

# Equity in Faculty Hiring:

Evaluation of a two-year faculty hiring  
pilot initiative

Literature Review

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THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

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'lilwətaʔɩ (Tsleil-Waututh) peoples, and the Okanagan campus situated on the unceded territory of the Syilx Okanagan Nation.

This literature review was conducted as part of the project to evaluate the two-year hiring pilot initiative - *Faculty Hires Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Initiative* - in the Faculty of Education. A synopsis of this review is included in the project report. 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 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 an important area to analyse the effectiveness of translating institutional equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) policies into practice. The goal of this review is to collect a set of best practices that can inform hiring practices in the Faculty of Education at the University of British Columbia, as a conclusion to the 2019-2021 pilot project on Equity in Faculty Hiring.

This literature review focuses on evidence-based approaches to equity in faculty hiring. In the first section, we focus on the practices within faculty search committees, including the emerging role of “equity advocates”, dynamics and tensions within search committees, as well as the impact of search committee training and education related to equity in hiring. The second section focuses on search committees’ evaluations of candidates, including the use of diversity statements, and the rubrics and evaluation criteria used to evaluate EDI contributions of candidates. Finally, the third section addresses the impact of COVID-19 on faculty, and how search committees might navigate candidate evaluation in this context.

In keeping with the goal of identifying best practices, literature included in this review is limited to the last 5 years of scholarship. Much of the literature in this small, but growing, area of inquiry is based in the United States, which is a limitation of this literature review. However, given the similarities in the United States and Canadian faculty hiring contexts, many findings and recommendations within these studies may also be useful in our context at the University of British Columbia.

## Project Background

The Faculty of Education (FoE) 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 the faculty hiring practices in FoE with the goal of the UBC’s Inclusion Action Plan

(IAP) 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). EES 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 on how the search committee membership represented area expertise and EDI goals in the unit. Additionally, search committees received an orientation and were provided with an EDI evaluation rubric which was then embedded in the search criteria. These steps were designed to ensure that all applicants, including those from equity-deserving groups, are more fairly considered in all stages of the hiring process, therefore maximizing opportunities for members from these groups to be hired. EDI practices such as these benefit the FoE and UBC communities by diversifying the faculty complement and constitute a multifaceted response to incorporating EDI perspectives in faculty hiring that align with the strategic and inclusion plans of the FoE and UBC. Now that the pilot project has come to a close, this literature review is part of concluding efforts to evaluate how our practices have been enacted, and what we might learn from new and emerging best practices to adjust moving forward. This review is partially funded by the UBC Equity Enhancement Fund.

## **Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Considerations in Faculty Searches**

### **Equity Advocates**

Increasingly, search committees employ the use of ‘equity advocates’ within their processes as a strategy to ensure searches are conducted with an EDI lens. The definition of ‘equity advocate’ can vary across institutional practices. In general, equity advocates are individual search committee members who have expertise (via formal training, or otherwise) in EDI hiring principles and are expected to assist the committee in recognizing and mitigating biases. The equity advocate can be a role appointed to a pre-existing member within the search committee composition, or a specific

addition to the committee membership. The equity advocate may also be intentionally appointed from outside of the home department of the hire.

Liera (2020b) studied the strategies and efforts used by professors to create equitable hiring practices during faculty search committees, and how they enact their agency to do so. Liera's (2020b) study was conducted at a religiously affiliated private liberal arts university in the United States with a predominantly White student and faculty population. The institution had taken part in a ten-month intervention to train 17 faculty members in racial equity in faculty hiring. Liera (2020b) collected data through interviews with these faculty members, as well as through observations of two search committees in STEM disciplines and faculty hiring materials. The study found that faculty advance racial equity by manipulating and subverting practices, rules, and roles that historically excluded racialized professors from the hiring process. As part of this, Liera (2020b) argues that equity advocates should (1) establish positional power as search committee members, (2) use equity-minded templates in job announcements and evaluation rubrics to change the rules and roles in search committees, (3) and informally strategize with other equity advocates to overcome organizational constraints and resistance from committee members.

Seeking to address gaps in the limited effectiveness of implicit bias workshops for hiring committees, Cahn et. al. (2021) introduced the role of equity advocates to the cycle of academic hiring and studied the perspectives of both equity-advocates and non-equity advocate members of the search committees. In Cahn et. al.'s study, the equity advocates introduced were volunteer faculty and staff members who serve on search committees outside their home departments. They found a contrast in perspectives of equity advocates and other search committee members. Search committee members felt that the equity advocates on their committees were of assistance and helped to mitigate bias. Equity advocates, on the other hand, felt they had a more contentious relationship with the search committee and felt less confident that the process was free from bias.

On the role of equity advocates, Liera and Hernandez (2021) found that equity advocates' knowledge of the department, their relationships with other search committee members, and their position within the department created power dynamics that shaped their agency for supporting racial equity. For pre-tenure equity advocates, their agency was limited out of fear.

## Search Committee Dynamics

Liera and Hernandez (2021) examined the colour-evasive mechanisms in late-stages of faculty hiring processes that subverted institutional policies and practices towards racial equity through two case studies of faculty searches. Both search committees had involved a small number of faculty members specifically trained in equity practices and acted as equity advocates in these spaces. Liera and Hernandez's (2021) case study found that faculty in search committees operationalized colour-evasive racism in the hiring process through selectively applying hiring criteria, undermining racial equity work, compartmentalizing racial equity work, and discrediting committee members trained in equity-mindedness. Liera and Hernandez (2021) offered empirical examples of the ways faculty used race-neutral and coded language to raise concerns about the fairness of evaluation criteria focused on EDI efforts. While many institutions and faculty purportedly support racial equity, the authors argue that the decoupling of policies and practices ensures that steps towards equity in one element of the hiring process will be used to legitimize disparities in the others (Liera and Hernandez, 2021).

Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) argue that it is the default of historically White institutions to reproduce racial inequality and offer constructive alternatives to search committee practices. Their reflective article identifies the discursive moves of faculty hiring committees that protects Whiteness, including: (1) the so-called objective scrutiny of applicant CVs, (2) the discourse of "fit," (3) the token committee member, (4) the additive nature of diversity related interview questions, and (5) the acceptability of candidate ignorance on issues of race/gender (Sensoy and DiAngelo, 2017).

Hakkola and Dyer (2022) studied the ways in which chairs of faculty search committees' status and social identities may influence committee dynamics and decisions about hiring diverse candidates. Specifically, Hakkola and Dyer (2022) identified the complexities that junior faculty encounter in navigating the role as search committee chair, and that faculty hierarchy superseded decision-making power granted to search chairs if they were junior faculty. To combat this, Hakkola and Dyer (2022) recommend that institutions support search committee chairs by providing an

administrative advocate, whose role will be to assist chairs as they navigate the academic hierarchy, managing conflict, and mitigating bias.

Search committee composition implications can also be understood through homophily theory, which suggests that individuals develop connections with those who are similar to them. Through analysis of recruitment data, Kazmi et. al. (2021) found that women search committee chairs and greater percentages of women on search committees related to more women applicants and that under-represented minority (URM) search chairs and a greater percentage of racialized members on search committees related to more URM applicants, resulting in 23% more women applicant pools with a woman chair and over 100% more URM applicants for a URM chair. In addition, Kazmi et. al. (2021) also found that women and URMs on search committees actively engaged in outreach to a more diverse set of applicants, whereas men and non-URMs' behavior maintained the status quo. It is important to clarify that within Kazmi et. al.'s study, URM is not a blanket-categorization for all equity-deserving groups and specifically refers to self-identification as Black/African American, American Indian/ Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, or Hispanic/Latinx.

## Search Committee Training and Education

Sekaquaptewa et. al. (2018) studied the individual- and departmental-level impact of faculty recruitment workshops on faculty attitudes towards evidence-based, equitable search practices. The faculty recruitment workshops in this study consisted of a two-hour workshop that contained research findings on gender and race schemas, implicit bias, the accumulation of disadvantage and the value of diversity in promoting excellence in academic hiring contexts. The workshops also included small group table discussions and activities, as well as a question period. Findings show that faculty who had attended a workshop demonstrated more favourable attitudes to equitable search practices (Sekaquaptewa et. al., 2018). In addition, faculty members who had not attended a workshop themselves, but who were part of a department where several of their colleagues had attended, also presented more favourable attitudes towards equitable search practices.



Sekaquaptewa et. al. (2018) argue that this finding suggests the possibility of faculty recruitment workshops playing a role in institutional climate shifts.

With faculty recruitment workshops playing such a key role in creating equitable search processes, Cavanaugh and Green (2020) offer a practical case study on the *process* of finding, securing and implementing such workshops for internal faculty consultants who carry out this work. Within Cavanaugh and Green's (2020) case study at Rutgers University, the internal consulting body is a unit of faculty members who organized to push for training for committees, and ultimately carry out the training workshops. The ability to self-sustain the program year after year by making faculty members deliver training, and train other faculty members to provide the training, was important to the unit, rather than use different external consultants annually (Cavanaugh and Green, 2020).

Liera's (2020a) inquiry-based intervention case study uses cultural historical activity theory to examine how the 'culture of niceness' is perpetuated and can be disrupted throughout the faculty hiring process. The study found that faculty who use race-conscious language and tools to interrogate their campus's historical roots with racism were able to rethink their hiring structure (Liera, 2020a). With implications for the training of search committees, Liera (2020a) argues that for faculty to develop the capacity to be race conscious, they need opportunities to engage in critical inquiry of their campus culture.

## **Committee Evaluation of Applicants' EDI Contributions**

As O'Meara et. al. (2020) identify within their narrative and integrative literature review of faculty hiring processes in American higher education, much of the literature focuses on the presence of bias in faculty hiring, while few studies examine interventions that may be useful in mitigating it. Among their recommendations for further study, O'Meara et. al. (2020) identified the following as promising practices from the literature for improving inclusive hiring: (a) the use of data by search committees and those who approve shortlists to contextualize the applicant pool vis-à-vis the full (disaggregated) demographics in the field, (b) committee creation and mandatory use of decision

support tools (criteria rubrics), and (c) increased accountability enforced by hiring officials and equity administrators for diverse applicant pools and short lists.

## Diversity Statements

Within academic hiring, diversity statements are increasingly requested from applicants within their application materials. Like teaching statements, diversity statements generally ask candidates to reflect on equity, diversity, and inclusion, and their contributions to advance it within their teaching, research, and/or service.

Bombaci and Pejchar (2022) synthesized the strengths and limitations of the use of diversity statements in faculty hiring through surveying of more than 200 equity, diversity, and inclusion professionals working in US higher education. While majority (91%) agreed that diversity statements should be required for faculty position applicants, most respondents (85%) felt they lacked sufficient guidance from their institution on evaluating diversity statements (Bombaci and Pejchar, 2022). Among the challenges with diversity statements, respondents identified the following as the most significant: (1) does not ensure candidates sincerity or future commitment, (2) [diversity commitment] should be demonstrated through other materials, and (3) [diversity statements are] less useful if an institution lacks EDI core values or is unable to evaluate candidates effectively (Bombaci and Pejchar, 2022).

White-Lewis (2020) argues that, despite the prevalence of diversity statements, faculty still espouse a color-convenience perspective in hiring: emphasizing identity in position advertisements, neglecting identity in evaluation, yet conveniently invoking identity when making final offers to a candidate's detriment.

Moore (2021) lends Sara Ahmed's (2006) concept of non-performativity as a tool to engage critically in the complexities of the use of diversity statements in faculty hiring. Moore (2021) argues that: (1) diversity statements can reduce social justice work to buzzwords, (2) diversity statements can fetishize equity-seeking groups, (3) diversity statements can perpetuate an oppressive status

quo by uncritically rebranding it as “already doing” EDI work, and (4) diversity statements can promote nonperformative effects for both institutions and individuals.

Presented as a resource to faculty writing such statements, Madhavi and Brooks (2021) identified key elements of strong diversity statements. They emphasize the importance of demonstrating an understanding of intersectionality and the interlocking issues within the matrices of oppression by using *diversity as a strategy*, rather than a simple action (Madhavi and Brooks, 2021). They encourage candidates to articulate *evidence of addressing structural challenges* and a *recognition of invisible labour*. Madhavi and Brooks (2021) acknowledge that posting a diversity statement is not “enough”, and advocate that they become an integral part of performance reviews and promotion to contribute to systemic change.

## Rubrics

The use of rubrics within search committees to assess candidate contributions to equity, diversity, and inclusion is a growing practice, often paired with the use of diversity statements requested from applicants. The use of rubrics for this purpose was popularized by the University of Berkeley California, whose rubric was influential in the development of the UBC Faculty of Education’s initial rubric. Berkeley’s *Rubric for Assessing Candidate Contributions to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging* evaluates with numeric scoring across three main areas: (1) knowledge and understanding, (2) track record of activities to date, and (3) future plans for contributing at Berkeley. Berkeley also provides a calibration exercise using sample statements, to assist committees with identifying scoring interpretations and discrepancies among reviewers.

In addition to their diversity statement strengths and limitations analysis, Bombaci and Pejchar (2022) also encourage the use of rubrics and offer a structural framework for evaluating diversity statements for faculty positions. Of note, Bombaci and Pejchar (2022) offer corresponding definitions of excellence for each evaluation criteria within 6 major categories: (1) actions, plans, and accountability, (2) cultural or DEI (diversity, equity and inclusion) competency, (3) promoting underrepresented scholars and allyship, (4) DEI in research, (5) DEI in teaching, and (6) DEI in service.

While rubrics and quantitative scoring mechanisms are designed to mitigate biases in the search committee evaluation process, recent studies have also identified problematic uses of these methods that run counter to goals of equitable search practices. In their case study of a STEM faculty search, Liera and Hernandez (2021) found that senior white faculty used quantitative rankings to minimize discussions among committee members, under the assumption that such practice reflected conclusive agreement. The search committee in the case study utilized two quantitative metrics: the average rating of the applicant, and the applicant's rank on the overall list of applicants. The reliance on quantitative rankings can allow searches to "maintain the illusion of fairness" and can help senior, white faculty members evade justifying their own ranked preferences for white faculty finalists (Liera & Hernandez, 2021).

## Evaluation Criteria

White-Lewis (2020) investigates the role of "fit" as a system of assumptions, practices and tactics in faculty hiring through a critical person-environment fit framework and case-study methods. Findings suggest that the role of "fit" evaluations within candidate appraisals was minimal, and, instead, faculty relied more heavily on idiosyncratic preferences to evaluate research, teaching, and service. White-Lewis (2020) argues that searches are as much about the department and faculty than the candidates themselves, and that searches are more about elevating status, minimizing identity, and mitigating perceived risk for the department than evaluating "fit". Following up on these findings, White-Lewis's (2021) study of the underlying mechanics of academic hiring seeks to outline what structural change to support faculty diversity might entail *before* the hiring process begins. Findings emphasize the critical role of department chairs and deans, who are uniquely positioned to implement initiatives that rearrange structural conditions of faculty hiring and empower equity-oriented practices (White-Lewis, 2021).

## Faculty Searches, EDI Considerations, and COVID-19

Beyond general best practices for equitable faculty hiring, the current contexts of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on academics is an important layer for consideration. Belikov et. al. (2021) studied the emotional impacts of the pandemic and anti-racism movements on academics, particularly in the early parts of the pandemic and overlapping rise of the Black Lives Matter movement. In their professional lives, participants felt emotionally burdened by the additional time and care they put towards learning new technologies, implementing new teaching practices, supporting their students, and putting in effort to sustain their obligations as a scholar (Belikov et. al., 2021). In their personal lives, participants felt emotional impacts from the increased caring responsibility for family and friends, reduced in-person connections, and the influx of distressing news reports and social media (Belikov et. al., 2021).

Fulweiler et. al. (2021), a collective of academic mothers, offer a thorough list of recommendations towards mentors, university administrators, scientific societies, publishers, and funding agencies to help address the exacerbated inequalities experienced by academic mothers in the COVID-19 pandemic. Though Fulweiler et. al. (2021) did not specifically address faculty hiring within their paper, the emphasis on the utility of a COVID-19 impact statement to assist in various forms of candidate evaluation (i.e. for tenure, for grant funding) may also be worth consideration in a hiring context. The authors suggest that these COVID-19 impact statements should be coupled with explicit instructions for reviewers to consider the inequalities generated by the pandemic as they review candidate application files and research productivity within the pandemic (Fulweiler et. al., 2021).

Kim et. al. (2021) turn to the impacts of the Great Recession on diversity in faculty hiring, and point towards what trends may emerge in our current financially uncertain times a result of the COVID-19 crisis. Their study analysed the trends in the hiring of tenure-track faculty at four-year colleges and universities in the United States between 1999-2015 and found that tenure-track hires had declined by 25% between 2007-2009 (the Great Recession) (Kim et. al. 2021). Their analysis found that the hiring of Black, Hispanic and Asian American faculty in this time had disproportionately declined,

which the authors believe suggests that times of financial uncertainty led to a reversal in progress on faculty diversity (Kim et. al. 2021). While Kim et. al. (2021) note that the COVID-19 pandemic crisis is a much different crisis than the Great Recession, the underlying uncertainty surrounding each crisis bears similarity. Kim et. al. (2021) suggest that the overlapping current crisis of police violence in communities of colour and the amplification of the Black Lives Matter movement may shift attention towards issues of faculty diversity, but unless institutions take strides to address hiring practices, crisis-induced uncertainty may once again lead to reductions in the diversity of new faculty.

## Overview

Though it may be a small area of scholarship, the emerging literature on equity in faculty hiring provides key lessons to share with search committees, departments, and university administrators alike. The following point-wise summary offers a summary of the findings of this review:

- 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, 2020b; Liera and Hernandez, 2021).
- Junior faculty members, in particular, experience limitations of their agency in authentically navigating a search committee, due to academic hierarchies (Hakkola and Dyer, 2022).
- The use of rubrics and evaluation criteria for EDI can be a powerful tool to mitigate bias in candidate evaluation (Bombaci and Pejchar, 2021; O'Meara, 2020), but are also vulnerable to the individual scoring discrepancies among reviewers and can also be troubling when utilized in searches to stifle discussion beyond the clear ranked top 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).
- COVID-19 pandemic, and overlapping heightened racial tensions, have exacerbated inequalities in higher education, and negatively impacted both the research output and emotional wellbeing of faculty (Belikov et. al., 2021; Fulweiler et. al., 2021). Searches should take care to contextualize candidate CVs in the conditions of the pandemic.
- Some areas of original inquiry, such as the extent and ways in which “lived experience” is evaluated in candidate applications, have little to no literature and are not yet widely investigated.

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