

URGE

Unlearning Racism in Geoscience



Hiring and/or Admissions Policies for University of Virginia, Department of Environmental Sciences

This is what was found by UVA-Environmental Sciences Pod at the University of Virginia on Hiring and/or Admissions Policies, as well as what the pod would propose to change and improve.

- **What EEO (Equal Employment Opportunity) statement¹ is included in a standard job or admissions advertisement? Are there other inclusion statements and resources publicly available²?**

“We [UVA] believe diversity is excellence expressing itself through every person's perspectives and lived experiences. We are equal opportunity and affirmative action employers. All qualified applicants will receive consideration for employment without regard to age, color, disability, gender identity or expression, marital status, national or ethnic origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sex (including pregnancy), sexual orientation, veteran status, and family medical or genetic information.”

The Office of Equal Opportunity and Civil Rights has a [module](#) for training Hiring Officials and Search Committees that outlines practices UVA has implemented to curb potential impacts of bias during the hiring process.

- **Where are advertisements posted or sent? Are there other strategies for reaching applicants for hiring and/or admissions, e.g. job fairs, showcases?**
 - Faculty: Recruitment plans must be developed by the search committee and approved by the Dean's office. These typically include paid postings in job sites hosted by journals (e.g. Science, Nature) and scientific organization (American Geophysical Union, Ecological Society of America), free posting on listserv sites (e.g., CLIMLIST, Met-jobs, AboutHydrology), and free or paid postings on sites that specifically target underrepresented groups (e.g., LatPro which includes DiversityJobs.com and JustJobs.com, Society for Women Engineers, National Association of Black Geoscientists, Society for Advancement of Chicanos/Hispanics and Native Americans in Science, ES-JOBS-NET, sponsored by the Earth Science Women's Network). Positions are advertised on

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

² <https://careers.who.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.ctv9jhw8s>, (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).



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the department website and are disseminated via Twitter, with organizations from the above list tagged (e.g., @NABGSocial). Direct emails are sent to professors/researchers who work in the area of the advertised position to enhance dissemination, with particular care taken to reach out to colleagues at minority-serving institutions and colleagues who are active in educating minority students.

- Postdocs:
 - All positions must be posted on the UVA jobs portal via Workday for at least 10 days. There is no requirement for a search committee.
 - There are no set requirements about where postdoc jobs must be advertised. The standard practice has been for the Principal Investigator/Postdoc Supervisor to advertise to their professional networks via society/discipline-specific job boards, word-of-mouth, or on social media.
- Graduate Students: We currently have no coordinated efforts for advertising graduate research opportunities (RAs), though individual faculty members have had good success in increasing graduate applications by advertising RA opportunities in their labs. Our graduate program (with funding, tuition and health insurance) is one that we could more effectively recruit at undergraduate institutions with high enrollments of students of color.
- **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?**
 - Faculty: Applying to a position requires a cover letter, research statement, teaching statement, curriculum vitae, and contact information for three references. The cover letter should include (1) a summary of how the applicant's research experience fits in the general area of the advertised position, (2) a summary of how the applicant meets the stated qualifications, and (3) any demonstrated past experience working on issues of diversity, equity and inclusion and/or working with diverse populations. Some searches require a separate DEI statement. Reference letters are sought for the top 15-20 applicants identified by the search committee.
 - Postdocs:
 - A letter of recommendation is generally required, and the application should include a cover letter and CV. There are few other requirements from the university or department, but additional materials (e.g., research statement, transcripts, etc) may be requested.



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- Graduate Students: Applying to our graduate program requires transcripts, personal statement, and letters of recommendation. We decided last year to eliminate GRE reporting. The fee to apply is \$85. Only the fee is likely to present a barrier to applications. Information concerning fee waivers that are available to applicants can be found at <https://graddiversity.virginia.edu/application-fee-waiver>. Applicants are asked about race/ethnicity, sex, 1st generation college graduate, veteran status, with some optional questions about gender identity. These do not seem problematic.
- **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?**
 - Faculty: All applicants are evaluated by the search committee using a rubric. This rubric must be approved by the Dean's office and must be in exact alignment with the job description for the advertised position. So, although the rubric is not made public, all of the elements of the rubric are publicly available in the job advertisement. Recent searches have included commitment to DEI as one of the categories considered in the rubric. Members of the search committee submit scores for each applicant for every element of the rubric, which provides a quantitative ranking of the applicants. Reference letters are solicited from the top 15-20 applicants, as identified by the quantitative rankings and discussion about the individual applicants. Information from the letters is factored into the next round of review, using the same rubric. From this pool, 6-8 applicants are selected for phone/Zoom interviews in which the same questions are asked of all candidates and notes are taken and archived. The rubric is once again used to further narrow the pool to 3-5 applicants who are invited for on-Grounds interviews. Before these invitations are made, this pool of candidates must be approved by the department faculty and the Dean's office, after the search committee provides justification for why these candidates were selected. During the in-person portion of the interview process, candidates meet with faculty and students from the department. The interview also includes a search committee meeting, in which all candidates are asked an identical set of questions and notes are taken and archived. The search committee then meets to determine a consensus ranking of the candidates, again using the parameters of the job description to guide the decision and using new information from the candidate seminars, search committee meeting, and one-on-one meetings with individual faculty members.
 - Postdocs:



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- The position advertisement should include a clear description of the required and preferred qualifications, that will be the touchstone used to make further hiring decisions.
 - There is generally not a search committee, but a rubric is required to be submitted to HR for approval.
 - Graduate Students: Applications are reviewed by the Graduate Admissions Committee and by interested faculty. We do not currently have an agreed upon process or rubric for evaluating applications, but that is something we are considering. The primary bias introduced into admissions is related to contacts made between faculty and prospective students prior to the application deadline and how those contacts are made. In some cases, faculty advertise for graduate research assistants (RAs) with encouragement for prospective students to contact the faculty member. In others, students learn about the program or specific research groups through informal networks. Others search for programs in their area of interest. Information on our website encourages students to contact prospective faculty advisors. Students who do not contact potential advisors in advance are at a disadvantage in the application process. Students who are accepted are likely to have had informal contact with potential advisors (phone, email, Zoom, Skype), and we encourage students to visit [under non-COVID conditions]. For the last decade or so we have had a student recruiting event in which we pay for our top prospects to visit campus and meet the faculty, current grad students, and each other.
- **Who is on selection committees and who makes the final decisions? Who interacts with the applicants?**
 - Faculty: The search committee presents the faculty with a motion for the hire, which usually includes contingency plans in case the offer to the top candidate is not accepted (e.g., an offer will be made to Candidate B if the offer to Candidate A is not accepted). This motion is presented at a faculty meeting, in which there is an open discussion. The full faculty have the right to overrule the search committee's recommendation and alternative motions can be presented for the hire. After the department's decision is made, it is submitted to the Dean's office for approval. The Dean's office has the right to overrule the hiring decision made by the department.
 - Postdocs: The only requirement for postdocs is to have a Hiring Official (most likely, the PI). There is no search committee required.
 - Graduate Students: We have a Graduate Admissions Committee with members from each of the 4 subdisciplines in the department. The Admissions committee



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is responsible for reviewing applications, in conjunction with potential faculty advisors. Individual faculty make the final decision about accepting any particular student as they are responsible for covering half of the student's financial support in addition to agreeing to advise the student. Both the chair of the Admissions Committee and the potential faculty advisor are likely to be in touch with an accepted prospective student.

- **Has your hiring and/or admissions process been evaluated by outside consultants? What is the process for changing it?**
 - Faculty: Since the hiring process is structured by the College, and review of the process is conducted at that level. No outside consultants have been involved with a review of faculty hiring practices, but the Dean's office does work in consultation with the UVA Office for Equal Opportunity and Civil Rights.
 - Postdocs: There has not been an outside evaluation of postdoc hiring as far as we can tell.
 - Graduate Students: Not sure about the admissions portal which is administered by the graduate school. Application review and admissions decisions are made by departments, though the letters of acceptance come from the Dean of the Graduate School. Departmental admissions processes have not been evaluated by outside consultants. The authority to change departmental processes lies with the faculty. We will review our admissions process in the next year with the recommendations of the 2 URGE Session 5 interviewees in mind.

- **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?**
 - Faculty: Arts & Sciences recently launched an effort to improve faculty diversity through cluster hires on race and inequality, with our department participating in a search in the area of environmental justice. Target-of-opportunity hires are also being pursued by the College. An "emerging voices" program has been launched, with searches for visiting positions for early career scholars. A key goal of the "emerging voices" program is to explore longer-term positions after initial visiting appointments conclude.
 - Postdocs: UVA Dual Career Program provides support for postdoctoral candidates, typically upon request from the PI.
 - Graduate Students: The University has received a number of training grants for graduate students that bring in student cohorts, and has developed several interdisciplinary graduate certificate programs to expand opportunities for



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broadening research and community. There is also a “Bridge to the Doctorate” program to support post-baccalaureate students from groups that are underrepresented in their disciplines and who have not had sufficient training and research experiences to prepare them for admission to doctoral programs. Bridge Fellows receive 2 years of fellowship support without teaching responsibilities allowing students to enroll in a combination of courses, guided research opportunities and UVA’s intensive graduate student professional development curriculum known as “PhD Plus.” Each bridge fellow works individually with faculty to develop a customized academic plan that identifies opportunities for additional disciplinary training, enable them to cultivate writing and research skills specific to their field, and develop a competitive portfolio for applying to doctoral programs. Bridge fellows have the opportunity to complete a graduate certificate or master’s degree. Qualified students are considered for promotion into UVA’s own doctoral programs after the first or second year.

Pod Members’ Signatures

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