URGE
Unlearning Racism in Geoscience

SEOE
SCHOOL OF THE EARTH OCEAN & ENVIRONMENT
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

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

This is what was found by the **School of the Earth, Ocean, and Environment (SEOE) Pod** at the **University of South Carolina in Columbia** 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) statement[1] is included in a standard job or admissions advertisement? Are there other inclusion statements and resources publicly available[2]?**

"SEOE Diversity Statement November 2020
 The mission of the School of the Earth, Ocean, and Environment (SEOE) is to be a center of innovative and integrative research and education across the broad spectrum of earth systems and human interactions with the environment. We believe that our personal and collective histories and experiences in the world shape the research questions we pose, the means we employ to answer them, and the solutions we promote. We believe, therefore, that a community of faculty, students, and staff that is more reflective of society is one that is better positioned to accomplish its academic mission. In addressing diversity, we recognize that fields of the earth and environmental study have historically privileged white, male, and upper-class actors and associated value systems. As such, we recognize that many institutions of environmental study and advocacy have been slow to center the experiences, values, and ideas of people of color, women, LGBTQ, and those with working-class backgrounds. In the context of these broad historical inequities, the SEOE has made notable efforts to diversify our faculty. We recognize, however, that we are not where we want to be in terms of diversity and inclusion. We are committed to increasing the diversity of our school and to doing so in a way that continues to

[1] R. Kelley, 10 Samples of an Effective EEO Statement, blog.ongig.com/diversity-and-inclusion/eeo-statement-samples, (2017).
[2] https://careers.whoi.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).

foreground open discussion and thoughtful reflection. This includes amplifying the ideas and voices of historically marginalized groups within the curriculum that SEOE faculty teaches to better reflect the diversity of perspectives and experiences in our fields. We are committed to becoming a school where all faculty, students, and staff regardless of identity, social background, and academic rank not only feel welcome but a sense of ownership over the SEOE and its mission. Our school supports participation and leadership by any person regardless of race, ethnicity, sex, gender, gender identity, transgender status, class, age, color, religion, national origin, disability, sexual orientation, genetics, protected veteran status, pregnancy status, and childbirth or related medical conditions. ` Finally, we are committed to approaching diversity and inclusion as a conscious practice that is integral to our research, teaching, and outreach"

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

There are no advertisements for any of SEOE's graduate programs outside of UofSC's website. The programs and most job listings are only are advertised through listservs by faculty members.

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

Before COVID-19, a minimum GRE score of 290 was required. No GRE was required for 2020 applications, and interviewed faculty have reason to believe the GRE requirement will be discontinued moving forward. A copy of transcripts is required with a minimum of a 3.0 GPA. This requirement is determined by the College of Arts and Sciences Graduate School, which all SEOE programs fall under, and SEOE does not have power over this requirement. Three letters of recommendation are required, as well as a statement of purpose. There is an application fee of $50. Because SEOE is most like dropping the GRE requirement, the only other major thing our pod discussed was possibly making the statement of purpose guidelines clearer. Students can apply for a waiver for the application fee.

- **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?**

There are three degree programs that fall under SEOE – Marine Science (offers both M.S. and PhD), Geology (offers both M.S. and PhD), and MEERM (Master's of Earth and Environmental Resource Management.) All three programs have to meet the minimum requirement set by the

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College of Arts and Sciences graduate school, but after that, each program has its own process. In general, however, there are committees for all three programs. The committees only review completed applications. Applications that do not meet the minimum requirements are flagged, but are not disqualified immediately. Similarly, applications that do not meet the requirements of a program are also flagged, but are not disqualified immediately. This just means that a faculty member will have to really want the student in order to appeal to the committee that they deserve a spot. After that, the applications are circled for faculty reviews and comments within the committee. Any faculty member the student mentioned in their statement of purpose will also review the application, even if not on the committee. This review focuses a lot on GPA, but transcripts are also taken into account during this review. The prior undergraduate/graduate coursework should also generally have something to do with what the students wants to study at the graduate level. The research interests of the students also have to match up with that of a faculty member/any coursework that falls under the program. At this point, students are filtered into a pool of strong applicants and a pool of weak applicants.

"By "strong" we mean "likely to succeed within normal progress-to-degree-times, with significant self-direction, and quick response to faculty input."

By "weak" we mean: "in danger of not completing the degree without significant preparatory coursework/tutoring, and/or close, and often repetitive, faculty direction.""

The strong candidates are then ranked, and the highest ranked receive the best funding opportunities. Lower ranked candidates receive some funding, and then the rest are considered inadmissible or admissible. The lowest ranked are decided by low GPAs or no clear research interests. Most of the time, programs do not send applicants an offer if there is no scholarship/funding attached. There is also an interview process, but the general consensus is that if students are invited for interviews, they will be accepted; however, the amount of funding has not been decided yet.

The faculty members interviewed noted that rarely ever has there been a student that there was disagreement upon where they fall on the ranked list; the committee members are almost always in consensus of students that are admissible vs. inadmissible. Because SEOE is fairly small, some faculty members have said that rubrics would not make sense for the number of applicants received each year. There are few enough that they can each be discussed as a committee.

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

Each program has separate committees, and the committees make final decisions based on amounts of funding which communicated by SEOE admin. There is a graduate program coordinator that interacts with students on the general level, but any faculty member can interact

with students. Additionally, if students are brought in for interviews, they get to decide what faculty members they speak to depending on faculty availability.

For geological sciences, the committee is Besim Dragovic, Susan Lang, and Katherine Ryker. For marine sciences, the committee is Subra Bulusu, Annie Bourbonnais, George Vulgaris, and Nick Peng. For environment and sustainability, the committee is Monica Barra, David Fuente, Jenny Pournelle, and Carol Boggs.

If a student names a faculty member in their application who is not on the admissions committee, that member will be looped into the process and will provide their input.

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

The admissions process for each program is ultimately decided by the admissions committee within that program. The committees get to decide their own requirements and how they rank students, and it does not appear that there is a formal process for that.

- **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]?**

This upcoming year, SEOE is implementing graduate student mentoring, in which "veteran" graduate students will be mentoring incoming graduate students. Because faculty members at SEOE have their own URGE Pod, the student pod focused only on the admissions process.

- The student POD met and discussed that we definitely support dropping the GRE requirement. We also think that the statement of purpose prompt should be read more clearly – it does not say anywhere that the applicant needs to name specific faculty members, and this is something simple that could really help a student's application. There also needs to be more advertising of the programs, because the program is mostly being advertised directly by faculty members or on UofSC's website. There just isn't a formal recruitment process occurring beyond listservs, which we think could boost our applicant pool immensely. The GPA requirement seems reasonable to us, especially when a low GPA doesn't immediately mean a rejection. Because each program operates slightly differently and is smaller, it is hard to imagine a process that would work for all three.