Interrupting Bias in the Graduate Admissions Process

• Before the Search
  o Form a diverse admissions committee. The Department Chair and DGS should compose a balanced committee that includes committee members with different perspectives and expertise, and if possible, women and individuals from underrepresented groups. Ideally, include a mix of junior and senior faculty.
  o Decide on voting procedure (unanimous or majority? open or confidential?) and review process (rubrics, meeting norms, etc.)

• Sourcing Applicants
  o Review minimum requirements and decide which are genuinely required
  o Review your promotional material and website for gendered or non-inclusive language (you may apply the tool: Gender Decoder) and ensure that they include text and images that promote an inclusive environment
  o Expand posting locations to include minority-focused professional networks and publications
  o Reach a broader applicant pool by visiting Minority Serving Institutions, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Women’s colleges

• Reviewing Applications
  o Develop a standard rubric for making assessments as it reduces bias against applications that imply different identities, and being organized makes the admission committee’s job easier
    ▪ Reviewers should meet and agree upon specific criteria and their weights to use to gauge potential success in graduate school for all applicants
  o Have at least two people read each application, to reduce chance for bias
    ▪ Enhances chances of having a more diverse list
    ▪ Consider creating a process for vetting all underrepresented and women applicants
  o Assess merit and potential
    ▪ A comprehensive approach is useful to avoid an over-reliance on GRE scores or other traditional definitions of merit.
    ▪ Letters of recommendation can sometimes reveal unconscious bias. How do you read them in a critical way? To reduce bias, consider using forms that allow the search committee to fill out the same qualities for everyone as this leads to a more systematic overview of candidates.
  o To supplement quantitative metrics, use a holistic approach, which helps to gauge applicants’ non-cognitive competencies

1 11 Non-cognitive attributes rubric from Fisk-Vanderbilt
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• Interviewing Candidates
  o Develop a standard list of questions for all candidates
  o Include space for interviewers to take verbatim notes
  o Avoid illegal and personal questions about identity/family/etc.
  o Consider conducting Skype or Zoom interviews as part of the initial vetting. This can be especially helpful in identifying students who may show promise/potential not clearly reflected in their written applications

• Admissions Committee Decisions
  o Be mindful of judgment shortcuts
    ▪ Admitting someone based on similarity to yourself
    ▪ Passing snap judgments, overlooking evidence
    ▪ Stereotyping, positively or negatively
  o Avoid premature ranking of candidates; review each candidate systematically
  o Require evidence and specifics in discussions about candidates
  o Consider a majority and confidential voting process

2 Interview Protocol from Fisk-Vanderbilt