

Equity in Faculty Hiring:

Evaluation of a two-year faculty hiring
pilot initiative

Final Report

August 2022

Dr. Reginald D'Silva, Associate Dean, Equity & Strategic Programs

Dr. Lesley Andres, Associate Dean, Faculty Affairs

Anna Bin, Director, Human Resources

Michael Wilkinson, Manager, HR & Strategic Projects

Julia Burnham, Graduate Academic Assistant



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Faculty of Education

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Acknowledgements

The University of British Columbia's Vancouver campus is located on the traditional, ancestral and unceded territories of the xwmə0-kwəy'əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish) and sə'lilwətaʔɪ (Tsleil-Waututh) peoples, and the Okanagan campus situated on the unceded territory of the Syilx Okanagan Nation.

We wish to acknowledge the contributions of those who attended the sessions and thank them for providing feedback for this report.

We are grateful to Dr. Mary Bryson for their leadership in launching this important pilot initiative to enhance EDI in faculty hiring practices.

We wish to express special thanks to Dr. Siobhan McPhee (Faculty of Arts) and Clara Ng (Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences) for their help with the project.

This final report is part of the project to evaluate the two-year hiring pilot initiative – *Faculty Hires Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Initiative* – in the Faculty of Education. We are grateful to the Equity & Inclusion Office for their support of this project through the Equity Enhancement Fund (2021).



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Equity & Inclusion Office

Introduction

With the emergence of a focus on faculty diversity, a growing area of scholarship on equity in faculty hiring practices has emerged. Underscored as a critical component of institutional efforts to increase faculty diversity, faculty hiring processes are important areas to analyze the effectiveness of translating institutional equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) policies into practice. This report provides an evaluation of how the current practices related to EDI in faculty hiring in the Faculty of Education at UBC have been enacted, and what we might learn from new and emerging best practices to change, adjust, and advance these efforts moving forward.

Project Background

The Faculty of Education has completed the second year of a two-year pilot initiative to enhance equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in faculty hiring practices. This initiative was designed to align faculty hiring practices in Faculty of Education with the UBC Inclusion Action Plan (IAP) goal of “recruiting for EDI skills and competencies.” As part of this initiative, each applicant was required to submit a diversity statement and to complete a mandatory Employment Equity Survey (EES). Survey responses were monitored during the application period to ensure a balanced representation of equity-deserving groups in the applicant pool. In addition, when a search committee was struck, unit Heads/Directors were asked to provide a rationale as to how the search committee membership represented area expertise and EDI goals in the unit. Search committees received an orientation and were provided with an EDI evaluation rubric that was then embedded into the search criteria. These steps were designed to ensure that all applicants, including those from equity-deserving groups, were more fairly considered in all stages of the hiring process, thereby maximizing opportunities for members from these groups to be hired. EDI practices such as these benefit the Faculty of Education and UBC communities by diversifying the faculty complement and constitute a multifaceted response to the call to incorporate into faculty hiring EDI perspectives that align with the strategic and inclusion plans of the Faculty of Education and UBC. Now that the pilot project has come to a close, a review of the practices and impact is warranted. This review is partially funded by the UBC Equity Enhancement Fund.

Literature Review

A literature review focusing on evidence-based approaches to equity in faculty hiring was commissioned as part of the conclusion of the project. Although it may be a small area of scholarship, the emerging literature on equity in faculty hiring provides key lessons to share with search committees, hiring units, and university administrators alike.

The following point-form summary offers a synopsis of our findings:

- Equity advocates can play a key role in mitigating biases and advancing racial equity within faculty search committees, but their efforts can be thwarted by power dynamics at play within academic hierarchies (Cahn *et al.*, 2021; Liera, 2020; Liera and Hernandez, 2021).
- Junior faculty members experience limitations to their agency in authentically navigating search committees, due to academic hierarchies (Hakkola and Dyer, 2022).
- The use of rubrics and evaluation criteria in pursuit of equity, diversity, and inclusion can be a powerful tool to mitigate bias in candidate evaluation (Bombaci and Pejchar, 2021; O'Meara, 2020), but are also vulnerable to individual scoring discrepancies among reviewers and can also be troubling when utilized in searches to stifle discussion beyond the top-ranked choices (Liera and Hernandez, 2021).
- In addition to education efforts for search committee members, a broader department buy-in to equity, diversity and inclusion efforts in faculty hiring can be an impactful tool to develop favourable attitudes towards equitable hiring practices (Sekaquaptewa *et. al.*, 2018).
- Generally, diversity statements are a favoured practice, but they may be limited by non-performativity (Bombaci and Pejchar, 2021; Moore, 2021). Efforts to provide clear guidance to both reviewers and candidates in evaluation criteria should be prioritized to increase the effectiveness of diversity statements as a tool (Bombaci and Pejchar, 2021; Madhavi and Brooks, 2021).

Methods & Process

The project team held three feedback sessions virtually and in person in May and June 2022 to inform this report. Invitations were extended to all faculty, staff and students who participated in a faculty search process during the 2021–22 academic year. During the feedback sessions, participants were asked to reflect on the effectiveness and usefulness of EDI initiatives in the faculty hiring process, with an emphasis on the employment of the equity survey, diversity statements, EDI rubrics, and search committee orientations. Following the feedback sessions, attendees were also sent a survey link to provide anonymous feedback that they may not have felt comfortable sharing during the sessions. Those participating in the feedback sessions included faculty, staff, students, Heads/Directors, and search committee chairs across all academic units in the Faculty.

Findings & Recommendations

The report findings are organized by the steps of the Faculty of Education's [Faculty Hiring Guidelines](#) (January 2022 version), and feature a summary of what was heard through the feedback sessions. Of note, one finding addressed the overall process of faculty hiring (rather than one step in the process), with participants who commented that the Faculty Hiring Guidelines placed a greater emphasis on “equality” over “equity,” suggesting that this concern be addressed in future revisions of the Faculty Hiring Guidelines.

The recommendations that follow the findings are intended to reflect the variety of received perspectives, which can prescribe and inform potential next steps in advancing EDI in faculty hiring and future revisions to the Faculty Hiring Guidelines. These recommendations were generated through participant suggestions, project team analysis, and literature best practices.

Seeking approval to fill position (Step 1)

When identifying the position to fill, participants discussed the importance of ensuring hiring units are looking towards the future of their disciplines rather than reproducing their existing areas of expertise. It is the current practice that requests for new hires that are linked to retirements,

resignations, or other changes in the Faculty complement should not be a 'replacement' for the departing disciplinary expertise, but rather related to faculty and disciplinary renewal, subject to budgetary considerations. As such, there are no recommendations related to this step.

Requesting authorization to initiate a search (Step 2)

In this step, the hiring unit works with the Dean's Office to draft and finalize the job advertisement for distribution. As mentioned, the job advertisement specifies that candidates must submit a diversity statement with their application packages. While participants in the feedback sessions generally agreed that diversity statements were a useful addition to the application materials, there was a strong desire for greater clarity in expectations—for both the applicant writing statements and the committee reviewing them. Participants noted that there was a large variance in content and framing of diversity statements received by committees: some candidates focused on their own identities, and others focused on the actions they would take related to EDI. The linguistic variabilities of EDI terminology were noted. Some participants expressed concern that cultural norms of the applicant may influence how they will or will not talk about EDI. While sample diversity statements were provided to search committees as a resource for consideration, participants indicated that these samples did not reflect the tone or length of statements received in recent searches. Additionally, participants commented that the diversity statement criteria should specify that candidates should speak to some of the EDI strategic commitments at UBC.

In addition, a significant focus of discussions in feedback sessions was the creation of job advertisements. Currently, the drafting of a job advertisement occurs prior to the search committee's formation and is often conducted at the unit level with leadership from the Head/Director. Participants noted that the process of job advertisement development constrained the ability for search committees to adapt selection criteria later in the process. Participants shared that they wished they were aware of how critical the text of the job advertisement was when it came time to evaluating applicants based on the selection criteria, since it would not be fair to create selection criteria that deviated from the job advertisement. Some participants commented that it would be better to adjust timelines so that the search committee is more hands-on in the

development of the job advertisement. Others noted limitations to this approach, including a potential negative impact on the ability to recruit competitive candidates (particularly Indigenous hires) if the hiring process is drawn out even further. Participants agreed that it is important that all members in the hiring unit are involved in the development of job advertisements, even if changes are made to include search committees more actively in this step of the search process.

Recommendations:

1. The Faculty Hiring Guidelines should encourage Heads/Directors, when soliciting feedback from the unit, to emphasize the importance of job advertisement development for the future success of the search.
2. The Faculty Hiring Guidelines should consider ways to establish search committee membership earlier to allow for group discussion on job advertisement text before it is circulated (and thus not changeable).
3. The Dean's Office should provide greater clarity to search committee members on criteria for the evaluation of diversity statements.
4. The Faculty Hiring Guidelines should encourage Heads/Directors to prepare job advertisements that encourage candidates to reference UBC's EDI strategic commitments within their diversity statements.
5. The Dean's Office should update the sample diversity statements to assist search committees and better reflect the desired content and tone of the statements.

Distributing the job advertisement (Step 3)

Participants noted that a well-crafted job advertisement can only be effective if it is able to reach a wide net of promising applicants. While institutional minimum standards are in place for duration and venues of job advertisements, participants commented that this must be complemented by significant efforts on behalf of faculty members to encourage nominations throughout their

networks. “Shoulder-tapping” and personal messages from members of a hiring unit have been highly effective ways to solicit applications from promising candidates. Participants noted that it was extremely important for all members of the hiring unit to be engaged in recruitment efforts in order to ensure success.

Recommendations:

1. The Dean’s Office should regularly refer Heads/Directors to the [Diversifying Your Applicant Pool: Places to Advertise](#) database for assistance in identifying professional associations, publications, and networks that serve and attract scholars from equity-deserving groups.
2. The Faculty Hiring Guidelines should encourage Heads/Directors to solicit suggestions from faculty members and students with disciplinary knowledge of the intended hire for specialized journals and networks to advertise.
3. The Faculty Hiring Guidelines should encourage Heads/Directors to motivate members from the hiring unit to actively participate in recruitment by reaching out to their networks and personally encouraging nominations from equity-deserving candidates.

Formation of the search committee (Step 4a)

Participants noted that search committee chairs played an instrumental role in facilitating a safe, productive committee environment, as well as securing a successful new hire. Participants overwhelmingly agreed that there should be more support provided to search chairs, as a key intervention in search committee success. In addition to the orientations for search committee members, participants commented that training designed specifically for search committee chairs would provide an opportunity to clarify the roles and responsibilities of search chairs, and make early connections with the support available from the Dean’s Office. Participants who had experiences as search committee chairs expressed their appreciation for the individual support they had received from the Dean’s Office as queries arose with their searches.

Moreover, participants commented that search committee chairs were responsible for setting the tone related to EDI and how it was manifested within committee decision making. Search chairs should be well versed in the criteria and intended use of diversity statements, EDI rubrics and employment equity survey data, and guide their committee members through these dimensions of the search. Additionally, participants noted that chairs must be aware of their significant responsibility as the committee facilitator and be equipped to identify and manage problematic or harmful discussions.

It was also suggested that search committee chairs be distanced from the area of expertise of the hire, as a tool to mitigate bias in committee moderation. While proximity to the intended hire's area of expertise is not considered a conflict of interest, participants noted that chairs with close proximity to the chosen field may have difficulty suppressing their own biases about the discipline or general knowledge of the research community.

Participants were concerned about the power dynamics inherent within the composition of search committee membership (e.g., with respect to rank) and the ability for junior faculty or members with more precarious employment or status (e.g., untenured faculty, students) to comfortably and openly participate in committee discussions. In addition, while some graduate students and their supervisors may have felt comfortable participating in a search committee together, it is still possible that a graduate student might not feel comfortable expressing opinions that are contrary to those expressed by their supervisor. As such, it seems inadvisable for Heads/Directors to place a faculty supervisor and their student supervisee on the same committee.

Student members also required additional support to navigate the unfamiliar processes and related power imbalances in searches. Participants recounted that the search committee experience was often brand-new to student members and students were confronted with a learning curve to which they were required to adjust. To ensure that students believe their voices are valued within a search and to provide them with additional support, it is important for search chairs and Dean's Office staff to make early connections with student members and identify themselves as resources throughout the search process.

Recommendations:

1. The Dean's Office should develop a checklist of search committee chair duties and responsibilities.
2. The Dean's Office, in consultation with search committee chairs, should reach out to student members at the onset of the process to encourage student participation and empowerment in the committee and to answer questions and provide support.
3. The Faculty Hiring Guidelines should stipulate that placing graduate students and their faculty supervisor on the same committee is inadvisable.
4. The Faculty Hiring Guidelines should recommend that Heads/Directors provide prospective members with the general timeline of faculty searches to help plan ahead and identify their available capacity, at the time of search committee formation.

Receiving applications and communicating with applicants (Step 4b)

As part of the Dean's Office follow-up with applicants to complete the Employment Equity Survey, participants suggested that applicants be made fully aware that, while completing the survey is required, they can select "Prefer not to answer" to any question. This clarity may address the concerns of the applicants who did not complete the survey.

Recommendations:

1. The Dean's Office should review the language to applicants regarding the Employment Equity Survey as required to ensure there is clarity that self-identification within any category is optional.

Search committee meetings and criteria confirmation (Step 5)

A. Search committee meetings and orientation

Participants were very positive about the search committee orientation provided by the Dean's Office and highlighted it as a key support in the process. Attendees remarked that the orientations had a gentleness that invited participation and encouraged using the search committee orientation as a space to learn about EDI practices, ask questions, and learn together. Currently, only searches for tenure stream faculty positions require an orientation. Participants encouraged the Dean's Office to offer orientations for *all* searches, including Lecturers. Additionally, a knowledge gap was noted in understanding the legal ramifications of changing a job advertisement in the middle of the search process, which future orientations could help address.

Some participants noted that it would be beneficial for the whole department to receive an orientation on the search process. By making the search process more transparent to individuals outside the search committee, it could help mitigate harmful misconceptions about why a particular candidate was selected, and any EDI implications.

Participants suggested revisiting the scheduling of orientations, given the difficulty in securing an available slot for all committee members and several members of the Dean's Office. Delays incurred by scheduling difficulties were a cause for concern for some participants, who feared that the top candidates would already have accepted other job offers. In particular, this was noted as an issue for the often-small pools of in-demand Indigenous hires. Reducing the number of Dean's Office facilitators, or scheduling orientations while the application period is still open and the committee is idle, were suggested as options that could accelerate this step.

B. Keeping record of the process

Participants shared gratitude for the administrative support received from staff supporting the work of search committees. Because staff members are tasked with the critical role of record keeping, the importance of ensuring they attend orientations and are equipped with information to support chairs was emphasized.

C. Minimizing unconscious bias

Participants appreciated the institutional resources available to familiarize committee members with identifying and mitigating unconscious bias in their deliberations. It was also noted that the chair played a key role in addressing biases present in committee deliberations.

D. Search criteria confirmation

Participants expressed a desire to integrate EDI into the job criteria more cohesively, as both a best practice and as a tool that would assist them in subsequent stages of the search. Generally, the dimensions of assessment, evidence, action, and knowledge specified in the criteria created a helpful framework that translated well into evaluation. Currently, “EDI Considerations” are articulated at the end of the criteria rather than being integrated with the rest of the list. At this stage, committees experienced roadblocks with their fixed job criteria and were frustrated that they were unable to revise the advertisement to better fit the wholistic EDI lens they wished to use to evaluate candidates. This challenge highlights once again the importance of the development of the job advertisement.

Recommendations:

1. The Dean’s Office should streamline search committee orientation facilitation and reduce the number of Dean’s Office members present, if this proves necessary to move ahead expeditiously.
2. The Dean’s Office should address the legal implications of search processes within the search committee orientation.
3. The Faculty Hiring Guidelines should require *all* ranks of faculty searches to receive a search committee orientation.
4. The Dean’s Office should develop educational opportunities (online tutorial, in-person workshop, etc.) on faculty search processes for all faculty members, and encourage reading of the Faculty Hiring Guidelines.

5. The Dean's Office should provide flexibility when scheduling the search committee orientations to avoid delays in the search and hiring process.
6. The Faculty Hiring Guidelines should recommend that search committees apply an EDI lens to the whole job criteria, rather than a separate addition of considerations.

Finalizing the search committee membership (Step 6)

There were no findings or recommendations related to this step.

Reviewing applications and creation of long and short lists (Step 7)

A. Understanding the diversity of the applicant pool

While participants generally agreed that it was important to conduct an Employment Equity Survey, some commented that they lacked the knowledge about what they should do with the data once it has been provided. For cases in which the search committee was made aware of concerns with the lack of diversity in an applicant pool, as demonstrated through the data, participants noted the helpfulness of the Dean's Office in identifying appropriate next steps. However, most participants claimed they were mystified by the use of the data and what conditions would need to be met in order for the data to have an impact on the search process. While any course of action taken as a result of the employment equity data is full of contingencies, participants remarked that it would be helpful to outline some scenarios during the search committee orientation.

B. Developing a long list (if required)

Regarding the use of the EDI rubric, some committees struggled to identify variance across the three-point scale of the EDI rubric. Participants shared that all evaluations seemed to cluster together, and it was not a helpful tool to differentiate among the different application files. It was noted in the feedback sessions that an overall rubric revision is forthcoming (following the release of an updated version from the University of California, Berkeley, where the Faculty of Education

originally borrowed its rubric approach), participants suggested that an adjustment to the three-point scale may be helpful.

C. Arriving at a short list and seeking permission to interview

In general, participants involved in the development of short list rationales found the exercise to be thought-provoking and helpful to their process. A further suggestion was to provide flexibility on the requisition of reference letters, allowing the search committee to determine a suitable time during the search process. This practice could help reduce the “paperwork strain” on candidates until they have moved further ahead in the process, as well as providing the committee with options for the unique circumstances of each search.

Recommendations:

1. The Dean’s Office should revise the EDI rubric to add greater variation in the levels of adjudication (e.g., increasing from a three- to five-point scale) and consider the updates made to the EDI rubric developed by the University of California, Berkeley.
2. The Dean’s Office should provide instructions and materials for search committees to use to conduct their own calibration exercises with the EDI rubric.
3. The Dean’s Office should consider ongoing revisions to the information communicated to applicants as how their self-identification data will be used within the search process, including a notation that the purpose is to reduce barriers and inequities for those from equity-seeking groups.
4. The Dean’s Office should ensure the search committee understands how the Employment Equity Survey information should be considered. The committee should be kept up to date if the survey has an impact on the search process (e.g., extending the application deadline).
5. The Dean’s Office should consider if the Faculty Hiring Guidelines could remove the requisition for letters of reference from the current step and create a new step that outlines

timeline options for requesting letters of reference (e.g., when applicants are on the long list, when applicants are on the short list, and potentially other options).

Interview activities and identifying the successful candidate (Steps 8 & 9)

At the stage when short listed candidates are invited to campus for an interview and presentation, participants suggested that rather than condensing all meetings into one day, campus visits should be held over a two-day period. Candidates should have appropriate time to rest and recharge during the packed itinerary of interviews, presentations, and social events in order to present their best selves. Participants also commented that search committees might consider using Zoom for interview activities, if a candidate's ability to travel to campus is limited (noting that the modalities used for interview activities should be consistent for all short-listed candidates in a given search process).

Additionally, candidates who are from equity-deserving groups may wish to meet with faculty affinity groups during their time on campus to ask questions about what it is like for members of their affinity group to live and work at UBC. These connections should be encouraged as they provide shortlisted candidates with perspectives that may not be present in the search committee. The benefits of such an initiative extend far beyond a faculty level. A peer network of this nature could be established at an institutional level and sustained with the resourcing and coordination of a suitable central office (e.g., Equity and Inclusion, Faculty Relations).

Recommendations:

1. The Dean's Office should consider ways to develop an institutional network to facilitate connections among shortlist candidates from equity-deserving groups and faculty affinity groups to assist with questions about community and life at UBC.
2. The Faculty Hiring Guidelines should recommend that campus visits take place over a two-day period to mitigate stressors and candidate fatigue.

Making the recommendation (Step 10)

Participants who had been tasked with drafting the recommendation for the hire generally found the criteria outlined and the samples within the Faculty Hiring Guidelines to be very helpful in the process. Although it did take time to draft the rationale, they found that the prompts and reflection built confidence that they had conducted a fair and equitable search process. Some questions emerged surrounding the “balancing” of EDI-specific criteria and traditional job criteria in writing the recommendation. This suggested the importance of embedding EDI throughout the job advertisement from the beginning of the process.

Making the offer (Step 11)

There were no findings or recommendations related to this step.

External to this report and feedback process, an additional resource for the Dean’s Office to consider in making offers to new faculty is the Final Report of UBC’s [Focus on Equity in Canada Research Chair Experiences](#).

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