

URGE



Unlearning Racism in Geoscience



RICE NATURAL SCIENCES

Earth, Environmental and Planetary Sciences

Hiring and/or Admissions Policies for University/Organization - Example URGE Deliverable

This is what was found by the Rice University Department of Earth, Environmental and Planetary Sciences Pod at Rice University 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?**

“Rice University is an Equal Opportunity Employer with commitment to diversity at all levels, and considers for employment qualified applicants without regard to race, color, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national or ethnic origin, genetic information, disability or protected veteran status.” (from the Wiess and Pan Postdoctoral Fellowship postings)

We found that the above statement was not applied consistently to all job postings, and is written in a sort of ‘legalese’ that makes it seem like it is not voluntarily added to those postings. Therefore, we recommend **writing a new equal opportunity employment statement that demonstrates our commitment to diversity in plainer language, and putting it on all job postings**. There is also no statement for applicants to the graduate program encouraging a diverse applicant pool, we recommend **explicitly stating that we strive to build a diverse student cohort**.

- **Where are advertisements posted or sent? Are there other strategies for reaching applicants for hiring and/or admissions, e.g. job fairs, showcases?**
 - <https://earthscience.rice.edu/academics/apply-to-graduate-program/>
 - <https://earthscience.rice.edu/home-page/open-positions/>
 - <https://jobs.rice.edu/>
 - <https://www.facebook.com/RiceEarthScience/>

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

² <https://careers.whoj.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).



Unlearning Racism in Geoscience

- climlist-request@lists.wku.edu (climate science listserv)
- <https://www.sacnas.org/>
- Others?

Because applying to graduate school is an esoteric process, we think it would be a good idea to **put resources for prospective students to help them with the applications on our department website**, at least directing them to a resource like <https://geogradapp.com/>. We also recommend **recruiting directly to under-represented minorities**, for instance by posting jobs on social media and through department representation at meetings held by URM in STEM organizations (e.g., .

- **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?**

For graduate admissions, the requirements for 2020 were as follows:

- A completed application form.
- Transcripts of all previous college or university work.
- TOEFL scores for foreign students whose language of instruction was not English. The Rice university code is 6609.
- Three letters of recommendation
- An application fee of \$85. We recognize that this fee can inadvertently discourage competitive applicants from applying, so please reach out to the Graduate and Academic Program Administrator to request a waiver.

The GRE was not required for the 2021 admission cycle as a test run, we recommend making this policy permanent. We also recommend either waiving the application fee across the board or making the process to request a waiver anonymous. We also recommend more explicit instructions on what we are looking for in a personal statement, as well as a statement encouraging a diverse pool of applicants.

For faculty positions, typical application requirements are a cover letter, a curriculum vitae, a research statement, a teaching statement, and contact information for three professional references. Although none of these requirements presents an obvious barrier to applicants from diverse backgrounds, the lack of a required diversity statement is notable and may negatively impact applicants whose past work has included efforts to improve equity, diversity, and inclusion within the geosciences. **We therefore**



Unlearning Racism in Geoscience

recommend that a diversity statement be added to the required application components for future faculty searches.

- **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?**

Applications for admission to the graduate program are evaluated initially by the EEPS department's graduate admissions coordinator. This member of the faculty identifies promising applicants from the applicant pool through an initial review of application materials and highlights the candidates relevant to each member of the faculty. The coordinator then sends the full list of applicants to each member of the faculty along with suggested guidelines for evaluating candidates in a holistic manner. Presently, the suggest process involves making a short list based on a selection of traits (technical preparation, strength of written correspondence and reasoning, "grit", and promise), interviewing the short-listed candidates, and re-ranking candidates from the short-list to facilitate an admissions recommendation with the grad admissions chair. While GRE scores were included in this evaluation process in the past, they were not used in the most recent admissions process for Fall 2021. The process is not public.

Biases may be introduced into the graduate admissions process through several avenues. Currently, review of candidates by individual faculty is not universally blind and is dependent on whether specific faculty choose to do an initial review with knowledge of the candidate's name. Inclusion of names that are clearly associated with a specific gender or racial background creates an opportunity for unconscious bias to infiltrate the process. The current evaluation criteria are also entirely qualitative; i.e., although the evaluation criteria that are used to evaluate candidates are holistic, there is no consistent means provided for classifying the traits for candidates (e.g., via categories like "exceptional", "excellent", "good", "neutral", "subpar", etc.). This has the potential to create biases based on the language used in describing candidates in making the short list for those who are to be interviewed. Similar biases could persist without concrete standards for evaluating short-listed candidates during the interview process.

Evaluation of applications for faculty positions is highly variable in terms of criteria and is largely dependent on the search committee. Removal of applicant names is not a universal process across all searches, and many of the same biases mentioned in the graduate admissions process above are also relevant here.



Unlearning Racism in Geoscience

Based on the above, we can identify several action items that may eliminate potential for biases and improve the equitability of the Rice EEPs admissions and faculty hiring processes. **Removal of identifying information (especially names, but potentially locations as well) during initial review of applications by faculty and creation of the short list of candidates would greatly reduce a risk for biases related to gender or racial background to affect the process.** In addition, **creation of evaluation forms with standard categories for ranking candidates would reduce the potential for biased language to affect the rankings during the evaluations.** Effective implementation of these measures may be evidenced by noticeably improved diversity in the candidates interviewed for hiring and admission. **We likewise that commitment to improving diversity and inclusion within STEM also be explicitly evaluated as part of the criteria for admissions and hiring.**

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

For graduate admissions, the graduate and academic program administrator handles the initial compilation of applications and separates them out by discipline. These discipline-sorted applications are then passed on to the graduate admissions coordinator for the initial review. The admissions coordinator highlights candidates of interest and subsequently passes on the list to individual faculty members for their evaluation using the suggested criteria outlined above. The faculty and the graduate admissions coordinator make the final admission decision in tandem, and the admissions coordinator may prompt faculty to take a closer look at specific candidates. Applicants typically interact with their prospective faculty advisor and members of their prospective lab during the interview process.

For faculty positions, the selection committee is typically appointed at the discretion of the department chair. Usually, individuals are appointed with the chair's knowledge of which faculty are willing and able to put in the work required to evaluate candidates fairly and effectively. Diversity is not currently an explicit consideration in creating the selection committee.

The readings for this URGE session demonstrated that individuals have a tendency to favor candidates who are similar to themselves; the need to ensure that selection committees themselves are diverse is therefore crucial. **We recommend that the department establish guidance for the selection of diverse hiring and admissions committees to ensure that diversity of the committee is as close as feasible to the**



Unlearning Racism in Geoscience

diversity of the candidate pool. Committee invitations to faculty outside of the EEPS department may be a viable means of improving the diversity of the selection committee in instances where individuals within the EEPS are unable to commit the necessary time.

We also recommend exploration of the idea of a matching/rotation program for graduate admissions such that students are not admitted to immediately work with a specific advisor. Although Rice's EEPS department is small enough that this may not be feasible, implementation of such a model may increase the department's flexibility during the admissions process and provide greater freedom to admit diverse individuals who could productively contribute to multiple labs (i.e., under advisors other than the one with which they have been in primary contact).

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

The EEPS department regularly undergoes a review process in which faculty from other Rice departments examine the operation of EEPS. However, the department has not been evaluated by consultants external to Rice University, and practices in regards to improving diversity and inclusion have not historically been part of the review. **We recommend that outside consultants be invited to participate in this review process to provide specific feedback on the department's policies and action in the context of equity, diversity, and inclusion. At minimum, a staff member of Rice's Office of Diversity and Inclusion should be invited to participate, but the department should also consider consultants external to the university.**

- **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?**

The EEPS department does not have formal policies with respect to cohort hiring, dual career support and partner hires, and most other considerations outlined in "Leveraging Promising Practices"; to the best of our knowledge, Rice University has not instituted formal policies either, though they have historically made efforts to facilitate partner hires and dual-career support on an informal basis. Cohort hiring is also rare across the university due to Rice's relatively small size. However, early career faculty do receive mentorship from more experienced faculty to help guide them through the tenure process. Based on the demonstrable, positive impacts that these strategies have in facilitating the success of diverse hires in STEM, **we recommend the establishment of specific, formal policies with respect to partner hires and dual career support.**



Unlearning Racism in Geoscience

With respect to re-visioning the work culture within the Rice EEPS department, **we also recommend an effort by the department to become a participating institution in the AGU Bridge Program.** Such an effort would have a similar supportive effect at the graduate student level and has the potential to yield long-term benefits in the department's diversity.