and resources publicly available²?**

Non-Civil Servants: Some in our pod are hired through a mechanism called a Co-operative Agreement that allows GSFC to hire non-nationals and some postdocs through an entity called Universities Space Research Association (USRA). USRA positions have a brief statement, "USRA is an Equal Opportunity Employer: Minorities / Females / Protected Veterans / Disabled / Sexual Orientation / Gender Identity." See links via: <https://www.usra.edu/careers>

Civil Servants: Civil Servant positions are advertised on USA Jobs and typically have a similar statement: "The United States Government does not discriminate in employment on the basis of race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy and gender identity), national origin, political affiliation, sexual orientation, marital status, disability, genetic information, age, membership in an employee organization, retaliation, parental status, military service, or other non-merit factor." And: "Federal agencies must provide reasonable accommodation to applicants with disabilities where appropriate. Applicants requiring reasonable accommodation for any part of the application process should follow the instructions in the job opportunity announcement. For any part of the remaining hiring process, applicants should contact the hiring agency directly. Determinations on requests for reasonable accommodation will be made on a case-by-case basis." Interestingly, veterans explicitly get "affirmative action"-type treatment, by adding "points" to their application.

¹ R. Kelley, 10 Samples of an Effective EEO Statement, blog.ongig.com/diversity-and-inclusion/eeo-statement-samples, (2017).

² <https://careers.who.edu/opportunities/diversity-inclusion/>

³ K. Cobb, #GRExit Resources, <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.13215461.v1>, (2020).

⁴ J. Posselt, Inside Graduate Admissions: Merit, Diversity, and Faculty Gatekeeping, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvjghw8s>, (2016).

⁵ <https://www.brandeis.edu/diversity/dei-recruitment-hiring/rubric-for-evaluating-diversity-statements.html>

⁶ K. Griffin, J. Bennett, T. York, Leveraging Promising Practices, Washington DC: Aspire Alliance, (2020).



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

USRA: Adverts are posted on the company website and circulated to current employees. Otherwise typically circulated on lab or research community mailing lists. It is unclear if there is a company policy for posting advertisements.

- USRA pod member #1: One of our USRA-employed pod is currently recruiting for a postdoc and posted the position on LinkedIn, social media, several HBCU's, and other universities. It should be noted that all of these actions were taken on the initiative of the pod member. To the best of their knowledge, there was no standard list of universities or professional bodies that jobs are routinely pushed to.
- USRA pod member #2: Another USRA pod member has seen a lot of jobs (internationally) advertised via MetJobs list, which seems to be a well-used resource, at least within Earth Science community.
- USRA pod member #3: A pod member commented that they have been surprised at how rarely they have seen advertisements for jobs at GSFC through either their current lab or normal channels (which, they admitted, aren't very extensive).

Civil Servants: NASA Civil Servant positions are posted on usajobs.gov. To the degree that NASA opens tailored positions for certain (generally, internal) candidates, this basically displaces the issue of diversity down to lower-grade hires, often interns or postdocs.

- **What are the requirements for an applicant, e.g. letters of recommendations, fees/test scores³/grades? Is providing any of these a potential barrier that could be further lowered or removed? Are there any problematic questions asked?**

USRA: In general, jobs advertised through USRA have a header that states, *"If you are unable to complete this application due to a disability, contact this employer to ask for an accommodation or an alternative application process."*

Additionally, the general instructions are:



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“Applicants should apply to the posting at [USRA Careers](#) and include a letter of interest, resume, or curriculum vita. Additional information on USRA can be found at www.usra.edu.”

- USRA pod member #1: This member is currently recruiting a postdoc. The applicants are required to fill out an online application form and no letters of recommendations are required. Thus far, some applicants have provided unsolicited letters of recommendation and their transcripts, despite not being asked for them. Most have supplied an academic style CV and a cover letter. This member has not seen the application form that the applicants filled out so cannot comment on whether problematic questions were asked. This member was also hired to their current position through USRA. The application process was very similar to what they are currently experiencing as the hirer.
- USRA pod member #2:
 - It does not look like letters of recommendation are needed. However, in practice people seem to provide them. Resume/CV traditionally include academic info; This member states that having looked at some applications (for applicants to positions working with civil servants but through other co-op/contractor organizations), people recently out of school tend to provide transcripts, even if not asked for. So, there could be an implicit barrier for those who don't “look good on paper” due to our expectations.
 - Their understanding is that the federal process has more explicit barriers before an applicant gets through to a human being, while through USRA it should at least get to someone's inbox.
 - One potential barrier could be attendance at interview. For this member's first position working at GSFC (through a cooperative agreement with UMBC), they flew from the UK and took a personal holiday to coincide with their interview time. Someone without the resources to afford such a trip would have a barrier. They were reimbursed to relocate from the UK to the USA, however, it is not clear whether non-international moves are reimbursable, or if there is a general process for reimbursement for interview attendance, or the ability to have fully remote hiring.
 - For the member's second position at GSFC (cooperative agreement through USRA following their winning the contract rebid from UMBC), they were already on site, so this was not an issue. The standard practice



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seems to be that the scientists (the “product”) are fired and then re-hired during such a contract change.

- For cooperative agreements/contracts, in some cases there is a preferred candidate in mind, e.g., an internal hire or for a particular student/postdoc, in which case the position statement is often highly tailored. While this specificity does reflect the specific needs of the position, it’s possible that over-tailoring and having a specific candidate in mind leads to other (equally or more) qualified applicants being left out of the process.
- USRA pod member #2:
 - This member’s impression is that civil servant and cooperative agreement hires are legally obligated to be “competitive”. From their short time at GSFC, many of them (at least in their code) appear to have a preferred candidate. They have heard people say that they will essentially require a preferred candidate before posting the job because they are worried about losing the hiring opportunity if they ultimately offer the job to someone who doesn’t accept. Much of this applies to interns as well, particularly as many are in high school, they are disproportionately from the local area. Anecdotally, they are also disproportionately children of people who work on center, or friends thereof. Interns receive remuneration, but in the case of high school children, it is likely not feasible for someone far from center to take up an in-person internship, which is a barrier.
 - One option could be to increase the availability of virtual internships, although this could also be a barrier to those without reliable computer/internet access from home.
- **How are applicants/applications evaluated? Is that process and/or rubric^{4,5} public? What kind of biases are introduced in this process and what strategies are used to address these, e.g. removing applicant names?**
 - USRA pod member #1: This member is currently recruiting and has not been provided with a formal process or rubric for selection by the company. They have received the CVs and covering letters of applicants and have been instructed to shortlist candidates for interview. All applicant names are available – nothing is redacted.
 - USRA pod member #2:



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- This member was unclear on what filtering goes on before an application is passed to the scientist/civil servant who wanted the position filled. In the past, they have been involved with meeting potential new hires at the request of the civil servant they were working with. In those cases, they did not know what went on before the decision was made to invite candidates for interview. They are also not aware of a public statement of the process. In the cases they have been involved with, they saw peoples' CVs and letters of recommendation, and names, etc. were not redacted.
 - Interns: This member created a project on the NASA intern portal to which high school students applied. They reviewed the applications and made a shortlist. From memory, they believe they also talked to them all on the phone. This process involved the pod member and other members of their research group. No information was redacted. There was an online application form listing the applicants' interests (they indicated preferences for certain research areas), educational info, letters of recommendation, and a personal statement. Again, nothing was redacted. The member made recommendations at their discretion (a short list in their preferred order) and the NASA internship team decided how many and which intern(s) they would be allotted. In this case, they were allotted all three of the interns they had shortlisted. The process was not made clear. This was approximately 5 years ago and it is unknown if the process has changed.
- **Who is on selection committees and who makes the final decisions? Who interacts with the applicants?**
USRA
 - USRA pod member #1: This member has been advised by the company that they will be on the selection committee, likely along with their manager and an HR representative. NASA Civil Servants cannot be on these USRA hiring committees which often leads to a rather ridiculous scenario in which the person who will essentially be the NASA boss of the USRA appointee and who will supervise and oversee the majority of their work cannot participate in the interview.
 - USRA pod member #2: For postdoc hire through USRA, this member has heard that the postdoc advisor has basically no contact and very little say. At least, this was true of one recent postdoc hire in 616. It is basically just USRA deciding.



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- **Has your hiring and/or admissions process been evaluated by outside consultants? What is the process for changing it?**
We do not know if our Co-operative Agreement entities (USRA and UMD ESSIC) have had their hiring processes evaluated by external consultants.
- **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”⁶?**
We do not know if our Co-operative Agreement entities (USRA and UMD ESSIC) have implemented or considered implementing these practices.

Additional Observations and Recommendations

The following information is presented in a more free-form manner and is, except where indicated, applicable to the GSFC Civil Servant hiring process.

In the first instance, selection is automated by the text filtering system, NASA STARS. (See this document for more details: https://searchpub.nssc.nasa.gov/servlet/sm.web.Fetch/Revised_Manager_Hiring_Guide_-_Final_8-5-11.pdf?rhid=1000&did=1120495&type=released). However, anecdotally, some members of our pod report that the STARS filtering may not be used for some hiring processes. This needs further clarification.

Civil Servant pod member #1: This NASA Civil Servant member has participated in multiple hiring processes and has the following observations.

- The official strategy for ensuring diversity in the applicant pool is recruitment. Unfortunately, getting the word out on a vacancy is still not well-organized enough to ensure that minority candidates are recruited. Goddard seems to rely on minority intern programs to feed this pipeline. When fresh-outs are being recruited for GS-7 & -9 openings, the Center does a better job with this recruitment than at other times.
- The bar for application is another good discussion. While the educational requirements are such that they cast a wide net as regards institution and major, the real trick to getting through the text filters to get to the top of the list is not equally available. Applicants associated with Goddard have a higher likelihood of getting good advice about how to fill the work experience fields to get maximum points/hits. Despite the



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same criteria and system access for all, this can easily lead to the oft-seen cronyism and nepotism for Pathways and Civil Servant public hires.

- Due to high expected number of applicants, NASA civil servant position postings are often only open a few days. This can also give preference to applicants already associated with Goddard, as colleagues and family members can alert them to the window for application.
- The other area for bias is the position description and selection criteria. Specifically, choosing technical lingo or phrasing that is unique to Goddard can further weed out anyone not already closely aligned with Goddard's work. While these may seem to be purely technical and therefore acceptable to include for purposes of selecting a good candidate, making the language more generic is the more equitable thing to do and would cast the widest net.
- With a few exceptions, the resume review typically is not done with names removed. The assumption is that hiring managers are required to interview all those on the list, so bias cannot be applied. The race, ethnic background, age and gender are all readily apparent at the interview, so why remove names from resumes and applications? While this makes sense, it also makes sense that evaluating and raking resumes with the names removed in advance of meeting the applicants would help fight bias in the interview phase.

Civil Servant pod member #2:

- This member has been on all sides of this process (applicant/interviewee panel/branch head chairing a hire) and concurs with the observations and issues detailed by CS pod member #1. They have seen them all, and they are all a huge problem. However, we have solutions at the agency level to almost all of them. We just need to implement them in Code 600. The strategy is to use social media – specifically LinkedIn – to find qualified applicants while the position description is being developed. Then recruit them to apply and give them coaching on how to do so. These tools can either be used without filters other than those on degree/experience, or we can apply filters to target underrepresented groups – for example, students at or alumni from Minority Serving Institutions. There are still barriers to success, including the internal training and experience that internal candidates will have. Ultimately, to solve that problem we may need to ensure we recruit diverse candidates at other levels as well, such as the NASA Postdoctoral Program (NPP). Additionally, we should advertise those opportunities and “grant/project” postdocs more broadly to achieve those goals. One associated question is whether we can apply the tools we have for CS folks to those other positions. It would be ideal if we could.



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- One final note, we're opening up Pathways opportunities in code 600 – one in each division plus two in 600.x offices. Those will use the aforementioned recruiting tools and will hopefully bring in a cohort of diverse and talented students we can provide GSFC-specific training to.

General pod member observations and comments:

- The college system admissions system is very analogous to the Center's approach, and includes all of the inherent biases and downfalls
- To the best of our knowledge, none of that process occurs on the Cooperative Agreement or corporation side.
- The D&I standards that state and federal agencies have to meet are not applicable to private corporations. We would like to know if there are any D&I standards in the Coop/corporation contracts.
- Nepotism has been observed in the intern recruitment process
- It is recognized that Code 600 needs to diversify its recruitment
- Code 693 has a position opening 4/1, for which we will use these recruiting tools. CS pod member will report back on success of this approach.
- Equity Thought Leaders @GSFC are working on such issues. We should connect with these teams to understand what actions are being taken at Center level to address these issues.