

Promoting Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Wellness in Faculty Hiring

*Prepared by the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee
and the Mental Health and Wellness Committee
of the Department of Integrative Biology
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Draft January 2020; Last updated July 2020

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1. INTRODUCTION

The goal of the guidelines outlined here is to institute best practices to attract and identify the best candidates for any given faculty position. This objective is best achieved by ensuring that no exceptional candidates are excluded, overlooked, or evaluated inaccurately due to the many biases inherent in typical hiring processes. These guidelines also emphasize the mental wellness of candidates, as the purpose of the hiring process is not to test resilience to grueling interviews, but to gain a meaningful assessment of candidates' qualities and potential contributions to a healthy, vibrant department. The recommendations provided below relate to each step of the hiring process, from formation of search committees to final selection of successful candidates, and are intended to be continually updated as new information on best practices becomes available. The strategies are not limited to actions undertaken by search committees, but should also contribute to a departmental culture that embraces inclusion and wellness as core values.

2. COMMITTEE FORMATION AND DISCUSSIONS

2.1. Ensure that the committee includes individuals with diverse perspectives, including members of equity-seeking groups and allies.

The composition of the search committee is important for two reasons. First, the search committee composition sends a message to job candidates about the department's EDI culture. Second, diverse and inclusive committees are more likely to avoid affinity bias, defined as the favouring of job candidates who are similar to us in race, gender, academic pedigree, socioeconomic status, and other characteristics.

We note that ensuring a diverse search committee is likely to disproportionately increase the service load for members of equity-seeking groups in our department (Jimenez *et al.* 2017). We therefore recommend that service on search committees by members of equity-seeking groups be accompanied with a reduction in other service assignments whenever possible.

2.2. Engage the whole committee in training about how to recognize and account for biases in hiring practices.

Everyone has biases that can influence their assessment of job candidates (see <https://www.socialtalent.com/blog/diversity-and-inclusion/9-types-of-bias> for a list). Identifying and acknowledging these biases can be an important step in minimizing their effects on faculty hiring. Consequently, all search committee members should complete not just the mandatory university training on implicit bias, but also explicitly discuss the role that various biases can play in the search process prior to reviewing any applications. Interventions that go beyond standard HR training to counter potential bias in search committees have been shown to increase diversity in faculty hires; indeed, experimental trials of two such interventions aimed at increasing gender diversity of faculty hires led to searches being significantly more likely to hire a female candidate (Smith *et al.* 2015, Devine *et al.* 2017). Materials from these

interventions are publicly available

(<http://www.montana.edu/nsfadvance/formsresources/index.html>, <https://osf.io/9yt23/>), and could be used by IB search committees.

2.3. Take steps to ensure that best practices in hiring are implemented throughout the search process.

Active efforts must be taken throughout a search in order to ensure a process that is fair, equitable, and effective. The primary responsibility for implementing best practices over the duration of a faculty search rests with the department Chair (and the search committee chair if another faculty member has been designated to serve in this role), with oversight by the Dean. The Chair should make a commitment to being accountable for the implementation of best practices and take steps to ensure transparency on progress toward this goal. More generally, the department can increase accountability by making hiring practice information available on the departmental website and directing prospective applicants to the EDI and wellness hiring guidelines that will be used.

The inclusion of an EDI representative on each search committee represents an especially effective option for maintaining best practices (e.g., as one of the Chair's appointed search committee members). It is worth noting that in some institutions, the inclusion of a EDI representative who reports to the Dean and senior administration is an explicit part of the search process as laid out in the faculty collective agreement (see e.g., York University: <https://www.yufa.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Collective-Agreement-Part-1.pdf>). Where such university-wide policies do not exist, department Chairs and Deans may still consider the appointment of an EDI representative to individual search committees. If such a practice is to be implemented, then care must be taken to ensure that this does not create undue burden on members of equity-seeking groups who may be asked to serve in this position (e.g., by reducing service commitments in other areas). At minimum, the Chair should encourage regular reflection and discussion by the search committee over the course of the search, and consultation by the Chair and/or the entire search committee with representatives of EDI and Mental Health and Wellness committees during the search is encouraged.

2.4. During committee meetings, ensure that individuals with diverse perspectives are heard.

A diverse search committee will not be effective unless all members of the committee are listened to—that is, unless the committee is both diverse and inclusive. Consequently, search committee meetings should be run in a way that ensures that members of equity-seeking groups are comfortable contributing and are listened to (i.e. inclusive meetings; see <https://hbr.org/2019/09/to-build-an-inclusive-culture-start-with-inclusive-meetings> for a description). Moreover, efforts should be made to ensure that committee members are not seen as 'representing' their equity-seeking community. They are there, rather, to contribute to the richness of the committee.

3. JOB ADVERTISEMENT

To hire diverse faculty, it is first necessary to attract a diverse applicant pool. Several recommendations for best practices are available in this regard.

3.1. Include a statement describing why the department values diversity, inclusion, and wellness, and the actions that the department is taking to in support of these values.

Much like the composition of the search committee, the job ad sends a message to job candidates about the department's EDI culture (Bhalla 2019). Consequently, we recommend that the job ad include a more detailed EDI statement than is required by the university, and that this be written into the main text of the ad rather than appended at the end.

An example of text that could be used in IB ads:

In the Department of Integrative Biology, we value diversity and inclusivity because we know that diversity in experiences and perspectives is vital to advancing innovation, critical thinking, complex problem solving, and the creation of a modern, representative academic community. The Department is committed to developing and maintaining a culture that is positive, collegial, and respectful of all members, and in which wellness and healthy work-life balance are valued along with (and indeed, contribute to) excellence in research and teaching. To develop an inclusive and vibrant departmental culture, the Department maintains standing committees focused on Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion and Mental Health and Wellness and has developed specific recommendations for faculty hiring that incorporate these important issues [INCLUDE LINK TO THIS DOCUMENT]. A link to the department's EDI statement is available at https://www.uoquelfh.ca/ib/EDI_Statement. The University of Guelph's Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Action Plan is available at https://www.uoquelfh.ca/research/system/files/2020-04-20%202020%20EDIAP_0.pdf.

3.2. Ask candidates to address diversity and inclusion as part of their application package.

Job ads for faculty searches in North America increasingly ask applicants to submit a statement that describes their experiences with and commitments to EDI. Such a statement can then be used by the search committee when evaluating applications in relation to EDI criteria listed in the job ad. It is important that this statement be used early in the evaluation process (Bhalla 2019), and be included in the main rubric for evaluating candidates. It is also important that the criteria for evaluating diversity statements be decided upon and understood by the committee in advance. Excellent examples of how to evaluate diversity statements already exist (for example, https://ofew.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/rubric_to_assess_candidate_contributions_to_diversity_equity_and_inclusion.pdf). Including a diversity statement in job applications is particularly salient at Canadian universities because a similar statement now comprises a portion of applications for NSERC Discovery Grants.

For more information on diversity statements in job applications, see:

- <https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2016/06/10/how-write-effective-diversity-statement-essay>
- <https://cpb-us-w2.wpmucdn.com/sites.udel.edu/dist/4/648/files/2019/07/The-Use-of-Diversity-Statements-in-Faculty-Hiring-7.29.19.pdf>

Note that a diversity statement should focus on how the applicant would support diversity and inclusion in their labs and classrooms as a member of the department, rather than asking for a list of contributions or accomplishments in relation to EDI activities. That is, it should not disadvantage members of equity-seeking groups for whom challenges related to diversity and inclusion may play a significant role in their daily lives. As an alternative, applicants could simply be asked to address how they feel they meet the criteria listed in the job ad, which includes EDI as well as teaching and research.

3.3. Make the subject area of the advertisement broad in scope.

There is evidence that posting jobs with a broad scope (for example, “Ecologist” rather than “Fish Community Ecologist”) lead to larger and more diverse applicant pools (Bhalla 2019) because more job candidates will perceive that they could be a good fit for the position. This is important, as candidates from equity-seeking groups may be less likely to apply than members of dominant groups if they do not meet all of the stated criteria for the position (e.g., <https://hbr.org/2014/08/why-women-dont-apply-for-jobs-unless-theyre-100-qualified>). Diverse candidates may also be better represented in non-traditional, interdisciplinary, and emerging fields. Consequently, the job ad should be as broad a possible while still meeting the needs of the department – for example, if taxonomically focused, make it conceptually broad; if conceptually focused, make it taxonomically broad. The ad may also include an indication that the department is open to applications from excellent candidates whose areas of expertise may fall outside any narrowly-defined job description.

3.4. Distribute the advertisement widely, using both traditional and non-traditional venues.

Posting job ads in traditional venues such as *Science* can result in a relatively homogenous applicant pool. Consequently, job ads should be distributed using non-traditional means such as social media (e.g., Twitter, Facebook) and job boards (e.g. ecojobs.net), with individuals encouraged to share information about the position with qualified colleagues.

3.5. Identify potentially suitable job candidates from equity-seeking groups and directly encourage them to apply.

Even a broadly-posted ad will not reach all qualified applicants, so building a diverse candidate pool requires active outreach by the search committee. One type of active outreach that can be particularly effective is to identify potentially suitable job candidates from equity-seeking groups, and send them a personal email encouraging them to apply. Candidates from equity-seeking groups can be identified using sites such as [DiversifyEEB](http://DiversifyEEB.org) and [DiversifyPlantSci](http://DiversifyPlantSci.org); by

contacting professional societies for members of equity-seeking groups (e.g. Society for Advancement of Chicanos/Hispanics and Native Americans in Science (SACNAS)); or by contacting colleagues at institutions that disproportionately serve students from equity-seeking groups (Bhalla 2019).

3.6. When multiple searches are underway, advertise them synchronously.

Female academics are statistically more likely to be married to a fellow faculty member than male academics (Schiebinger *et al.* 2008, Moors *et al.* 2014), making accommodations for academic partners an equity issue. Advertising multiple searches synchronously is one way to potentially enable dual hires for candidates with academic partners.

4. EVALUATION OF APPLICATIONS AND CREATION OF SHORTLIST

4.1. Evaluate all candidates using a common rubric that explicitly based on the criteria listed in the job ad (including EDI).

One way to minimize the effects of implicit bias on hiring decisions is to evaluate applications using a rubric. For an example of such a rubric, see p. 13-14 of <https://www.eng.mcmaster.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/v8handbookonfacultyrecruitmentandsearches-03-15.pdf>. To ensure that all members of the search committee contribute equally, each member can be asked to score the applications individually according to the pre-determined criteria and to generate their own long list of top-rated candidates, and then these individual scores and lists can be collated and compared during a subsequent discussion.

4.2. When evaluating candidates, assess research excellence broadly.

Some commonly-used and seemingly objective metrics of research excellence – including number of publications, h-index, and impact factor of journals in which an applicant has published – can be biased. For example, peer-reviewed studies have shown that women’s research is more likely to be rejected by journals, and less likely to be cited once published (Hengel 2017, Fox and Paine 2019). These biases manifest early in researchers’ academic careers and over time may be compounded (e.g. Moss-Rascusin *et al.* 2012). Consequently, an over-reliance on quantitative metrics to assess research excellence can result in bias against candidates from equity-seeking groups. Ultimately, the goal of assessing research excellence broadly is to recognize that there are many paths to a successful research program.

To address this, we recommend that search committees look beyond metrics when assessing research excellence. Some options include:

- Evaluate the broader impact of the candidate’s research. For example, did the research inform conservation planning or wildlife species assessments?
- Consider the candidate’s creativity and independence as a researcher. For example, did the candidate write grants to fund their own research, or develop new methods for

collecting or analyzing data? Was the applicant the lead or sole author, or were they one of many authors? When listed as a co-author on papers, do they publish with many different people, or the same group? Was the candidate part of a very productive lab with a well-known PI, or did they do most of their work in a smaller lab with fewer advantages?

- Take into account advantages or challenges that applicants may have experienced and assess productivity and potential accordingly, rather than simply counting publications or comparing h-indices.
- Assess the quality (in addition to the quantity) of published work by requiring candidates to submit pdfs of what they consider their three most significant publications. Ask the candidate to briefly summarize their most significant contribution(s) and why they were important.

These alternatives may allow the committee to achieve a more holistic view of an applicant's research accomplishments and potential, and allow the candidate to highlight other important factors such as their approach to mentorship, collaboration, scientific communication, etc.

4.3. Be aware of gendered or racialized language when evaluating recommendation letters.

Letters of recommendation commonly include gendered/racialized language that signals doubt about job applicants, or creates biases through the use of “hedgies”, “faint praises”, and other subtle cues (see <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/06/19/study-finds-recommendation-letters-inadvertently-signal-doubt-about-female>). The biases may not be consciously acknowledged by either the author or the reader of the letter, and may occur regardless of the gender of the referee. The potential for this subtly biased language to create a disadvantage for applicants from equity-seeking groups needs to be explicitly discussed by the search committee.

As a way of mitigating biases in reference letters, referees can be given specific prompts or asked focused questions relating to specific criteria and asking for concrete examples – e.g., “Please describe a specific project you worked on with the candidate. What role did they take? How did they demonstrate creativity and independence?”. Alternatively, referees could be provided with a common form/template to complete, similar to those used when providing letters of support for many scholarship applications.

4.4. Revisit applicants who self-identified as being from equity-seeking groups who came close to being included on the shortlist.

To reduce the possibility that bias results in members of underrepresented groups being excluded from the shortlist, revisit candidates that made the longlist but not the shortlist. Use the criteria on the rubric (see above) to determine whether the potential of applicants was assessed fairly (i.e., taking into account the full range of factors). If necessary, revise the shortlist. If the long list does not include representative diversity, there are likely to be have

been significant problems in one or more of the steps leading up to this stage and these should be assessed and corrected.

5. PLANNING FOR INTERVIEWS

5.1. Prior to the interview, communicate clearly with candidates about the process, schedule, and expectations.

Clearly communicating with candidates about the process, schedule, and expectations for the interview can ensure that candidates from equity-seeking groups have a more level playing field (Bhalla 2019). Expectations for the teaching seminar should be made especially clear. Similarly, a lack of clear communication can present a mental health challenge to many applicants as they balance their personal lives. Communicating clear intentions for hiring milestones will signal that the committee is organized and that the candidate is a respected and valued participant in the process. Faculty searches are intended to identify excellent long-term colleagues, not to test resilience to a grueling interview process.

5.2. Schedule group meetings rather than meetings with individuals.

Rather than meetings with individual faculty, candidates can be scheduled to meet with small groups of departmental stakeholders (faculty, staff, and students). These meetings could occur in the same room, with the groups arriving at scheduled times rather than the candidate being brought to individual offices. Coffee and snacks can be provided, and regular breaks scheduled.

5.3. Schedule meetings between candidates and members of EDI and MHW committees.

Having candidates meet with members of the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee and the Mental Health and Wellness Committee sends a message to candidates about the department's culture, and gives candidates a safe space in which to ask questions about EDI and mental health and wellness.

5.4. Build flex time into the interview schedule.

Offer candidates a pre-determined amount (e.g., 1 hour) of flex time/day in their interview schedule to meet personal needs without requiring disclosure of information they might prefer to keep private (for example, pumping breastmilk, taking medication, mental health needs, family time). Candidates could request to use their flex time to start the interview a bit later in the morning, end the interview slightly earlier in the afternoon, or take two 30-minute breaks in a private space during the day. More generally, including such flex time in the interview schedule would help candidates be the best version of themselves, and signal that the department values EDI and mental health and wellness.

6. INTERVIEWING CANDIDATES

6.1. Include questions about EDI in the formal interview.

Including questions about EDI in the interview both sends a message to job candidates about the department's EDI culture, and allows the committee to evaluate any EDI-related job criteria.

Examples of possible questions include:

- How do considerations of EDI apply to your research focus, and how does this affect your approach?
- How does your mentoring strategy promote equity, diversity, and inclusion?
- How would you support a student who is a first-generation university student?
- Imagine that one of your graduate students, a year into their program, discloses that they have a mental health challenge that requires attention. How would you respond? What resources do you have to help?
- Imagine that another colleague's graduate student tells you about an experience in which they felt discriminated against. How would you respond? What resources do you have to help?
- Tell us about a time when you collaborated on a research project. What were the challenges? What were the benefits? What was surprising? Would you do it again? Would your colleagues ask you to join them again?
- How can you help reduce student barriers to learning in your classroom?

6.2. Provide the questions in writing to the candidate during (or before) the interview.

It is beneficial to ensure that all questions are made available to the candidate during the interview by either printing them or projecting them. This reduces stress and allows the candidate to focus on their responses rather than struggling to remember the details of the question. If possible, the questions could be provided to the candidate a short while before the interview to allow time for reflection. Again, the goal is not to "surprise" a candidate, but to gain a fair assessment of their qualifications and potential as a long-term member of the department.

6.3. Minimize the stress of public seminars.

Candidates in IB have typically been asked to present two public seminars: one on their research and another a teaching demonstration. Steps can be taken to minimize the stress experienced by the candidate while also maximizing the usefulness of these seminars for assessing the candidate. These include:

- Ensure that only one seminar is scheduled per day. Consider asking the candidate which they would prefer to present on the first day and whether they would prefer it to take place earlier or later in the day.
- Make the topics and expectations clear for the seminars (especially the teaching seminar), and convey these to both the candidate and the department in advance.
- Avoid a situation in which faculty are pretending to be undergraduates – instead, consider inviting undergraduates and soliciting their feedback from the student perspective.
- Have the question period moderated by the Chair to prevent inappropriate questions and to ensure that a diversity of audience members has a chance to participate.

6.4. Ensure that evening meals are as stress-free as possible.

If candidates are taken out to dinner in the evening, it should be made clear that this is not part of the formal interview process and steps should be taken to make this as stress-free as possible. It is recommended that members of the search committee not take part in these informal dinners. Instead, individual labs (advisor, postdocs/students) can volunteer to host a candidate for the dinner. Chosen restaurants should be ones with a variety of meal options to cover any dietary restrictions without requiring the candidate to ask for these accommodations up front. Host labs should receive guidance on appropriate topics of discussion (e.g., no probing personal questions). Hosts should respect a candidate's choice not to consume alcohol and not comment or inquire as to why.

6.5. Respect the schedule.

Ensure that the designated 'host' of each candidate is respected as they follow the schedule. Each candidate visit is full with back to back meetings and going overtime is disruptive. The person assigned to enforce the schedule must be respected by all involved in the process. Regular short rest breaks should be included throughout the day.

7. DEBRIEFING AND DEPARTMENTAL FEEDBACK

7.1. Debrief as a search committee after each candidate's interview.

In order to more accurately capture the views of all search committee members, the search committee should meet to debrief and compare notes soon after each interview. A written summary of these discussions should be kept and used in the final deliberations.

7.2. In addition to feedback from faculty, solicit and explicitly discuss feedback from students, staff, and postdocs.

To have an inclusive and equitable departmental culture, it is extremely important that our faculty hires interact well with members of the department who have less power than faculty, so opinions of all members of the department should be taken very seriously. This can be

achieved effectively through the use of an online survey in which members of various departmental constituencies are asked for feedback related to specific criteria, including collegiality and respect for all department members. Those providing feedback should be asked to indicate the information on which they are basing their comments (e.g., reviewed CVs, attended talks, met with the candidate). The search committee should be aware that subtle biases in language may appear in departmental feedback.

8. DELIBERATIONS, FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS, AND REFLECTION

8.1. Use a scoring system and rubric based on the stated search criteria.

Final deliberations can follow a similar mechanism to the creation of the shortlist, by using a rubric that allows each search committee member to independently score the candidates on the basis of the stated criteria prior to convening for discussion. The net scores can be presented to the search committee along with departmental feedback (which can also include aggregate rankings of candidates) as a starting point for deliberations, rather than beginning with arguments or advocacy from individual committee members.

8.2. Ensure that diverse perspectives are heard during search committee deliberations.

As with other steps in the hiring process, final deliberations and selection of recommended candidates must include an opportunity for all members of the search committee to be heard. This includes ensuring that all members of the search committee are given ample opportunity to provide their input. It also involves soliciting and thoughtfully considering feedback from a variety of departmental stakeholders, including faculty, staff, and students. It is important that members of the department who provide feedback, especially those who are in less powerful positions, feel that their input is taken seriously by the search committee.

8.3. Consider EDI issues in the final deliberations.

Deliberations on final candidate selection should be based on criteria stated in the job ad and understood by the search committee, the applicants, and the department throughout the process. In this regard, EDI considerations should be incorporated into the search criteria and discussed during final deliberations. This includes impacts of hiring decisions on overall diversity in the department as well as ensuring that evaluations and expectations take into account the different challenges and opportunities that have been experienced by the candidates.

8.4. Reflect on what worked and what did not work and revise the process for the future hires.

The search process should continue to evolve as the department gains experience and reflects on strategies that worked or did not work and as new information on avoiding biases and increasing applicant diversity becomes available. Search committees should reflect on their experiences, in addition to soliciting feedback on the process from applicants and members of

the department (including faculty, staff, and students). The department should also maintain a record of the diversity of applicants, shortlisted candidates, and hires to allow an evaluation of the level of success being achieved over time in recruiting a diversity of exceptional candidates.

9. REFERENCES

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10. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Canada Research Chairs – Equity, Diversity and Inclusion: A Best Practices Guide for Recruitment, Hiring and Retention

https://www.chairs-chaire.gc.ca/program-programme/equity-equite/best_practices-pratiques_exemplaires-eng.aspx

11. CONTRIBUTORS

The initial draft of this document was completed in January 2020, and involved the contributions of many individuals through the efforts of the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee and the Mental Health and Wellness Committee: Dr. Sarah Alderman, Dr. Jim Ballantyne, Dr. Christina Caruso (EDI Co-Chair), Katherine Drotos (MHW Co-Chair), Dr. Jinzhong Fu, Dr. Elizabeth Gow, Karl Heide, Aliana Hellmuth, Dr. Shoshanah Jacobs (MHW Co-Chair), Jocelyn Kelly, Dr. Prasad Kesanakurti, Joshua Manduca, Dr. Georgia Mason, Dr. Liz Mandeville, Dori McCombe, Dr. Amy Newman, Dr. Melissa Perreault, Jianfei Shao, Karson Theriault, Dr. Shaylah Tuttle-Raycraft, Xueqi (Sharon) Wang (EDI Co-Chair), and Hayley Wilson.