

URGE

Unlearning Racism in Geoscience



Department of Meteorology and
Atmospheric Science

Hiring and admissions policies for Penn State University, College of Earth and Mineral Sciences, and the Department of Meteorology and Atmospheric Science

Faculty

Equal Opportunity and Inclusion statements in job ads:

- Overall Penn State recruitment and hiring information is available from the Office of Equal Opportunity and Access (formerly the Affirmative Action Office) (<https://equalopportunity.psu.edu/welcome/recruitment-searches/>)
- Penn State Equal Opportunity statement is written into every posted advertisement: <https://sites.psu.edu/aaoffice2/welcome/equal-employment-opportunity-laws-and-regulations/> “EEO is the Law: Penn State is an equal opportunity, affirmative action employer, and is committed to providing employment opportunities to all qualified applications without regards to race, color, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identify, national origin, disability or protected veteran status. If you are unable to use our online application process due to an impairment or disability, please contact 814-865-1473.”
- Ads from the College of EMS (including Meteorology and Atmospheric Science) all include an additional statement of valuing diversity such as “The Department of Meteorology and Atmospheric Science at Penn State relies on the expertise, sensitivity, and commitment of an inclusive faculty to enhance diversity, seek equity, and create a welcoming environment within our community. We are committed to nurturing a learning and working environment that respects differences in culture, age, gender, race, ethnicity, physical ability, sexual orientation, and religious affiliation. We understand that our shared future is guided by basic principles of fairness, mutual respect, and commitment to each other. We strive to meet the needs of professional families by actively assisting with partner-placement needs of newly hired faculty members.”
- All Penn State postings also include information about campus crime statistics as part of Clery Act compliance.

- In our college, it is required that the associate dean for educational equity meet with the committee for each leadership search (department head, institute director) and recommended to meet with faculty search committees if possible, but at least with the committee chair to share information related to insuring equitable searches.

Position advertising

- Paid ads for faculty positions are generally placed in wide-spread society newsletters such as EOS from AGU and the AMS job board. For a current faculty position, we are researching the most effective minority-focused place to submit an ad.
- Faculty position ads are sent to relevant disciplinary and appropriate minority-focused listservs, and the Earth science women's network
- Individual faculty distribute ads to their networks
- Individual faculty personally encourage candidates to apply

Required application materials

- Statement of interest/cover letter
- Curriculum vitae
- Statement of research plans and vision
- Statement of teaching philosophy and interests
- Diversity statement demonstrating a commitment to fostering diversity, equity, and an inclusive environment in the department/workplace
- Names and contact information for 3-4 references

Applicant evaluation

- Committee members are strongly encouraged to complete training provided by the Office of Equal Opportunity and Access on ensuring equitable searches for faculty positions, available on Penn State's Learning Resource Network
- If the department is underrepresented for women and/or minorities, the Office of Equal Opportunity and Access reaches out to the hiring manager with that data.
- Training on implicit bias is available and encouraged
(<https://pennstateoffice365.sharepoint.com/sites/DiversityEquityandInclusionResources/SitePages/Implicit%20bias.aspx>)

- Our department organized workshops on Unconscious Bias (fall 2022) and Conscious Inclusion (fall 2023).
- During the ad-writing process, committees consider what attributes they would like to see in an ideal candidate
- Committee members are advised to go slowly to give adequate time for anti-biased review of application materials
- Committee members are recommended to develop their own rubrics or criteria for ranking potential diversity, teaching, and research contributions, as well as disciplinary needs, etc. We do not use a uniform or standardized rubric, but examples are provided. Faculty members are asked to think clearly about specific evidence that leads them to rank candidates higher or lower and are encouraged to consider a wide range of factors and a holistic view of excellence that extends beyond traditional “metrics” such as prestige of school attended, number of publications, citation indices, and grant money raised.
- Committee members are discouraged from reviewing an applicant’s CV prior to reading their statements. This recommendation aims to slow down the review process and center candidates’ words and minimize the potential impact of pedigree and metric-based accomplishments emphasized by the CV (e.g., what programs/labs someone came from, how many publications they have, etc.). The recommended reading order is 1) cover letter, 2) diversity statement, 3) teaching statement, and 4) research statement; all prior to viewing the CV. For committees who have used this approach, general feedback has been that this is a successful way of emphasizing candidate’s individual expression and perspectives and that it helps identify strong applicants who are early career or from less familiar institutions. Additionally, it helps sort out a candidate’s individual perspectives and ideas when they come from large working groups.
- During the interviews, a specific question related to DEI is included and these issues are also common in discussions with students

Decision-making process

- The search committee (appointed and charged by the Department Head) manages the search and evaluates candidates based on their own review of materials and interviews, informed by feedback from the broader faculty and graduate students.
- During the interviews, as many faculty as possible meet with the candidates (in individual and small-group meetings). Every candidate meets with a group of graduate students (usually ~8 students during lunch hour). The committee meets as a group with each candidate for one hour. Candidates interact with support staff during scheduling and visit coordination.
- Faculty submit feedback on each candidate that is accessible to the search committee.
- Graduate students may also submit feedback and their collective reactions are summarized for the search committee by the graduate student representatives to the faculty.

- The search committee evaluates all materials and feedback and decides on a recommendation that is put forth as a formal motion to the faculty. A faculty meeting is convened and the entire faculty votes on the motion.
- Ultimately it is the Department Head who has the final say in faculty hiring decisions. In practice, strong consensus is typically achieved before moving forward.

Process assessment

- Our hiring process has not been assessed by outside consultants; however, there has been active internal engagement to improve the process.
- During the 2020-2021 academic year, the College of EMS at Penn State had a faculty working group to evaluate college hiring practices. The committee developed a self-assessment tool for departments in the college to use to evaluate their hiring practices and recommended that departments across the college conduct regular re-evaluations of their practices and compare experiences with other departments. This review and comparison is to be facilitated by the EMS Associate Dean for Educational Equity and Associate Heads for Diversity Equity and Inclusion across EMS departments.
- Suggestions for changes to practices within the department can be brought to the Department Head or the Associate Head for DEI. Departmental practices are kept in compliance with college-level policies, so communication with the Dean, the Associate Dean for Educational Equity, and College Human Resources are important pathways for alignment.

Recruiting and hiring strategies

- Our department has a strong track-record of working toward dual-career solutions whenever possible. This has recently been added to the language in ads: “In welcoming every candidate, we strive to meet the needs of professional families by actively assisting with partner-placement needs.”
- The request for, and review emphasis on, candidate statements on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion statements is intended to help underscore the importance of this aspect of our departmental and college community and culture.

Recommendations

- More emphasis on active recruiting.
- According to the Harvard Business Review (<https://hbr.org/2016/04/if-theres-only-one-woman-in-your-candidate-pool-theres-statistically-no-chance-shell-be-hired>), when the final candidate pool has only one minority candidate, he or she has virtually no chances of being hired. If there are at least two female candidates in the final candidate pool, the odds of hiring a female candidate are 79 times greater. If there are at least two minority candidates in the final candidate pool, the odds of hiring a minority candidate are 194 times greater. For faculty searches in our department, we typically have a

short list of 10-15 candidates and then an interview list of 3-4 candidates. Recommend at least two minority candidates and two women candidates in the short list.

Graduate Students

Equal Opportunity and Inclusion statements:

- There are statements in the Graduate School admissions materials, but the department does not have anything specific. We are working to add a diversity statement to our website as well as a page describing our Committee on Belonging.

Advertising

- Prospective graduate students contact faculty after learning about their research on departmental and research group websites.
- We have recruited from REU programs at Penn State (e.g., Climate Science).
- We work with the EMS Office of Educational Equity and visit with prospective applicants at events hosted by EMS and at the Graduate School at the STEM open house.
- We recruit from our own undergraduate program- mentoring/starting research as undergraduates
- AMS meeting booth, Career fair AMS
- Consider a booth at the National Diversity in STEM Conference organized by SACNAS (Society for the advancement of Chicanos/Hispanics and Native Americans in Science) in October. We do not currently host a booth at the AGU fall meeting.

Required application materials

- Personal statement
- Letters of recommendation
- Transcript
- Curriculum vita
- GRE scores are not accepted.

Applicant evaluation

Applications are evaluated via a rubric. The evaluation form used by the grad admissions committee (scored 1-5) is shown below.

RATE APPLICANT
Academic preparation (overall GPA, grades in particular foundational classes, referee testimonials)
<input type="text"/>
Research experience and technical skill set (e.g., programming, modeling, field work experience)
<input type="text"/>
Communications skills (based on essay and any evidence provided by CV or referees)
<input type="text"/>
Intangibles (e.g., signs of maturity, leadership qualities, drive, curiosity, grit, resilience evident in essay, CV, or referee testimonials)
<input type="text"/>
Notable strengths
<input type="text"/>
Notable weaknesses
<input type="text"/>
Additional comments (note here if you want to pursue the applicant for your own group, or if there's a faculty member particularly well-suited for the applicant)
<input type="text"/>

Decision-making process

- The Faculty Graduate Admissions Committee is selected by the Department head with an emphasis on representing the broad disciplinary areas in the department.
- This committee makes recommendations to the Associate Head, who makes the final decisions on admissions with a faculty member. Admissions decisions are made factoring in committee review of candidates, faculty interest (is there a good research/advising match?), and funding opportunities (departmental TA allocations, faculty RA opportunities, etc.)
- Any faculty can interact with applicants.

Process assessment

- There has been no formal external review.
- Suggestions for changes to admissions policies and practices could be raised by contacting the Associate Head for Graduate Programs who can make those changes immediately.

Recruiting and hiring strategies

- In-person or virtual visits for admitted students, including a meeting with current students.
- University, Graduate School, and College fellowships and awards for minority students (<https://www.ems.psu.edu/graduate/graduate-student-resources/diversity-resources-graduate-students>)

Recommendations

- Consider lowering or removing the application fee, or offering waivers.
- Consider removing the unwritten norm of reaching out in advance to advisor before admission process granting advantage to admission (probably unrealistic due to the need to match funding opportunities).
- Consider making it clear that prospective graduate students should reach out to prospective advisors prior to applying, adding a bullet point here (<http://www.met.psu.edu/prospective-students/graduate-students-ms-and-phd-degrees/how-to-apply#:~:text=In%20order%20to%20apply%20to,index.cfm%2Fapply%2F.>)
- Consider running a booth at the National Diversity in STEM Conference organized by SACNAS (Society for the advancement of Chicanos/Hispanics and Native Americans in Science) in October. We do not currently host a booth at the AGU fall meeting.

Acknowledgment: The Department of Geosciences at Penn State completed URGE training and deliverables during the spring of 2021. As their department is in the same college within the same university, many of our policies and procedures are the same. We have thus relied on the deliverables of their pod, adjusting and updating as appropriate.