

# URGE

## Unlearning Racism in Geoscience

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

This is what was found by the USU-GEO pod at Utah State University and Weber State University 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>?**

### **USU's EEO statement:**

*USU is an AA/EO (Affirmative Action / Equal Opportunity) employer and does not discriminate based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, genetic information, sexual orientation or gender identity/expression, disability, status as a protected veteran, or any other status protected by University policy or local, state, or federal law. Learn more at <https://equity.usu.edu/>. USU recognizes and values the importance of diversity and inclusion in enriching the employment experience of its employees and in supporting the university's academic mission of learning, discovery, and engagement (<https://www.usu.edu/president/missionstatement/>). USU is sensitive to the needs of dual career couples and provides a Dual Career Assistance program. Additional information can be found at: <http://www.usu.edu/provost/faculty-life/dual-career-assistance.cfm>.*

### **Other inclusion statements/resources:**

At USU, applicants can/should be directed to the *USU Inclusion Center* (<https://www.usu.edu/inclusion/>) to access information about their programs, resources and links to various campus groups related to DEI. The USU Department of Geosciences also posts a link to USU's Inclusion Center Land acknowledgement statement ([https://geo.usu.edu/ou-files/USU\\_Native%20Land%20Statement.pdf](https://geo.usu.edu/ou-files/USU_Native%20Land%20Statement.pdf)) on their website. USU's Inclusion task force committee is currently developing a new statement.

### **WSU EEO Statement:**

*Weber State University is an "Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Employer." It is the policy of the University to accomplish all personnel actions in a way that will provide equal opportunity to all employees and prospective employees at the University. Every effort is taken to ensure that you are treated fairly and your civil rights are protected.*

In job announcements this statement is typically included: "Weber State University is an AA/EO employer."

WSU also has a Discrimination, Harassment and Sexual Misconduct Policy which is below:



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*Weber State University prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, pregnancy, genetics, age (over 40), disability, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity/expression, veteran, active military status and other classifications protected by law. Such an environment is a necessary part of a healthy learning and working atmosphere because such discrimination of any kind undermines the sense of human dignity and sense of belonging of all people in the environment.*

*Discrimination and harassment are prohibited by Titles IV, VI and VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and Title IX of the Education Amendment of 1972, as well as the Utah Anti-discrimination Act. In addition, various other constitutional provisions, statutes and common law causes of action prohibit such discriminatory conduct. It is the policy of the University to enforce these laws among its students and employees.*

*Weber State is committed to eliminating incidents of illegal discrimination in personnel policies and practices within the institution through affirmative efforts at education and support. When violations of this policy occur, various forms of disciplinary action, where appropriate, may be imposed within the parameters of protected speech.*

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

### **USU Faculty hiring:**

At USU, both the faculty search committee and our HR office undertake advertising. Individual faculty share with colleagues, especially through discipline-specific email listservs. In the future, this should include the Geoscience Alliance list ([geosciencealliance.org](http://geosciencealliance.org)). Positions are listed on USU Geoscience and HR websites. The Department advertises positions through GSA and AGU and at their scientific conferences, including meeting with candidates.

USU's HR office reports that they advertise faculty positions widely and consciously target outlets for diverse candidates. In the future, we need to ask and document exactly where they are being sent and expand our new job postings to diverse groups and their associated listservs including SACNAS, National Association of Black Geoscientists, GeoLatinas, AWG, etc..

### **USU Graduate student admissions:**

Beyond our webpage and personal-professional spheres, USU Geosciences advertises graduate opportunities only when they are designated as special Diversity or Presidential Fellowship opportunities provided by our Department and Graduate/Research offices, respectively. In such cases, we have advertised at typical scientific society outlets and through discipline-specific email listservs. With only a single recent exception, we generally have **not** advertised at SACNAS or other conferences geared toward BIPOC student researchers.



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### WSU Faculty hiring:

At WSU the chair of the faculty search committee and HR are involved in advertising the position. Positions are typically posted on listservs appropriate for the field, HigherEdJobs, and other online locations. In the future the Earth and Environmental Sciences Department will plan to advertise new positions through the National Association of Black Geoscientists (NABG), the Society for Advancement of Chicanos/Hispanics and Native Americans in Science (SACNAS), and the Association for Women Geoscientists (AWG).

The WSU College of Science and the Earth and Environmental Sciences Department does not currently offer graduate programs.

- **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?**

### Faculty hiring:

At USU, faculty applications have required a cover letter, CV, transcripts, a representative publication, statements of research interest and of teaching philosophy/experience, and contacts for 3 references. Up until this time, Geo faculty applications have **not** required a statement about DEI, although our URGE pod advocates for requiring one in future hiring efforts.

At WSU, faculty applications typically require a cover letter, CV, transcripts, a teaching philosophy, research statement, and three letters of recommendation. These materials require a significant amount of work on the part of the applicant; however, they are necessary for the search committee to gain insight into their experience and future plans. Committees are relatively lenient on recommendations and will follow up with candidates if recommendations are missing. Faculty applications do not ask for a diversity statement; however, this is an important component to include in future calls for applications.

### Graduate student admissions:

Graduate applications require academic transcripts, a Statement of Purpose, a Resume, and 3 letters of recommendation. Starting this academic year, the requirement for the GRE has been removed. This has been replaced with 2 still-evolving instruments – a student self-assessment ranking and a referee assessment ranking of strengths and weaknesses which include the same qualities and skills on each (including maturity, leadership, integrity, creativity, independence, quantitative skills, field skills, and written and verbal communication). This first version of the form that we used this year is listed here: <https://geo.usu.edu/ou-files/geology-dept-forms/Grad%20Student%20Self-Assessment--fillable.pdf>).



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One future idea to lessen barriers related to the application process, is to remove the application fee entirely for for all students, instead of only upon request as it currently stands.

- **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?**

### **Faculty hiring:**

At USU, recent faculty search committees have generated their own, custom rubrics for evaluation that are not posted or widely shared beyond the committee. After ranking and discussion, the committee identifies semi-finalists for videoconference interviews, and then eventually finalists for on-campus interviews. Interview sessions, particularly involving the search committee, follow a systematic set of questions asked of each candidate to ensure parity. Our process has been complicit with institutional racism that filters out candidates who are not from marquee institutions and who do not have strong publishing records in certain journals. In one recent case, a search-committee chair went to great length to redact personal identifiers from all application materials in an effort to make the process “blind” and free of implicit bias due to gender and ethnicity. But this apparently backfired (based on results) and instead perhaps amplified bias based on educational pedigree and other traditional markers of academic success. In the future, more proactive, affirmative consideration of diverse candidates should occur. Perhaps if increasing diversity is an explicit goal, then information about ethnicity, race and gender should be explicitly known to the search committee.

### **WSU Faculty hiring:**

At WSU each search committee develops a rubric to evaluate candidates for each position. The goal is to develop a rubric that matches with the job advertisements required and preferred qualification, but each criteria is up to the discretion of the committee. Each criteria is given a specific numerical weight which is used to quantitatively evaluate each candidate. These evaluation rubrics are not made public since they are individual to each position. There is also a diversity component that is included in the overall assessment of a candidate, which is included by HR. The weighting of the diversity component is also left to the discretion of the committee. Names are not currently removed from applications during the initial paper screen.

### **Graduate student admissions:**

Graduate applications are uploaded to USU Graduate School. As the applications come in, the Graduate Program coordinator uploads and compiles a summary list of students and information such as student name, degree program and topic of interest, undergraduate institution, GPA, ethnicity, international vs. domestic into a table. This table is placed on USU-Box for faculty that are seeking graduate students to review. The completed Graduate



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application including SOP, transcripts, and reference letters are reviewed and evaluated in further detail by individual faculty members as they decide on students they may want to interview. No systematic rubric beyond GPA scores is yet employed, and no central committee evaluates or ranks candidates objectively. This results in a very strong bias toward students who are already connected to individual faculty through alumni or colleague connections, and toward those students savvy to the need to reach out and engage with future advisors during the application process. This needs to be fixed! We acknowledge that we need to re-examine our criteria and develop a more equitable admissions policy. We will be working to update some of our application criteria through the summer of 2021. An exception to this process is the evaluation of applicants to specially-designated Presidential Doctoral Research Fellowships, in which typically a committee of several faculty conduct video-conference interviews with several well-qualified applicants (following a set handful of questions, as in faculty interviews), then discuss and rank candidates and make decisions collectively. The contribution of applicants to departmental diversity has been considered in these decisions.

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

### **Faculty hiring:**

Faculty search committees are appointed and decided upon by the Department Head. Diversity by gender and rank is a primary consideration, but also the committee's composition is partly a function of needs to share duties and spread responsibilities equitably across faculty and partly a function of which faculty are familiar with the discipline of position being advertised. Final decisions on candidates/job offers is made by the Department Head. All students, staff, faculty, instructors, and lab managers in the USU Geo department have the opportunity, and are encouraged, to interact with applicants at some point during interview process. Everyone in the department is provides systematic feedback to the search committee via a response form.

### **Graduate student admissions:**

Again, at USU, final decisions about graduate student acceptance are almost entirely left to individual faculty advisors. A veto by the Graduate Director and/or Department Head is theoretically possible. Graduate applicants may have significant and early contact with the Graduate Program Director and Graduate Program Coordinator if they email or call. Many do not unless they have an issue with their application. To increase accessibility and knowledge about the graduate application process for more students, we plan to create webpage next year that clearly outlines etailed information on the faculty with funding and that are actively seeking students, and the steps that one needs take to get through this process and be seen.

If there is communication, the student is encouraged to seek out a faculty member based on topics of interest and faculty that have external funding and are actively seeking students. We do not accept any student's into our M.S. or Ph.D. programs that we can't cover on either a TA



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or RA stipend, which includes graduate health insurance and tuition. Once faculty decide on the students they want to actively recruit, these students take part in group interview or on-campus visits where they interact broadly with current graduate students, faculty, staff, and lab managers.

WSU Faculty hiring:

At WSU, a search committee typically is composed of six people including one external person who is not a member of the department hiring the candidate. The search committee chair contacts candidates for first and second interviews. During the first interview, candidates interact with the search committee typically through a video conferencing interview. The second interview is more involved and in non-COVID times involves an on-campus visit. During the second interview candidates will interact with the search committee, faculty members within the department, students, and administrators such as the Dean and Associate Deans. The committee consults faculty members and students about their opinions about each candidate and ranks the candidates using a rubric. The search committee provides a recommendation to the Dean, who then makes the final decision.

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

No outside evaluations of any USU hiring/admission processes have been undertaken, at least at the department level. At USU, hiring processes at the HR office level require significant lobbying at the Dean's level.

Graduate admissions processes at USU are essentially left to departments to tailor and implement, and therefore this ability lies with the Graduate Director and Graduate Program Coordinator. However, our College or Department currently has limited resources devoted to this process. To create a more equitable decision making and evaluation process for graduate admissions, additional resources need to be allocated to cover the time required to improve this process long-term.

At WSU, to our knowledge there has not been an evaluation of the hiring processes by outside consultants. The College of Science and the Earth and Environmental Sciences Department does not offer graduate programs at this time and for undergraduate students the university is open enrollment and thus there are not barriers in place to prevent admission.

- **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>?**



## **Unlearning Racism in Geoscience**

USU has only rarely utilized “cluster” hires, and perhaps never has one occurred in the College of Science. This is a key strategy that needs to be implemented at the College level to set and achieve DEI goals. USU is relatively strong on dual-career support, but it is significantly limited by the fact there is no separate pool of salary support for such situations. USU has had an evolution of early-faculty mentoring programs, which have incrementally improved.

WSU has not recently implemented cohort or cluster hiring. There is support for new faculty through New Faculty Orientation, which integrates new faculty hires across the university, and includes training, mentoring, and a weekend retreat. There is not an official dual career or partner hiring policy but in practice the university has supported dual careers when able.