

# URGE

## Unlearning Racism in Geoscience



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### URGE Session 5 Deliverable: Hiring and/or Admissions Policies

This is what was found by the University of Utah Megapod (Pods 1-2-3) on Hiring and Admissions Policies, as well as what the pod would propose to change and improve.

Note: We focused on Faculty Hiring and Graduate Admissions policies as two separate issues, although there are common themes regarding how best to attract and retain a more diverse CMES community. The analysis below pulls largely from policies and experiences in the Geology and Geophysics (GG) Department as well as Atmospheric Sciences (Atmos), but has broader implications across the College and Institution. Although staff hiring and undergraduate recruitment are not specifically addressed here, these are also important constituent groups to consider in the future.

#### Part One - Faculty Hiring

##### Advertising and Recruitment

Advertisements for faculty positions are posted on University of Utah websites (HR and Diversity@UU, as well as Higher Ed), circulated to all relevant professional societies for publication (online and in print, for example, GSA, AGU, and HigherEd Jobs) and also sent to diversity-centered organizations such as SACNAS, AWG, NABG. The positions and links to the application portal are also posted to social media (Twitter and Facebook). Individual faculty members, particularly in allied fields, often reach out to their professional networks as well.

**EEO (Equal Employment Opportunity) and Diversity/Inclusion Statements** are included in faculty search advertisements. For example (from a recent faculty search ad):

##### EEO/Non-Discrimination Information

The University of Utah is an Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity employer and does not discriminate based upon race, national origin, color, religion, sex, age, sexual orientation, gender identity/expression, status as a person with a disability, genetic information, or Protected Veteran status. Individuals from historically underrepresented groups, such as minorities, women, qualified persons with disabilities and protected veterans are encouraged to apply. Veterans' preference is extended to qualified applicants, upon request and consistent with University policy and Utah state law. Upon request, reasonable accommodations in the application process will be provided to individuals with disabilities. To inquire about the University's nondiscrimination or affirmative action policies or to request disability accommodation, please contact: Director, Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action, 201 S. Presidents Circle, Rm 135, (801) 581-8365.

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The University of Utah values candidates who have experience working in settings with students from diverse backgrounds, and possess a strong commitment to improving access to higher education for historically underrepresented students.

There is no fee to apply for a faculty position. Required materials include: (1) statement of interest, (2) summary of current research activities and future research and funding plans, (3) teaching statement describing teaching philosophy and proposed courses at the undergraduate and graduate levels for the University of Utah, (4) diversity statement describing commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion and the mentoring of diverse students and junior colleagues, (5) curriculum vitae, and (6) names and contact information for five referees. Research and teaching statements should be limited to four pages each.

### **Faculty Hiring Decisions**

In GG, search committees include ~4-5 faculty (research and career line), usually with some overlapping interests in the target hiring field(s), and one graduate student member. The initial selection process varies slightly for each case, but generally involves narrowing the application field (typically >100 applicants) down to a medium list (~10-20), from which letters are requested and often short phone/audio interviews are conducted. A final short list of ~3-5 are then invited participate in the campus interview (virtual or in person). Rubrics are used at multiple stages (example below), and these do specifically evaluate commitment and contribution to DEI initiatives. The formal interview process typically includes 2 technical talks (including a one hour department-wide lecture, and a separate 45 minute future vision talk that includes discussion of student mentorship and service goals), small group interviews with faculty, students and administrators, campus facilities tours, off campus dinners, etc.

The actual hiring decision includes discussion by the entire faculty, although only tenure-line faculty can vote. All faculty involved in the hiring decision are required to complete implicit bias training. The Department Chair then takes over all individual negotiations with the candidate.

The two most recent tenure-track positions that have been added to the Department of Atmospheric Sciences (Atmos) were each the result of searches led by a cross-disciplinary University search committee. Atmos has not conducted a faculty search and hire in at least 10 years. At that time, the search committee consisted of all faculty members (at the time 9) in a manner similar to that described above for GG. No implicit bias training was done at that time. Example rubric for faculty hiring screening:



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- 1) Research performance and potential
  - a. (1-5) Quality and quantity of research productivity relative to applicant career stage, based on factors such as amount and type of research funding, number and quality of research publications, H-index, etc.
  - b. (1-5) Potential for future accomplishment based on creative and ambitious research statement, disciplinary expertise, breadth of work, and potential for excellence as identified by letter-writers.
- 2) Fit of research and teaching interests relative to existing programs and search focus.
  - a. (1-5) Applicant would bring new research foci and techniques, and educational/training opportunities to the program, as evidenced in their record and research and teaching statements.
  - b. (1-5) Potential for the applicant to collaborate with, leverage, support, and be supported by existing UU/GG faculty, labs, infrastructure and educational programs, including opportunities identified by the applicant, letter-writers, or otherwise apparent to the committee members.
- 3) Commitment and preparedness of the applicant to contribute to actively advancing DEI in the department.
  - a. (1-5) Track record of leadership or involvement in DEI-focused work, as evidenced by concrete activities reported on the applicant's CV or written statements and judged relative to the applicant's career stage.
  - b. (1-5) Applicant presents a compelling and specific vision for future efforts to advance DEI, including fostering discovery, education and achievement for individuals from underrepresented groups in a supportive and inclusive environment.

### Suggestions for improvement

Our existing faculty recruitment process checks many of the boxes for inclusive hiring practices. Nevertheless, racial and ethnic diversity is lacking in both GG and Atmos despite improvements in gender diversity in the former (30% female-identified tenure line faculty in GG). Several faculty members are engaged in JEDI training, including Whiteness at Work, STRIDE, and URGE, but there are also many faculty who do not have this level of engagement. Some suggestions for improvement:

- Extend and expand implicit bias and inclusivity training beyond the minimal requirements currently in place.
- The multidisciplinary nature of geoscience lends itself well to cross-college and cross-departmental collaborations, including non-traditional pathways for hiring. Therefore, we are in a good position to strategically pursue the possibility of cohort and cluster hires, possibly across departments.



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- Establish and publish quantitative goals for % minoritized STEM Faculty over the next 10 years, both hiring and retention/promotion.
- Re-frame campus visits (when they are allowed) in terms of inclusion. Consider both advantages and disadvantages that face minoritized individuals when considering a move to Salt Lake City and the University of Utah; be willing to address those issues openly. Reflect upon key aspects of College climate that are part of the candidate's decision making process, and have open conversations about these issues with all candidates.
- Consider assigning a mentor/advocate to assist the candidate in the pre-hire and early hire transition phases (Griffin, 2020).
- This analysis focuses on tenure line faculty, but career line (research, instructor) faculty are vital to each Department's mission. The recruitment and hiring process is different for career line faculty, but JEDI challenges are overlapping. A similar analysis should be undertaken for career line faculty, particularly given data that suggest minoritized groups are more likely to occupy these professional routes, which typically do not include State salary funds.

### **Beyond the hire:**

- Full evaluation of Retention, Promotion, and Tenure (RPT) policies and procedures are beyond the scope of this deliverable, but we note that advances in hiring mean nothing if the faculty members are not supported throughout the process. This week's deliverables point to some key considerations for RPT and faculty success, including:
  - o Provide better onboarding and cohort building experiences.
  - o Re-evaluate and improve mentoring and professional development pathways.
  - o Provide ways for junior faculty to safely give feedback on their experiences, and act accordingly.
  - o Remove hierarchical structures that can impede success and/or strengthen unhealthy power dynamics. For example, allow junior faculty to be involved in all RPT discussions (of more senior faculty).
  - o Consider service requests carefully, given that under-represented groups are often over-committed on committee work. Unhide hidden service.

### **Part Two – Graduate Admissions**

In GG, the Graduate Affairs committee (~4-5 faculty members) oversees admission and progress/completion concerns for all MS and PhD students. In Atmos, the entire faculty serves in this capacity. In terms of admission, prospective students apply through the University of Utah admissions office, at a cost of \$55/application, although applicants can request a fee waiver. The College and Department websites are one entry point for interested students, and



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these do include diversity and inclusion pages/statements. Qualitatively, social media, journal publications, professional meetings, and colleague recommendations also factor in to student's decisions to apply. Individual faculty members may "post" open positions, but these are typically not done through an official University channel such as the HR website.

Applicants are asked to submit transcripts, including GPA, as well as personal statements and letters of recommendation (sent separately). GG and Atmos decided not to require GRE scores as of Fall 2020.

Admission offers are largely driven by individual faculty (PI) funding availability. In other words, GG and Atmos do not follow a model where the committee extends offers directly (cf., Posselt, 2016). There is no systematic, department-wide rubric or broader oversight system in place. The majority of GG and Atmos graduate students are on some form of financial support, and each Department has limited TA and Fellowship positions available. None of these are currently specifically earmarked toward support of a diverse graduate student population, although diversity is often a consideration. Faculty who are recruiting new graduate students can nominate prospective students for available funding, and/or promise to provide grant support. The University is transitioning away from a previous tuition benefit model to one where PIs must pay tuition for their students. Any effect this may have on the graduate program has not yet been evaluated.

Pre-Covid, the GG Department provided \$500 for 1 prospective student per faculty member to visit the campus. These visits were mainly organized by the recruiting faculty and their research groups, including meeting relevant faculty/students, and logistics. At various times in the past, a semi-coordinated "prospective students" simultaneous visit was organized. Atmos fully funded visits for all prospective graduate students, with the visits organized by the Department.

### **Suggestions for Improvement**

- Student recruitment from minoritized populations is critical and should be a common, explicitly stated goal for the College.
  - o This goal should be incorporated into outreach initiatives, including State populations and communities, as well as recruitment within the University (e.g., from our own undergraduate populations and synergistic programs in other Colleges).
  - o Consider Bridge programs to aid transitions, such as high school to undergraduate, undergraduate to graduate, MS to PhD, and post PhD training. This could include 5<sup>th</sup> year MS programs and/or a professional Masters program, for example. Expand undergraduate and pre-College (summer?) research



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opportunities, particularly with under-represented communities. Continue and further expand the existing GeoPaths program with Salt Lake Community College.

- Expand and advertise scholarships from endowment funds specifically for graduate students from minoritized groups; there are already several endowed scholarship funds earmarked for undergraduate minoritized groups.
- Demystify the application process, particularly for underprivileged students who may not know some of the unwritten 'norms' for applying to graduate school. For example:
  - Add clear, student-friendly "how-to apply" guidelines on department and college web pages. Include information on how to locate and approach/contact potential advisors, and underscore that this is strongly recommended in the pre-application phase. Explain the admissions process, time lines, funding norms, etc. Provide more specific guidelines for personal statements.
  - List faculty who ARE specifically looking to recruit graduate students for a given admissions cycle.
  - Make clear that it is possible to request a waiver of the graduate admissions fee, and streamline the process for doing so.
- CMES might consider a College-wide common application, particularly one that does not require GRE scores, and is evaluated at some level by a committee or even an outside expert trained in implicit bias and racism.
- Bring all prospective students for a collective campus visit so they can interact with students and faculty outside their discipline. This will give prospective students a jump start in community building and expose them to support networks they may not be able to naturally form once they are here.
- Help faculty learn how to contextualize application material with inclusivity, privilege, and potential for implicit bias in mind.
  - Establish a common rubric for faculty to complete evaluations, similar to faculty hires (example in Possett, 2016). Ensure that the potential for 'contributions and commitment to' diversity and inclusion is part of that rubric.
- GG and Atmospheric Sciences partnered to apply for the AGU-Bridge program in fall 2020. Although this proposal was declined, the proposal evaluation was generally positive and we are working to incorporate feedback and suggestions, such as:
  - highlighting examples of student success
  - specifying participating faculty members' role beyond research advisor and mentor
  - ratifying mentor-mentee compact
  - specifying department chair endorsement for the program
  - specifying staff support roles



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- outlining how students lacking key undergraduate courses and underperforming students will be helped
- developing further student relocation support
- formalizing URM retention data collection and addressing any retention issues.
- Provide information to applicants about stipends, health insurance coverage, student loan deferment, and other benefits that are available to graduate students, as many potential applicants may be discouraged from applying to graduate school if they believe they cannot afford it.
- As with faculty hires, successful recruitment of diverse graduate student populations is only a start. To improve, the College/Department should incorporate cohort experiences, broader mentoring, ongoing evaluations of and reflections on graduate student experience (e.g., expand exit surveys and interviews, use neutral parties for interviews, create a mechanism for providing this anonymized feedback to the departments), support structures, culture/climate, retention and successful degree achievement.  
[Inclusive Earth](#) (a student-led group focused on JEDI initiatives across the College) activities should be supported and expanded. From previous deliverables, make sure all students have a *streamlined* understanding of how to seek help and conflict resolution.

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K. Griffin, J. Bennett, T. York, Leveraging Promising Practices, Washington DC: Aspire Alliance, (2020).

J. Posselt, Inside Graduate Admissions: Merit, Diversity, and Faculty Gatekeeping, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvjghw8s>, (2016).