

Appendix H: Personal Diversity Statements in the Academic Recruitment Context

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Purpose and Prevalence

In the last decade, some universities have begun to request a required or optional personal diversity statement as part of the academic job application. This White Paper is intended to serve as a guide to considerations and best practices surrounding requesting and evaluating diversity statements.

Personal diversity statements are intended to allow an applicant to demonstrate commitments and capacities that could contribute to the institution's efforts around diversity, inclusion and equity through research, teaching, service, mentoring, and/or advising.¹ Requiring a personal diversity statement can signal the institution or department's support of diversity and inclusion goals in terms of campus climate, hiring, and scholarship. It can also signal that creating a welcome academic environment is a shared responsibility and each potential member of the campus community is expected to contribute in some way.²

Princeton University does not require personal diversity statements, although individual departments are welcome to consider including one as part of a comprehensive and transparent evaluation of candidate qualifications. Preliminary research shows that diversity statements are most useful when the purpose for the statement and method of evaluation have been discussed and agreed upon by all members of the search committee.³

Critics of diversity statements express concern that evaluation of the statement will serve as a political litmus test, potentially restricting academic freedom.⁴ Critics also note that the preferred executions of diversity and inclusion goals are still under debate, e.g. color-blind vs. multicultural methods, general vs. race/gender-specific methods, etc. Though the peer-reviewed research on the content of most diversity statements is limited, one working paper suggests that personal diversity statements do tend to reflect many ways of defining and supporting diversity.⁵

Supporters of diversity statements consider them a logical extension of the policies and procedures that have increased diversity and inclusion in the workplace and academia thus far.³ For supporters, diversity statements are intended to ensure that scholars with minority identities receive credit for invisible labor such as mentoring and service, and that all scholars engage with diversity and inclusion goals and consider ways to contribute.⁶

Personal diversity statements are still relatively rare. In a 2014 survey of assistant professor job ads, only about 17% of the 110 ads requested a diversity statement but the numbers are likely growing. Thus far, only a few (including Cornell and UCLA) have made such a statement a requirement for all faculty applications (including tenure and promotion portfolios).⁶

Considerations

Before deciding whether to require a personal diversity statement as part of a search committee's application, the department and/or search committee should discuss potential advantages and disadvantages, and make a commitment to evaluating it in a standard way. Diversity statements processes can produce unintended consequences and even deter applicants if poorly designed.

- The search committee should be aware that the degree of involvement and awareness of diversity and inclusion will vary greatly across position levels and fields.⁶

- Applicants who have developed their careers in non-U.S. countries may have difficulty understanding the context of diversity statements, and the content of their statements may differ from those of U.S.-based applicants.
- Committees should be prepared to be receptive of different ways of supporting inclusivity, and/or interaction with a variety of identities.
- Diversity statements may raise expectations on the part of applicants about the level of departmental support. Departments should consider their ability to support the contributions suggested in applicant statements.
- Diversity statements can result in applicant concern about what aspects of their personal identity to disclose, as well as opportunities for evaluators to misunderstand or misuse what is disclosed.⁶a few Statements should not be used in order to identify the personal characteristics of the applicants themselves, but should focus on relevant professional experiences.

Best Practices

Sample Prompts

Departments may choose to require or suggest that applicants address diversity, equity, and inclusion values within existing application materials or in a separate statement. The following are prompts currently in use in higher education.

“This department is committed to fostering a diverse and inclusive academic community. We encourage applications from individuals whose backgrounds or interests align with this commitment. Candidates are welcome to include a brief, separate statement in this regard in their application.”

"A description of how the applicant would contribute to the development of a diverse and inclusive [learning/working] community through their [teaching, research, and/or service] should be included in the personal statement."

"This department strives to create and strengthen an inclusive, respectful, and intellectually challenging environment that embraces difference in the pursuit of knowledge. The diversity statement should describe how your background and experiences demonstrate your commitment and ability to engage with issues of diversity and inclusion, and should also discuss how those values might be reflected should you join our community."

See [Cornell University’s explanatory material](#) regarding the goals of their required statement and the type of content that could be included.

Potential Evaluation Criteria

If Departments choose to use diversity statements, it is important to have a clear rubric for how the information will be evaluated, including in relation to other aspects of the application. Rubrics may include such elements as:

- Knowledge of and interest in dimensions of diversity that result from different identities, such as ethnic, socioeconomic, racial, gender, sexual orientation, disability, and cultural differences - particularly in relation to Princeton University or higher education in general
- Prior research contributions to the advancement of knowledge of topics related to diversity and equity in any field
- Effectiveness in creating an academic environment (in the classroom or through mentoring) that is open and encouraging to all students, including development of particularly effective strategies for the educational advancement of students in various under-represented groups

- Involvement or leadership in organizations/programs/activities dedicated to furthering diversity and equal opportunity within or external to a university
- If applicant has not previously engaged in any relevant activities, statement should demonstrate knowledge of the value of equity, diversity, and inclusion, and outline clear and detailed plans for committing to those principles in this position

See UC Berkeley's [Rubric to Assess Candidate Contributions to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion](#) for further guidance.

For more information:

1. Turner, C. S. V. (2002). *Diversifying the faculty: A guidebook for search committees*. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities
2. Turner, C. S. V., González, J. C., & Wood, J. L. (2008). Faculty of color in academe: What 20 years of literature tells us. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 1, 139–168.
3. Canning, C. & Reddick, R. (2019) In Defense of Diversity Statements. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 11.
4. Flier, J. (2019). Against Diversity Statements. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 3.
5. Flaherty, C. (2018). Breaking Down Diversity Statements. *Inside Higher Ed*, November 19.
6. Schmaling, K. B., Trevino, A. Y., Lind, J. R., Blume, A. W., & Baker, D. L. (2015). Diversity statements: How faculty applicants address diversity. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 8(4), 213-224.
7. Dovidio, J. F., & Gaertner, S. L. (2000). Aversive racism and selection decisions: 1989 and 1999. *Psychological Science*, 11(4), 315-319.
8. Kelsey, K. (2014). How to make sense of the diversity statement. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, January, 31, A37.
9. Wilton, L. S., Good, J.J., Moss-Racusin, C.A., Sanchez, D.T. (2015). Communicating more than diversity: The effect of institutional diversity statements on expectations and performance as a function of race and gender. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 21(3), 315-325.