



Admissions Policies for the Joint Program and Postdoc Hirings for Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution

Prepared by the WHOI MC&G URGE Pod 1

I. Joint Program Admissions

Barriers for underrepresented minorities

- The graduate application pool for ocean sciences is very narrow and not racially diverse
 - There is a perception that a student must be an oceanography or geoscience major to qualify for a PhD program in oceanography, but that is not the case.
 - Ocean science institutions must advertise and reach out to students from a variety of backgrounds (physics, mathematics, biology, chemistry, geology, environmental science, economics, etc.).
 - There is a general lack of knowledge, especially among first generation college students, that oceanography provides a stable and prestigious career.
- Learning about the Joint Program
 - Most Joint Program students learn about the program through word of mouth or personal connections. Many students without this in-network knowledge have few ways to learn about the Joint Program
 - The application process to an oceanography graduate school is very opaque
- The application process
 - TOEFL and GRE exams are not affordable or accessible. MIT also does it's own language assessment for graduate students, so TOEFL is an extra time and financial burden for international students
 - It is unclear which PIs are accepting graduate students each year

Policy Recommendations

- Advertisement and outreach of the Joint Program should be funded and increased.
 - Social media and branding of the Joint Program should be stronger, including infographics, what these sciences do, interviews with scientists
 - Provide funding to allow PhD students, post-doc, and early career scientists to visit local colleges to give science talks
 - Create and maintain an updated website of PIs accepting students that year, and the projects they're working on
- Make the application process more accessible
 - Do not require GRE scores, and use MIT's language assessment in place of TOEFL
- Create paid internship possibilities for local undergraduate students to conduct research at WHOI
 - Focus on local college students, especially Cape Cod Community College
 - This partnership has already been started by Julie Huber.
 - Paid interns can be supported by broader impact funds within grant proposals
 - Create pools of funds for paid interns to present undergrad research at national conferences (e.g., ASLO, AGU, Goldschmidt)

- Create standardized admissions policies across departments
 - Standardize an admissions rubric for JP student admissions
 - Mandate implicit bias training for those making admissions decisions, including faculty accepting JP students

II. Postdoc Hiring

Barriers for underrepresented minorities

- Prestige and networking is highly valued, and often supports already privileged individuals
 - Difficult for graduate students to receive a WHOI postdoctoral scholarship coming from less well-known or connected labs/universities
 - The “merit-based” selection of postdoc scholarships often magnifies the advantage of applicants graduating from high-prestige universities with lab connections, high-impact papers, and cutting-edge research

Policy Recommendations

- Standardize a hiring rubric for the WHOI Postdoctoral Scholar Program
 - Award committees should consider biases inherent to a potential fellow’s background, prestige of previous institutions, and existing network of letters of recommendation
- Require diversity statements from Postdoctoral Scholar applicants
 - Many postdocs take on mentoring roles for both graduate and undergraduate students
 - Diversity statements could focus on any combination of the following, where applicable: (1) previous DEI work, (2) personal experience in academia, and (3) future plans to support DEI in mentoring/academia

III. Faculty Hiring

Barriers for underrepresented minorities

- Soft money puts WHOI at a disadvantage for recruiting
 - Lack of security - perception that the job is less secure
 - Many faculty leave for a hard money position
 - Perception of WHOI as a “stepping stone” position
- WHOI often hires from within their own postdoc pool
 - Internal networking that benefits those already known by WHOI
 - WHOI postdocs tend to be more comfortable with the soft money system because they have seen how it works
- Spousal hires are less supported at WHOI
 - Barrier to attracting new faculty from outside the state or abroad
 - There is not a wide diversity of jobs outside WHOI on Cape Cod

Policy Recommendations

- Clarify the soft money situation in job postings.
 - WHOI’s funding is often more secure than other soft money institutions. Include more information/clarification on grant and funding expectations in tenure-track job postings.
- Create funded chairs for new faculty hiring and recruitment
 - 3-6 months salary for new hires

- Makes soft money position more attractive and secure to those outside the WHOI network
- Create a WHOI-wide policy requiring all faculty candidates to submit a diversity statement
- Standardize a hiring rubric and bias training for all faculty hiring committees across departments