

What do we do?

Hiring managers and selection committees must:

1. Overcome objections to setting diversity as a goal.
2. Employ processes to proactively address traditional biases that have historically limited opportunities for female and other minority candidates.
3. Utilize *Best Practices* in recruitment, evaluation, and selection.

Best Practices for Hiring a Diverse Workforce

1. Set improving diversity as a key priority in all hiring and selection.
2. Educate all hiring managers and selection committees on recruitment processes and the impact of unconscious bias.
3. Engage hiring managers/committees in conversations regarding diversity and unconscious bias. Identify strategies for addressing both.
4. Ensure that the composition of selection committees is diverse (experience, discipline, gender, ethnicity, etc.).
5. Know the internal and/or external workforce demographics for the position being sought.
6. Establish specifically job-related criteria at the outset of the selection process but ensure it is broadly worded enough to attract a diverse applicant pool.
7. Expand the recruitment effort beyond traditional sources to generate diverse applicant pools. Invite candidates from a variety of diversity partners. Encourage all participants in the recruitment process to proactively network for referrals of diverse candidates.
8. Control unconscious bias when evaluating candidates at all stages of selection by consistently applying the **pre-established criteria**.
9. Validate that short lists reflect the diversity of the applicant pool and/or the available workforce. Consider adding additional candidates to improve the diversity of the pool.
10. Manage the interview process for consistency to ensure an optimal climate for the candidate.
11. Gather evaluations from all hiring managers/committee members and review for appropriateness. If any apparent impacts of bias are identified then discuss and resolve.
12. Evaluate the recruitment process overall at the end and adjust future efforts accordingly.

AURA's Statement of Commitment

As a leader in the astronomical community, AURA is deeply committed to the human resources that support our mission to advance astronomy and related sciences and is deeply invested in continually developing and improving its policies and practices for the purpose of providing a welcoming and fruitful work environment for all employees.

AURA believes that a diverse workforce, particularly one that includes women and individuals from underrepresented minority and the disabled groups, contributes best to the achievement of excellence in both our organization and the scientific community as a whole.

All AURA staff bear responsibility for developing and fostering a diverse and inclusive work place. AURA's recruiting and hiring practices are designed to attract a broadly diverse pool of candidates including underrepresented applicants. When a vacancy occurs, AURA will hire the most qualified person from among the fully qualified applicants meeting AURA goals and clearly defined program needs while endeavoring to develop and maintain a diverse work force where women, underrepresented minority and disabled staff are proportionately represented.

“Even the most well-intentioned person unwittingly allows unconscious thoughts and feelings to influence apparently objective decisions.”

—Mahzarin R. Banaji

“To evaluate other people more accurately we need to challenge our implicit hypotheses... we need to become explicitly aware of them.”

—Virginia Valian



Overcoming Unconscious Bias



“Seeking diversity means maximizing the organization’s opportunity to hire the best.”

When we are put in the position of evaluating others, we like to think that we will handle that responsibility professionally and objectively—that we will judge people based solely on their credentials and achievements.

However, each of us brings a lifetime of experiences and cultural histories that create in us certain “schemas” or non-conscious hypotheses (expectations or stereotypes) that affect our judgments of others. Schemas allow efficient, yet sometimes inaccurate, processing of information. They are unintentional, automatic and outside of our awareness. Our schemas can even conflict with our conscious or “explicit” attitudes. We perceive and treat people based on the schemas we hold regarding their physical and social categories.

Unconscious bias results from the schemas that exist in our understanding. Unconscious bias affects us all, regardless of gender, race, sexual orientation, ability, etc. A significant limiting factor in our selection and advancement processes and our desire to achieve a more diverse workforce may well be our inability to acknowledge the existence and impact of unconscious biases.

The good news is that our schemas and the biases that result from them can change based on experience or exposure to new information.

Unconscious Bias and Diversity

Diversity goals help make difference acceptable and desirable, and reverse patterns of discrimination. We need diversity in such things as gender, race, discipline, outlook, life experience and personality to offer the breadth of ideas that lead to an effective workforce capable of achieving excellence in astronomical science.

Unconscious bias is an impediment to achieving diversity goals. Unconscious bias affects the evaluation of CVs and resumes, job credentials, applications and letters of recommendation. If the use of and impact of bias is not acknowledged and addressed, the processes for selection and advancement can become flawed, resulting in some candidates being under-estimated and/or unfairly disadvantaged while others are inadvertently advantaged. This self-reinforcing cycle can make historical outcomes of who applies for positions, gets positions and progresses in positions seem “natural” or expected.

“When we assume “that cultural, racial, ethnic, and gender biases are simply nonexistent [in] screening and evaluation processes, there is grave danger that minority and female candidates will be rejected.”

—Caroline S. V. Turner

Examples of Unconscious Bias

>> A study of over 300 recommendation letters for medical faculty hired at a large U.S. medical school in the 1990s found that letters for female applicants differed systematically from those for males. Letters written for women were shorter, seemed to provide “minimal assurance” rather than solid recommendation, raised more doubts, and portrayed women as students and teachers while portraying men as researchers and professionals. While such differences were readily apparent, it is important to note that all letters studied were for successful candidates only (Trix and Psenka 2002).¹

>> A study of the nonverbal responses of white interviewers to African American and white interviewees showed that white interviewers maintained (1) higher levels of visual contact, reflecting greater attraction, intimacy, and respect when talking with whites, and (2) higher rates of blinking, indicating greater negative arousal and tension, when talking with African Americans (Dovidio et al. 1997).²

>> In a national study, 238 academic psychologists (118 male, 120 female) evaluated a résumé randomly assigned a male or a female name. Both male and female participants gave the male applicant better evaluations for teaching, research, and service and were more likely to hire the male than the female applicant (Steinpreis et al. 1999).³ Another study showed that the preference for males was greater when women represented a small proportion of the pool of candidates, as is typical in many academic fields (Heilman 1980).⁴

>> A study of postdoctoral fellowships awarded by the Medical Research Council in Sweden found that women candidates needed substantially more publications to achieve the same rating as men, unless they personally knew someone on the panel (Wenneras and Wold 1997).⁵

>> In a study of scientists in R&D labs, White, U.S.-born men received more favorable task assignments and evaluations whereas most others fell into an average zone on these aspects of their work. Only U.S.-born Black women were actually less favorably evaluated and had less access to the work experiences that are related to performance. “...Findings suggest that in science and engineering, the relative structural position of U.S.-born White men provides them with greater access to favorable work experiences...as well as giving them the benefit of the doubt in the evaluation of their work (DiTomaso et al, 2007).⁶

References

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