



## Unlearning Racism in Geoscience

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

This is what was found by the **Geology Department at Western Washington University** on Hiring and/or Admissions Policies, as well as what the pod would propose to change and improve. **Policies are described in blue font and suggested changes are in red font**

**Purple font is extra background information that sets the stage for our policies and suggested changes**

Western Washington University has ~16,000 students, ~950 of which are graduate students. We are a masters-granting institution with no PhD program.

At the start of the 2021-22 academic year, the Geology Department will have 17 tenured/tenure-track faculty members, at least 1 full time instructor, and 2 research associates with additional teaching duties. To support all faculty, there is 1 full-time department administrator, 1 part time program coordinator, and one part-time instructional classroom support staff.

The department traditionally has ~150 undergraduate majors, split between BS Geology, BS Geophysics, and BA. There are ~35 MS students in our research-based degree program. All graduate students are supported in their first 2 years by funding either from TAships or RAships.

*"Policy is our love language" - Vashon Wright – PI, URGE Team*

- **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>?**

### EEO statements

- **Faculty hiring**

#### Wording from EEO in all job advertisements

*"WWU is an equal opportunity/affirmative action employer, committed to assembling a diverse, broadly trained faculty and staff. Women, minorities, persons with disabilities, Vietnam-era veterans and disabled veterans are encouraged to apply. WWU is sensitive to and has a policy addressing dual career assistance. For disability accommodation, call the Employee Relations-Disability Specialist at (360) 650-6106 or (360) 650-7696 (TTY). All new employees must show employment eligibility verification as required by the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service before beginning work at WWU."*

<sup>1</sup> R. Kelley, 10 Samples of an Effective EEO Statement, [blog.ongig.com/diversity-and-inclusion/eeo-statement-samples](http://blog.ongig.com/diversity-and-inclusion/eeo-statement-samples), (2017).

<sup>2</sup> <https://careers.who.edu/opportunities/diversity-inclusion/>

<sup>3</sup> K. Cobb, #GRExit Resources, <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.13215461.v1>, (2020).

<sup>4</sup> J. Posselt, Inside Graduate Admissions: Merit, Diversity, and Faculty Gatekeeping, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvjghw8s>, (2016).

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.brandeis.edu/diversity/dei-recruitment-hiring/rubric-for-evaluating-diversity-statements.html>

<sup>6</sup> K. Griffin, J. Bennett, T. York, Leveraging Promising Practices, Washington DC: Aspire Alliance, (2020).



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*WWU is committed to fostering a safe learning and working environment. Our Annual Campus Security Report includes information on campus crime and WWU safety policies and procedures. For a paper copy, call Human Resources at (360) 650-3774, TTY (360) 650-7696. For alternate formats, call (360) 650-3839."*

- **Suggested changes: newly-hired faculty suggest that these statements are boiler-plate and do not reflect much originality or commitment. Our action item is to:**
  - Provide some better local context/background about WWU and its specific commitments to EOO in the job ad.
  - Our department needs to come up with our own operationalized definition of diversity with concrete evidence of how that is valued by the university to include that in the job advertisement
- **Graduate admissions**
  - [Statement on the WWU Graduate School admissions eligibility webpage](#) -  
*"Western Washington University (WWU), in compliance with applicable laws and in furtherance of its commitment to fostering an environment that welcomes and embraces diversity, does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex (including pregnancy and parenting status), disability, age, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, marital status or genetic information in its programs or activities, including employment, admissions, and educational programs. Inquiries may be directed to the Vice Provost for Equal Opportunity & Employment Diversity, Title IX and ADA Coordinator [contact information]*  
*WWU is committed to providing reasonable accommodations to qualified individuals with disabilities upon request. To request an accommodation [contact information]"*
  - [Statement under Students tab: Graduate student life>Equity and Inclusions](#)  
*"The Graduate School at Western Washington University cultivates a welcoming and affirming environment in which all Graduate students experience equitable opportunities for learning, personal and professional growth as members of a diverse community of advanced scholars.*  
We advocate for an inclusive Graduate student community enriched by diverse individuals, traditions and viewpoints, by promoting expanded awareness, knowledge, and empathetic understanding. We affirm the dignity of all students and celebrate varied perspectives, differences, and experiences. We aim to foster an environment where all students are respectfully heard, where every one of our students feels a sense of belonging in a University that strives to be free



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from constraint on the basis of culture, race, sex, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity and/or expression, age, religion, family structure or relationships, national origin or economic status. Through a commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusivity we confront racism, prejudice, incivility, intolerance, and discrimination.

Our dedication to supporting Western's Graduate scholars, teachers, and researchers stems from a commitment to provide an ethical and socially just environment for learning and growth. Diversity in graduate education benefits the entirety of the University. These principles are grounded in [Western's strategic plan goals](#) of Advancing Inclusive Success, Increasing Washington Impact, and Enhancing Academic Excellence”

- **Suggested changes: action item**
  - Provide more committed evidence-based EID statements on the department website
- **Undergrad admission**
  - First year admissions has a link to Office of Civil Rights and Title IX Compliance, however, this takes you to their website – not necessarily easy to see how it relates to admissions
  - **Suggested changes: action item**
    - Provide more committed evidence-based EID statements on the department website

### **Other inclusion statements and resources publicly available (These may ultimately be more relevant to applicants than the EOO statement)**

- **WWU “Inclusive Community” tab on the university webpage**
  - This has a fairly comprehensive collection of messages, plans and resources. It links to WWU resources for different groups, and includes a statement from the President, as well as AEDI Timeline, also Enrollment Stats.
- **WWU Strategic Plan 2018-2025. Two of four goals are inclusion/equity centered:**
  - [Goal #3: Western will foster a caring and supportive environment where all members are respected and treated fairly.](#)
  - [Goal #4: Western will pursue justice and equity in its policies, practices, and impacts](#)
- **Geology Department website:**
  - Has an equity and inclusion tab that highlights WWU College of Science and Engineering's Inclusion mission statement. It also describes the role



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of “community ambassadors” from our department and college whose serve as equity and inclusion liaisons. This needs upgrading as per action items above.

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

### Advertisement posting and other strategies

- **Faculty hiring**

- Traditional routes: Geological Society of America, American Geophysical Union, National Association of Black Geoscientists (NABG), SACNAS, Association of Women Geoscientists, HigherEdjobs.com, Chronicle of Higher Education, Diversejobs.net, and various specialty listservs specific to the discipline being hired.
- Other strategies: Informal meetings with interested candidates at AGU and GSA. **Action item**: This should be expanded to include targeted visits to SACNAS meetings and the NABG Technical conference.
- Non-traditional strategies are up to the search committee chair: In one recent search, the committee chair reached out to similar-discipline faculty members in universities located in states across the south (WWU is in the far northwest) to draw attention to the position and the department.
- Suggested changes related to individual faculty searches:
  - active personal outreach to minority serving institutions and institutions serving a different population demographic (such as non-traditional strategy outlined above) should be part of the expected protocol for all faculty searches
- Suggested longer term strategies: Create pathways to have scholars from minoritized backgrounds interact with our faculty and students; best idea for our department is through our speaker series.

- **Graduate admissions**

- We currently have no formal advertisement strategy.
- Some faculty coordinate to post on listservs, similar to Faculty hires. For example, this year, three faculty members posted to the following lists during pre-application recruitment efforts:
  1. AGU Graduate Student opportunities here - <https://employers.agu.org/static-page/10284/Voluntary/>



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2. GSA's Job Board:

[https://www.geosociety.org/GSA/Publications/GSA\\_Today/Job\\_Board/GSA/GSAToday/Job\\_Board.aspx?hkey=a0ff6fa6-876b-47d4-afb4-026bbfa820f2](https://www.geosociety.org/GSA/Publications/GSA_Today/Job_Board/GSA/GSAToday/Job_Board.aspx?hkey=a0ff6fa6-876b-47d4-afb4-026bbfa820f2)

(there's a subsection for Opportunities for Students)

3. Pathways to Science:

[https://www.pathwaystoscience.org/discipline.aspx?sort=ear-geosci\\_geological%20sciences](https://www.pathwaystoscience.org/discipline.aspx?sort=ear-geosci_geological%20sciences)

4. PROGRESS: <https://geosciencewomen.org/be-prepared/real-world-experience/reu-listing/>

5. Listservs: GeoPRISMS, IRIS, UCAR Job Listserv, SACNAS

- Suggested changes for graduate student admissions:
  - The department plans to apply to become an AGU Bridge site, but we have a lot of work to do first to make sure that the Geology Department is appropriately set up with supports for success for \*all\* students
  - More outreach to minority serving institutions. We have a fabulous MS-program, but we tend to get outstanding applicants from a the same ki institutions each year
- Undergraduate admission
  - We currently have no recruiting mechanism for undergraduate geology majors of any kind. Our major has been filled to capacity over the last few years (~160 majors), sourced from WWU's introductory geology classes and transfer students who encountered geology at nearby community colleges. Outreach has therefore been limited, and our majors are dominantly students who have discovered our science late in their college careers.
  - Suggested changes: There is a lot of room for improvement by facilitating outreach to high school students and first year community college students in the Pacific NW. But doing this requires resources, both time and dollars
  - Suggested action item: make this kind of outreach more explicitly valued in the faculty P&T documents.
  - Practically considering the time it takes for these kind of activities – increasing capacity, or reducing other obligations to facilitate them.

### General suggestions for other strategies

- For Faculty or Graduate recruitment - Build relationships with Universities with documented success in graduating BIPOC undergraduates and PhDs – table of



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these in our second reading for the week. "Building a network to identify candidates"

- Taking a long-term view/Outreach – investing in activities that increase interest in the field from minority and underrepresented students.
- 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?

### Requirements

- **Faculty hiring - typically 60-90 applicants for each position offered**
  - Requirements - applications are handled within WWUs PageUp system
    - Cover letter addressing required and preferred qualifications
    - CV
    - Research: *Detailed statement of research plans*
    - Teaching: *Statement of teaching philosophy and interests*
    - Diversity & inclusion: *Statement detailing how teaching, service, and/or scholarship has prepared you to support the success of students with background or identities that are underrepresented in STEM fields*
    - Name and contact information for 3 individuals to provide recommendation letters (letters requested later in the process)
  - Potential barriers
    - None that we can see
- **Graduate admissions**
  - **Baccalaureate Degree**
  - Minimum TOEFL (86 iBT) or IELTS (7.0) scores or English is your native language
  - Applicants must have a 3.0 cumulative GPA (on 4.0 scale) calculated over all post-secondary coursework
  - Unofficial transcripts, statement of purpose
  - Reference letters
  - GRE was removed as a requirement for 2020-21 academic year and thereafter
  - In Geology: Detailed "How to Apply" instructions.  
<https://geology.wvu.edu/prospective-graduate-students>
    - This importantly includes "Contact those faculty and discuss potential research projects with them. Visit the campus and department if possible."



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- “If you wish to be considered for a Teaching or Research Assistantship, you need only check the relevant box in the [online application](#). We suggest including in your documentation evidence of your teaching abilities and interest if you seek a Teaching Assistantship.”
- A limited number (10% of our total admissions) can be admitted "provisionally", meaning that the applicant doesn't meet the minimum admission standards. We usually reserve making offers of provisional admission until April or May. Provisionally admitted students are not eligible for financial support until they have met the conditions of their admission letter and moved to regular status. This generally requires completing any needed courses and obtaining at least a 3.0 GPA in the first 15 credits.
- **Undergraduate admissions**
  - To declare the major, successful completion of a few prerequisite classes is the only requirement. However, the presence of supportive staff in the department office is critical to making the onboarding a positive experience. Providing immediate advising about best practices in terms of which classes to take when from a faculty member are also critical for success.

### Potential Barriers in application process

- **Faculty hiring**
  - None that we can tell, but need to have better networking and recruiting to make sure that enough applicants make it to the application stage.
- **Graduate Student Applications**
  - The application fee is high (\$100) and you have to pay more to accept
  - Develop a more refined personal statement question that prompts students to speak to department agreed-upon metrics of success.
  - Have a department website that explains WWU's admissions process and suggest that potential applicants reach out to individual advisors (possibly improve the page that is there). List stipends. List TA work load.
  - Faculty personal websites should include specific tools/skillsets that students should have. In writing personal statements make sure to suggest that students address those skillsets
  - Not clear that we primarily provide funded positions – students do not need funding to apply
    - But be clear how many classes the average TA teaches (i.e. up to 3 labs)





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- No protections for bias associated with individual evaluations from potential faculty advisors. How do we mitigate this?
  - Implicit bias or focus on prestige (?) from specific faculty advisors?
- Quantitative metrics like GPA may not be comparable across different groups. It may not be productive to compare these kind of quantitative numbers for candidates that do not come from equivalent backgrounds (this week's reading)
- **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?**

### Applicant Evaluation

#### ○ Faculty hiring

- Applicants are evaluated using a rubric for required and preferred qualifications developed by the search committee.
  - The rubric is developed at the same time that the job advertisement is crafted.
  - The job ad describes the required and preferred qualifications and this is what is included in the rubric.
  - These rubrics are all slightly different depending on the job being offered, but the required qualifications part of the rubric will include some evidence of teaching experience/promise, research experience/promise, and evidence/experience of fostering inclusiveness and equity in teaching, research, or service and in advancing diversity initiatives. If any of those required qualifications are not addressed in the application materials, then the applicant "does not meet required qualifications" and is removed from further evaluation.
- The rubrics are not made public, but they are based very specifically on the required and preferred qualifications.
  - Job applicants who have not been coached very well may not realize how important addressing the specific qualifications are. Action item: The department should consider including a rubric on PageUp in future hiring OR creating a page on the department website with information about the hire, including the rubric and timelines.

#### ○ Graduate admissions





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- Graduate students applications (through WWU's "Admit" system) are evaluated by future potential advisor, and reviewed by the Graduate admissions committee for completeness).
- There is no department-wide rubric. Faculty members use their own individual metrics.
- Faculty members may request individual meetings with students, perhaps meeting the applicants at their conference poster sessions or other presentations if timing allows. They may also reach out to colleagues who have worked with the student.
- Undergraduate admissions - students desiring to become Geology majors are not evaluated, they declare the major whenever ready. This includes successful completion of introductory coursework, and maintenance of good academic standing

### Potential Biases

- **Faculty hiring**
    - All search committee members attend implicit bias trainings. Search committees work with full applications that have not have had names redacted. Some committees have worked to ignore names while applying the rubric, but obviously this is difficult to achieve. This process may introduce implicit bias, however search committees have worked hard to make sure that scoring in the rubric has been tested for reliability.
  - Graduate admissions
    - Vulnerability to bias is completely dependent on the prospective advisor. No implicit bias training is given to faculty advisors at WWU. Very little oversight as to the qualifications of a given applicant.
      - **Action item: Anyone who interacts with student applications should have to attend an implicit bias training**
  - Undergraduate admissions
    - Potential biases exist as relate to barriers to admissions to Western or to the maintenance of good academic standing
- **Who is on selection committees and who makes the final decisions? Who interacts with the applicants?**

### Selection committee

- **Faculty hiring - search committees (typically 3 people in similar discipline as the one being hired for).**



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- The department chair chooses a search committee and committee chair. Typically the search committee chair is the one who interacts with applicants during the application phase, answering questions.
- All faculty on search committees attend implicit bias training workshops
- Long list to short list: the search committee comes up with a list of “long-list” of candidates (~10 candidates) that are invited for a phone interview and those applicant materials are shared with the department. The search committee then narrows this list down to the final 3 for interviews, with input from the department
- The entire department, including students, interact with the shortlisted candidates who visit campus
- The search committee and the department faculty vote on the final decision. It is a department-wide decision, not just the search committee
- **Newly hired faculty in this URGE group have suggested that communication could be more clear during the application process. Sometimes delays are unexplained which can be disconcerting.**
- **Newly hired faculty in this URGE group suggest that the “phone interview” be a video interview to make the process less stressful.**
- **Action item: create a protocol for letting all applicants know how they are being evaluated both before and after applications are submitted (e.g., a departmental website for each search that includes the evaluation rubric, a timeline, and an approximate update on where the search committee is in the process)**
- **Graduate admissions**
  - Faculty members (future advisors) choose from students who apply to work with them. There is a graduate admissions committee; they oversee the process of which faculty can offer TAs but they have relatively little control over decisions to admit or offer funding to students. If a faculty member has a grant, they are in charge of who they want to admit to work with them.
  - **Graduate students have asked for more clear communication from the proposed advisor during the decision-making process about some things that are unique to WWU: e.g. relatively low stipends compared to other institutions nationally, high cost of living, etc.**
- **Undergraduate admissions -**
  - A department advising coordinator interacts with newly declared geology majors. This person is the interface between the new student and the department, and she introduces the student to their faculty advisor via



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email. It is clear that individual faculty have different approaches in responding to this email. Undergraduates have asked for a clear mandate to faculty to provide more guidance on how to successfully navigate their major

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

There has been no evaluation by outside consultants for any of our admissions processes.

### Details:

- **Faculty hiring**
  - PageUp is controlled by the university, cannot be changed. EOO statement is controlled by the EOO office, but the Geology Department has the ability to add to it as we see fit. Required and preferred qualifications can be created and changed by the search committee.
- **Graduate & undergraduate admissions**
  - There has not been an evaluation of the graduate program admissions process. There has been decision-making in the recent past to make small updates to the graduate admissions process, such as no longer requiring GREs. This kind of decision making is done with input from the entire faculty (and students). Our URGEO group consists of undergraduate, graduate, staff, and faculty members. Frank discussions have prompted us to create a set of action items for change. One of these not mentioned previously is to create a more specific personal statement prompt in the graduate student application that speak to departmental metrics of success. Another could be a specific prompt for future teaching assistants that asks for statements relating to equity and inclusion.
- **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>?**

### Faculty

- As of 2020, WWU has an ambitious new policy for Dual Career Accommodations that all employees, including new faculty, are eligible to participate in. Within the past year, this DCA Policy has been successful at securing employment opportunities for three Geology Department faculty member partners, some of who represent women or underrepresented minority groups. At least one new faculty member has commented that the DCA policy played a significant role in



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their decision to accept the job offer at WWU.

<https://crtc.wvu.edu/process/policies>

- Cohort hiring may have occurred at times throughout the recent past. In 2019, the Geology Department engaged in a 2-position hiring effort in association with a new major. However, the most common hiring trends usually offer one position in a given field at a time.
- Although the university has a mentoring program that is available to new faculty starting their 2<sup>nd</sup> year, there is not currently a formalized mentoring program for faculty or students within the Geology Department. This is something that has been identified as a significant resource in terms of onboarding for new faculty, navigating P&T policies and for graduate and undergraduate students.

Graduate students –

- The Geology Department has just instituted a Graduate Success Committee this year that is comprised of 3 faculty members and one graduate student. The goal is as the name implies. This committee holds twice-quarterly meetings, one that is led by the graduate student member of the committee that is just for graduate students and a second that is led by the faculty members of the committee for all graduate students. The agenda of these meetings varies, but is culled from existing graduate student concerns. The committee delivers an annual graduate student survey that addresses a host of thorny issues that students have raised in the past. The committee compiles the results and shares with the rest of the department faculty to lobby for change where appropriate.

Undergraduates -

- When they apply to the major, undergraduate students are assigned a faculty advisor. There is significant variability in how much individual students engage with their advisors, and how active and responsive an individual faculty advisor is in their mentoring efforts.
- Undergraduate mentoring could be improved by additional training for assigned faculty advisors or enlisting the help of more experienced faculty advisors. Some students on this committee have described feeling lost once they enter the major.
- Action item: create modules on a department canvas course that introduce students to the major with “best practices” plans for completing the major in a timely fashion, explaining what the different major options are, and describing what field camp is and when one would take it.

**Longer-term diversity and inclusion through outreach**

**Something that was given relatively little attention within this unit and these deliverable are efforts or strategies needed to improve the applicant pool for student and faculty**



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positions. Although some of this may be addressed by changing the application process, it seems that greater progress is going to require a long-term commitment to outreach; essentially making it clear to students entering college that geoscience careers are out there and viable options for them. Incentivizing outreach to k-12 or underrepresented student groups who might represent feeder communities to undergraduate and graduate programs is something that will likely require more resources in the form of faculty and student time. Having a dialoged about how to incentivizes this through re-prioritization of evaluation protocols is something that would need to happen with University and Department leadership.