

Consideration of Equity and Inclusion Credentials in Evaluation of Faculty Candidates

Analysis and recommendations for the UW-Madison College of Engineering

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UW - Madison College of Engineering Equity and Diversity Committee

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Executive Summary:

- The EDC reiterates the need to consider diversity, equity, inclusion, and to mitigate the effects of implicit bias throughout the hiring process.
- The EDC recommends that search committees be given flexibility in deciding the form of materials and metrics for evaluation.
- The EDC recommends that search committees consider alternatives before adopting a *requirement* of free-standing diversity statements as a component of faculty applications.
- The committee recommends that faculty applicants be asked to address diversity activities and plans as part of their application materials. Suggested text for PVLs (to be adapted according to the details of individual searches):
 - “The University of Wisconsin-Madison College of Engineering strives to foster a respectful, diverse, equitable, and inclusive environment. Submitted materials should include candidates’ thoughts on diversity, equity, and inclusion, including previous activities and/or future plans in these areas, in relevant sections of their applications.”

Background: Request from Dean Robertson

Prompted by discussion among engineering deans across the country, Dean Robertson sought the input and recommendations of the UW–Madison College of Engineering (CoE) Equity and Diversity Committee (EDC) on the question of whether the CoE should adopt the practice of requiring all applicants for CoE faculty positions to include a diversity statement as part of their application. As implemented by some of our peer institutions, the applicant diversity statement is a stand-alone document, similar in length and scope to the required research and teaching statements, that describes the applicant’s experience and future plans relevant to incorporating equity and inclusion in their professional activities as a faculty member.

In his request to the EDC, Dean Robertson posed the following questions to be addressed in the committee’s recommendations:

1. Should the CoE require faculty candidates to address equity and inclusion in their application materials?
2. Should the CoE require faculty candidates to submit a diversity statement as a component of their application package?
3. What guidance should the CoE provide search committees in evaluating diversity, equity and inclusion statements?
4. How shall progress and performance related to equity and inclusion be addressed in appointment renewal, tenure, promotion and performance reviews?

This report constitutes a summary of the work of the EDC, including both analysis and recommendations related to the questions raised by Dean Robertson.

Current practice in the CoE

An informal study was conducted by the members of the EDC to gauge current practice and attitudes among CoE faculty search committees related to evaluation of credentials and future plans that support College of Engineering goals for diversity, equity, and inclusion. EDC members consulted with department chairs and search committee members across the CoE to answer the following questions about faculty searches during the current academic year:

1. Was the requirement and/or consideration of candidate diversity statements discussed by the search committee at the beginning of the search process?
2. Were diversity statements (or description in another form of the candidates’ credentials and future plans related to diversity) requested in the PVL for the position?
3. Were diversity statements received from applicants, regardless of whether they had been explicitly requested in the PVL?

4. When submitted as part of an application, were materials documenting experience and future plans related to equity and inclusion considered by the committee in their evaluation of the candidate?

The spectrum of responses to these questions reflects the search committee autonomy that is a hallmark of the decentralized governance at UW - Madison. Search committee practices were found to vary considerably between departments and even within a given department. These practices ran the gamut from no consideration to systematic consideration of diversity in evaluating candidates, with variations in between.

One finding consistent across search committees is that a growing number of candidates are including a diversity statement with their applications, regardless of whether it was requested in the job listing. When received as part of application packages, some but not all committees did consider diversity statements in the evaluation process.

Use of diversity statements as a tool in evaluating applicants

Many U.S. universities are now asking applicants for tenure-track faculty positions to submit a diversity statement as part of their application materials. The diversity statement may describe an applicant's experience and goals related to equity and inclusion, and serves as a parallel document to the applicant's research and teaching statements.

One innovative evaluation technique currently being piloted in the College of Engineering at UC Berkeley relies on the use of a stand-alone diversity statement. In this pilot, an early phase of the evaluation process is to consider **only** the diversity statement, with names and other personal identifiers redacted from the document. This phase thus serves as a blind review to determine whether each candidate meets a threshold standard for demonstrated potential for contributing to the UCB CoE's equity and inclusion goals, based on guidelines established by the search committee. Only candidates who meet this standard advance to the next phase, in which the full, unredacted application is evaluated. This approach ensures that search committees give serious consideration to the candidate's potential for contributions in equity and inclusion, without being biased by other aspects of the candidate's record. This approach is clearly dependent on the submission of a separate diversity statement by each applicant.

Whether the use of diversity statements is the most appropriate tool to characterize if a faculty candidate's activities and intentions related to equity and inclusion are aligned with the College of Engineering's values was the topic of considerable discussion in the EDC. The concern about the "diversity statement" approach is that it gives a false impression of diversity and inclusion as an endeavor separate from research and teaching activities. If our goal is to *infuse* our teaching and research activities with our equity and inclusion efforts, then there is merit in

encouraging candidates to address equity and inclusion *within* their teaching and research statements and/or in a cover letter.

General considerations for search committees related to evaluation of applicants on equity and inclusion

- Creating a diverse pool of applicants in response to a PVL can be achieved through a variety of practices that search committees are encouraged to implement before and during the application submission period.
- An emphasis on using candidates' past and planned *activities* as a basis for evaluating their potential contributions to equity and inclusion does not guarantee increased diversity among hired faculty in the short term.
- In the event that a search committee considers changes in candidate evaluation practices, a discussion involving the search committee and the full department faculty is advised, as new expectations for faculty performance related to equity and inclusion constitute a significant shift for most departments.
- Reporting of PVLs along with evaluation rubrics and metrics developed by search committees to the CoE EDC would aid the EDC in assessing whether and how search committees are considering equity and inclusion in evaluation of applicants for faculty positions, and would serve as input to guide future recommendations from the EDC.
- Evaluation of candidates through an open PVL process based on any aspect of their personal identity is not supported by the law. (Note that certain types of hiring at UW-Madison, such as [Targets of Opportunity](#) do *not* make use of an open PVL, and different guidelines apply in those cases.)
- During the evaluation stage, the search committee must focus on the merits of the individual candidates related to their potential for fulfilling the requirements of the position.
- Making consideration of contributions in equity and inclusion pervasive in evaluations throughout each faculty member's career with the College of Engineering will help the College of Engineering to work as a community to achieve its equity and inclusion goals.

Format options for candidate applications

The EDC recommends that the CoE encourage the consideration of equity and inclusion in faculty hiring and provide faculty search committees with a recommended selection of options to consider for the requested form for candidates to use in preparing their applications, such as:

- Format not prescribed - location within application left to applicant's discretion
- Include in cover letter
- Include in teaching and research statements
- Provide a separate "diversity statement"

It was noted that flexibility in allowed format(s) will reduce the burden on candidates to adapt their application statements for UW-Madison, thereby reducing an administrative barrier that could discourage qualified candidates from applying.

Search committees are advised to make decisions about rubrics, metrics, and processes before or simultaneous with selecting the submission format of candidate equity and inclusion application materials. It should specifically be noted that the UC Berkeley example described above of applying an equity and inclusion threshold standard as a preliminary step of the evaluation process is dependent on the submission of a stand-alone diversity statement by each applicant.

Suggested language for CoE PVLs for faculty positions

There was a consensus among the EDC members to recommend that the College of Engineering **encourage** (but not require) the consideration by search committees of a faculty candidate's experience and plans related to equity and inclusion, in addition to research and teaching.

To implement this practice in an equitable (and legal) manner, several conditions apply to each search:

- Candidates must be informed through the PVL that equity and inclusion will be a factor in the evaluation of applicants.
- If equity and inclusion is to be considered for *any* candidate, it should be considered for all applicants, who must be informed via the PVL of the opportunity to present relevant evidence.
- If a candidate submits a diversity statement or otherwise includes a description of activities that demonstrate past activities and/or future plans to support equity and inclusion with their application, these parts of their application should only be considered if they respond to a request in the PVL. *In other words, unsolicited diversity statements should not be used in applicant evaluation.*

Caution must be used in requesting information related to equity and diversity. Candidates may interpret the request for contributions related to diversity and inclusion as a requirement to reveal private aspects of their personal identity. To avoid this unintended effect, which could increase bias in the members of the review committee, the EDC proposes the following text, which focuses on activities rather than identity, as a starting point for crafting requests to applicants to be included in the PVL:

“The University of Wisconsin-Madison College of Engineering strives to foster a respectful, diverse, equitable, and inclusive environment. Submitted materials should include candidates’

thoughts on diversity, equity, and inclusion, including previous activities and/or future plans in these areas, in relevant sections of their applications.”

The EDC recommends that the review of PVLs by CoE HR staff includes verification of the inclusion of an appropriate request or a reminder of the guidance in this document in cases where a request related to diversity, equity, and inclusion was not included.

How to evaluate faculty applicants on equity and inclusion?

Following its study of search committee practices in the College of Engineering and among our peer institutions, the EDC concluded that consideration of equity and inclusion is on the rise. At the same time, the committee found that there is a desire within the CoE for **guidance** on how to include equity and inclusion in evaluation rubrics and interview questions.

A suggestion was raised by the EDC that training search committees on the evaluation of candidates' potential to make contributions in equity and inclusion could be added as an element in the “Searching for Excellence and Diversity” workshops conducted each year by the UW Women in Science and Engineering Leadership Institute (WISELI). At present, the topic of diversity statements is briefly touched on in the search workshops as part of a broader group discussion with participants about evaluating applications.

The current version of the WISELI search guidebook and workshops do not include formal training on evaluating candidates in the area of equity and inclusion based on specifically requested material submitted by applicants, because the practice has emerged and grown in popularity since the guidebook was last updated. Moreover, because the practice has emerged recently, there is a lack of completed research studies that can provide data-driven guidance on the effectiveness, in terms of measurable outcomes, of strategies being implemented. However, WISELI Search Workshop Director Eve Fine has indicated an interest in working to develop relevant training to be included in future search workshops and in the next update of the search guidebook. A timeline has not been established.

The EDC concluded that while WISELI search workshops and guidebook are a good long-term approach to providing expert advice to search committees, there is a short term demand for guidance in the CoE as the consideration of equity and inclusion in evaluation rubrics is a growing practice among CoE faculty search committees.

After initial discussion of developing a rubric for all CoE searches, the EDC decided to instead provide suggestions and a summary of best practices for each search committee to use as inputs to their own process of developing a rubric and interview questions. We note the following observations:

- It is a recognized best practice to allow committees to deliberate internally to establish an evaluation rubric on a search by search basis. This is especially the case in the UW–Madison College of Engineering, where there is a high expectation for committee autonomy.
- It is a recognized best practice for committees to develop rubrics and metrics **before** evaluation of candidates begins.
- An emerging practice is to use equity and inclusion as an initial (blind) screening criterion to eliminate candidates who do not meet a threshold standard in this area, according to a rubric and metrics developed by the search committee.
- As search committees begin their process of developing a rubric for evaluation of activities and future plans related to diversity, equity, and inclusion as presented by candidates in their applications, they may benefit from kickstarting their process by reviewing available examples. [The Office of Faculty Equity and Welfare](#) (OFEW) at UC Berkeley has made rubrics for evaluating faculty candidates publicly available on their website. Search committees are encouraged to look at two rubrics posted on the UCB OFEW website: 1) [a rubric for an overall evaluation](#) that includes consideration of diversity, equity, and inclusion, and 2) [a rubric for evaluating candidates on diversity, equity, and inclusion](#). The latter includes the following categories:
 - Candidates knowledge about diversity, equity, and inclusion
 - Track record for advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion
 - Plans for advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion
- Another best practice is for search committees to calibrate their rubrics and metrics (for teaching, research, and equity and inclusion) *before* embarking on evaluation of all applicants. This may be accomplished by using draft versions of rubrics and metrics as the basis for discussion of a small number of applications among the full committee, and then revising as appropriate, by consensus of the committee, for use in evaluating the remaining applicants.

Assessing equity and inclusion in performance reviews, tenure and promotion

In adopting faculty search committee practices for consideration of candidates' potential to advance the Colleges' equity and inclusion goals, it is imperative that the reward structure is consistent in recognizing relevant contributions. In other words, our faculty must be rewarded for their time, effort, and innovations in the course of their work that contribute to these goals. As a first step, departments are encouraged to include diversity, equity, and inclusion in appointment letters for new faculty as a job expectation.

Review of faculty performance is initiated within their home department, and each department has the authority to develop its own guidelines, consistent with the relevant campus guidelines.

Each department should therefore review their guidelines for performance reviews, tenure and promotion to ensure consistency over the arc of the career. The committee noted that recent versions of both the Physical Sciences tenure guidelines and the campus post-tenure review guidelines include a provision for consideration of activity related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Quoting from the UW-Madison Physical Sciences Division tenure requirements (page 4, under Professional Service):

“Professional contributions include service on departmental and university committees as well as service to professional organizations, and professional consultation to the community, to agencies of government, or to industries. Contributions also include professional activities that enhance diversity and/or climate in the professional community, enhance public engagement in the physical sciences, and enhance K-12 outreach. Especially significant results of the candidate’s individual efforts should be documented.”

[Excerpt from UW-Board of Regents Post tenure review policy:](#)

- Identification of criteria by which to evaluate the tenured faculty member’s performance that are effective and consistent with the mission and expectations of the department, school or college, and institution, as applicable, and sufficiently flexible to permit shifts in professional emphasis. However any criteria must fall within the three categories of teaching, scholarship/research/creative activity, and service.

UW Board of Regents policy:

<https://www.wisconsin.edu/regents/policies/periodic-post-tenure-review-in-support-of-tenured-faculty-development/>

Excerpt from UW-Madison Post-tenure review policy (in FP&P)

Each department shall develop criteria to measure progress in teaching, service, outreach/extension, and research/scholarly productivity as appropriate to the field and consistent with FPP 8.02. Each department shall develop criteria to measure progress in scholarly productivity as appropriate to the field. The criteria for review shall be periodically reviewed by the executive committee of each department and the school or college APC.:

The EDC recommends that each CoE department review faculty guidelines for renewal, tenure, promotion, and post-tenure review, and to add criteria related to diversity, equity, and inclusion.