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Hiring and/or Admissions Policies for the University of Minnesota

This is what was found by (Bio)geochemistry Pod at the University of Minnesota - Twin Cities on Hiring and/or Admissions Policies, as well as what the pod would propose to change and improve.

**What EEO (Equal Employment Opportunity) statement<sup>1</sup> is included in a standard job or admissions advertisement? Are there other inclusion statements and resources publicly available<sup>2</sup>?**

**EEO statement ([Link](#)):**

Long Form: (for use in collegiate bulletins, employee handbooks, and application forms)

*“The University of Minnesota shall provide equal access to and opportunity in its programs, facilities, and employment without regard to race, color, creed, religion, national origin, gender, age, marital status, disability, public assistance status, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.*

*Inquiries regarding compliance may be directed to the Director, Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action, University of Minnesota, 274 McNamara Alumni Center, 200 Oak Street S.E., Minneapolis, MN 55455, (612) 624-9547, [eoaa@umn.edu](mailto:eoaa@umn.edu). Website at [www.eoaa.umn.edu](http://www.eoaa.umn.edu).*

*This publication/material is available in alternative formats upon request. Please contact (name, department, address, phone number).”*

**Other inclusion statements and resources:**

- [Policy Statement about Hiring Faculty & Staff](#)
- [Recruiting a Diverse Applicant Pool UMN resource](#)

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

**Hiring**

– **Strategies for advertising new positions:**

- Ads are written as broadly as possible to encourage a diverse applicant pool
- Ads are distributed through as many avenues as possible:

- Email listservs and other professional networks
- Paid advertisements in publications
- Postings on job boards
- Postings through professional organizations that support scientists from underrepresented groups (e.g. AISES, SACNAS, NABG, AWG)
- Posts on social media

**– Suggested improvements to this process:**

- Implement long-term outreach strategies to build a diverse pool of potential candidates rather than beginning the search when a position opens
  - Establish relationships with scientists of color through invited talks, outreach at conferences, etc. to increase the likelihood of successful recruitment when a position does open

**Admission**

**– Strategies for advertising graduate positions:**

- Professors reach out to colleagues via email
- Research websites of individual research groups
- Recruiting booth at major conferences (e.g., GSA)
- ESCI department website provides information for prospective undergraduate and graduate applicants

**– Suggested improvements to this process:**

- Post opportunities and details on social media (twitter, instagram, etc.) to reach a broader audience
- Use intentional recruitment at AISES, SACNAS etc.
- Waive the application fee for all applicants (rather than relying on prospective students to ask for an exemption)

**Other suggested strategies:**

[Check out this UMN Policy Link \(also linked in above section\)](#)

**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?**

**Admission**

**– application requirements:**

- Unofficial transcripts (official transcripts only required if admitted and attending)
- Personal statement
- Diversity statement (optional)

- Three letters of recommendation
  - TOEFL (required for international applicants and for domestic applicants for whom English is not their first language)
  - Application fee (\$75 for domestic applicants, \$95 for international applicants)
- **Barriers that could be removed:**
- The program seems to have done a fairly good job already, relative to many graduate programs: only unofficial transcripts are required for the initial application and the GRE is not required at all.
  - One change the department could make would be to indicate they value letters of recommendation from less traditional sources, i.e. from people who were not an academic or research advisor. However, this would be risky - doing this in a situation where faculty will not actually value these less traditional letters may set applicants up to fail, so it is imperative to have all faculty members on board with this.
  - Another barrier would be the application fee - the department says fee waivers are available, but the process is somewhat opaque & the department is contradicted by the university grad admissions site, which says fees cannot be waived.
- **Problematic questions:**
- The department does not have any questions that are problematic in and of themselves, but potentially problematic aspects of the application are reviewed above.

**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?**

- Admission evaluation process/rubric:**
  - Graduate Admission policy can be found on the department website ([Link](#))
  - Individual Faculty page and Areas of Study and Research can be found on the ESCI Grad Admin Policy page and the FAQ tab ([Link](#))
  - An evaluation rubric is not available
  
- Possible biases you can see and potential mitigation strategies:**
  - Students are required to find a faculty member that has agreed to act as an advisor. This may introduce implicit bias.
  - “The needs and wishes of the applicant are considered. However, sometimes we do not offer the desired specialty in this department, or the faculty member in that specialty cannot accept additional students. Applications are reviewed individually with due consideration for any special circumstances.”

This may discourage students with diverse interests from applying as they may not be able to find a research area/ faculty member that is working on/ actively engaged in research in their field of interest.

☐ **Potential mitigation strategies:**

- Changing the language to encourage students with more diverse interests to apply but informing them that funding is typically available for certain types of research. It may also help to let prospective students know if additional funding opportunities and sources are available that a potential advisor may be interested in/ apply for with the student. Some helpful information can be found in the FAQ tab ([Link](#)).
- Might be helpful for faculty members who are actively looking for students and/or have funding for taking additional students to advertise their availability on “Prospective Graduate Students” page, social media etc. along with their Lab Research Page.

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

☐ **Admission:**

- Graduate student admission is largely decided by the individual faculty member who intends to advise the student. Potential students reach out to faculty members they are interested in working with at which time the faculty member evaluates the student’s application. Students may apply for College of Science and Engineering graduate fellowships where the awardees are selected by a committee, however this involves funding not solely admission. The applicants largely interact with their potential advisor until after admission at which point they generally meet other research group members and potential graduate students at an admission weekend spring semester.

☐ **Hiring:**

– **Faculty**

- Selection committee consists of a chair (associate or full professor in the department), ~3 additional departmental faculty, a graduate student representative, and an outside the department faculty member. The selection committee generally makes a recommendation of 2 candidates to the department head (following evaluation of applicant statements and 2 day on campus interviews). The department head recommends a candidate to the Dean for final approval. All members of the department, including students, generally interact with the candidates during the on campus interviews.

– **Postdoctoral Scientists and Other Researchers:**

- The PI who will be supporting the researcher selects the candidate and puts forth to the department head for approval for hiring (this needs to be confirmed). Potential researchers may meet research group members prior to being hired.
- **Other departmental Staff:**
  - these are hired by the department head (this need to be confirmed).

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

Actually it has. For the first time in 2017-2018, in anticipation and/or connection with prioritizing faculty hires, an outside consultant worked with ESCI faculty to gauge the relative strengths and weaknesses of the existing faculty and how research strengths could be strengthened further or research and teaching weaknesses addressed by hiring the right person. Faculty hiring typically results in a certain amount of tension and the consultant played a key role in fostering a more transparent and engaging process that most people felt facilitated the exchange of ideas in a healthy way. As I think back on this exercise, however, issues involving diversity and related factors were not as effectively included as could be the case. In a manner consistent with “standard operating procedure” research strength and teaching potential were overwhelmingly emphasized as the search process moved forward. Similar attributes can often be observed in student recruiting.

The consultant the department hired was recommended by the CSE staff and it worked out well. If left to our own devices things could have not turned out so well. In such situations, however, direct communication with the potential consultant with a broadly based faculty group would prove beneficial. Concerns must be clearly discussed and the background and experience of the consultant must be reviewed from diverse perspectives and in the modern era, demonstration of development of new recruitment strategies that might enhance recruitment of faculty or students of color with diverse backgrounds must be a much higher level concern that hereto fore has been the case and the consultant must be aware of this.

- **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>?**

**Admission**

Graduate students admissions are cohort-driven. There is the mandatory introductory seminar for all incoming graduate students, which is a chance to get to know the cohort of new grad students. Once admitted, all graduate students

participate in a mentorship program in which they are mentored by senior graduate students.

□ **Hiring**

The university participates in the President's Postdoctoral Fellowship Program (PPFP) to attract excellent postdocs with the intent that they could be offered tenure track positions at the university. The College of Science and Engineering last year dedicated funds specifically to attract a cohort of BIPOC postdoctoral scholars through the PPFP (a cohort of 3 fellows over two years, with the intent to renew). The fellows also participate in a formal mentoring program. For all faculty, the university works hard to find dual career positions (but, of course, cannot guarantee this for two tenure-track positions). What is more common is that the university will provide additional support for the partner to work within the university (e.g., three years of dedicated salary), but there is not guarantee that support will be provided after that by the hiring unit. For all tenure-track faculty, there is a formal mentoring program in place, and many informal mentoring opportunities throughout the university in programs that the faculty might be affiliated with.