Recruitment, Admissions, Hiring, Retention, and Promotion: Mechanisms of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion (DEI) and Belonging in Higher Education

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This panel session is for anyone in human factors and ergonomics (HFE) or related disciplines interested in recruiting, hiring, admitting, retaining, and promoting people within organizations from the perspective of pursuing authentic diversity. Applicants and hiring managers may also gain insight on what makes a meaningful diversity statement, a trending requirement in many degree programs and job applications. Although the panelists featured are from higher education, we welcome hearing from audience members in other industries (e.g., corporate, military, and consulting). Panelists will focus on our experiences crafting admissions or hiring criteria, recruiting and retaining Human Factors and Ergonomics Society (HFES) members, and evaluating the contributions of people in our field that go beyond the traditional bounds of science and engineering yet are central to the future of our profession. The goal of this panel is to foster community and discussion across people and organizations working to improve diversity, equity, inclusion, (DEI) and belonging in HFE.

SUMMARY

A recent white paper published by the Human Factors and Ergonomics Society (HFES) took a close look at the Society's pursuit of authentic diversity by evaluating "who" HFES is and how HFES can continue to build toward an inclusive future, as befitting a human-centered profession (Chiou & Roscoe, 2021a). The concept of authentic diversity was intended to distinguish organizational satisficing (e.g., posting a diversity statement or creating a diversity committee primarily to placate public perception) from organizational commitment to activities that meaningfully (structurally and noticeably) create more diverse, inclusive, and equitable communities. Such communities should attract, promote, and retain people from different backgrounds, especially from groups that remain systematically excluded from and underrepresented in human factors and ergonomics (HFE) and HFE-adjacent fields.

Data collected and reported in the white paper was subsequently condensed and published as a two-part journal article series (Chiou & Roscoe, 2021b, 2021c). The reported data include: an overview of HFES member demographics from the 2018 cohort; a brief history of efforts to improve diversity and inclusion in HFES; and recent HFE scholarship that suggests sustained interest in diversity, equity, and inclusion issues. Results from the analysis indicate that HFES members and fellows are predominantly older white men, that HFES student members are the most racially and ethnically diverse group (including greater proportional representation of the categories collected at the time: "Asian", "Hispanic or Latino", "Black or African American", "American Indian/Alaska Native", and "Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander"), and that the data are incomplete and inconsistent

for assessing if HFES is retaining its student members and advancing diversity and inclusion among its members. The paper also concluded that there may be multiple dimensions and mechanisms for advancing authentic diversity that may affect recruitment and retention of HFES members.

Alongside these observations made about authentic diversity in HFES is the increasing visibility of institutional initiatives around the world to improve diversity within their organization, department, or field of study. Diversity "dashboards" and yearly reports that inform strategic plans at established institutions like MIT and Boeing (e.g., Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2021; Boeing, 2021); an increase in administrative roles, committees, and departments centered around diversity; and an increasing number of available resources on how to write diversity statements for new job or admissions requirements (Brown, 2019; Mahdavi & Brooks, 2021), indicate just a few of the recent organizational controls that are informing recruitment, retention, admissions, and hiring practices. To what extent these organizational controls are effective at promoting authentic diversity through recruitment, retention, and career development is the subject of this panel discussion.

PANEL PRESENTATIONS

Recruitment and Retention in HFE: Our Collective Responsibility

Erin K. Chiou, Ph.D., Arizona State University. In this presentation, I will discuss the context of our 2021 invited white paper, and report on select details from the white paper focusing on the 2018 demographics data. I will review the HFES diversity committee's efforts to improve data collection on diversity and inclusion since the white paper was written,

and present updates based on 2021 member demographic data, and a 2022 inclusion survey (to be administered March 2022). I will discuss why these efforts should not be the result of ad hoc individual service (i.e., volunteer labor) and individual exceptionalism, but that they should be baked into the fabric of society and structurally within the responsible organization.

I will also discuss why recruitment and retention of diverse groups into the HFE profession is the shared responsibility of our larger community, including the universities and programs that recruit and educate our future members, the industries and organizations that recruit and retain HFE professionals in the workforce, and individuals in leadership roles. Organizations and people are not silos, even if it might be convenient to represent them that way. We are interdependent, and part of the same ecological system that many of us are working to ensure will persist across time.

Hiring in Higher Education: A Department Chair's Views on DEI by Design

Richard J. Holden, Ph.D., Indiana University School of Public Health-Bloomington. I am chair of an academic department in a research intensive doctoral degree granting institution. In this role, I am involved in the recruitment, promotion, and retention of teaching, research, and clinical faculty. I have adopted the position that department chairs can and should be "transformative diversity leaders" (Chun & Evans, 2015) capable of achieving *DEI by Design*. Indeed, an effective chair can be more than a peacekeeper or intermediary between faculty and administration. Transformative chairs can contribute leadership, policy making, advocacy (e.g., to higher-rank administrators such as deans and provosts), and decisions regarding the distribution of resources. Department chairs also play substantive roles in faculty and student recruitment, and, perhaps more importantly, the mentoring and guiding of minoritized groups through systems designed and dominated by a White male majority. A particularly transformative chair can also design their department – and the units above or adjacent to it – to have more equitable structures, policies, and practices. For example, I head a schoolwide task force on faculty recruitment and in this way can influence DEI-driven hiring efforts across all the school's departments and administrative roles.

In this panel, I will more thoroughly address and provide advice and insider knowledge about recruiting and developing faculty from underrepresented or marginalized groups. I will draw on scholarly literature, personal experience serving on academic faculty search committees, and leadership work on department efforts such as faculty hiring, as I discuss:

- DEI-driven recruitment strategies and practical how-to advice;
- Evaluating diversity statements of academic faculty job applicants (with advice on do's and don't do's);
- Intentionally designing departmental faculty culture for inclusion and belonging as a proactive approach to promotion and retention;
- Mentoring and guiding hired faculty who bear the added costs of a "minority tax" (Campbell & Rodriguez, 2019);
- Challenges to promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in academic hiring, including oppositional forces, regulatory requirements, and the inertia of centuries of inequality (cf. U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

As a White male, I will also make a few modest remarks on the privileged position of White male "allies" and why it is appropriate but challenging for us to spearhead DEI initiatives (cf. Nunes, 2021).

An International Student's Perspective: Writing and Evaluating the DEI statement for University Admissions

Sourojit Ghosh, Ph.D. Student, University of Washington, Seattle. I am approaching this conversation as an international student, leveraging my personal experiences during the graduate application process, those of prospective international Ph.D. students who met with me in my capacity as a Ph.D. student ambassador, and my undergraduate experience of being a student writing consultant to graduate school applicants.

I will begin with my personal experiences as an international Ph.D. applicant, navigating different universities' requirements for a DEI essay. Through a retrospective account (Duncan, 2004), I will recount situations of being required to write a DEI statement or those where I was exempt from having to provide one, and through anonymized artifacts, I will describe the rationale I was given behind this ask. I will reflect on my own experiences with the various prompts, and conclude with some questions and directions for future exploration on how to better include international applicants' understandings into current framings of DEI statements.

I will then present my experience of supporting and counseling international students' writing DEI statements for Ph.D. applications. I will highlight a mismatch between the DEI statement's intended purpose and the perception of international students, relating anecdotes from students who do not have any experience with the American perspective of diversity, equity, and inclusion. For example, some prospective students have interpreted it as asking for their opinions on social justice issues in the U.S. such as the Black Lives Matter movement. I will also examine universities' guidelines on the evaluative role of the DEI statement in student admission decisions, as well as their proposed criteria for a 'high quality' DEI statement. I will then pose scenarios as I hope to highlight potential mismatches between applicants' perspectives of writing the statement and the processes of review.

Through demonstrative scenarios, I will highlight students' difficulties in succinctly explaining their highly specific and complicated experiences as it pertains to DEI, and the challenge of trying to explain years of lived experiences and cultural contexts within the limited submission criteria. On the other side, I will examine how readers and members of admissions committees interpret such statements, which they are statistically unlikely to be able to personally relate to. I will conclude with questions about improving the DEI statement prompts and composing more diverse admissions committees.

A Conversation about the DEI Essay Prompt in Higher Education Admissions

Yuliana Flores, Ph.D. Student, University of Washington, Seattle. As a second year Ph.D. student I have applied to many things that have required or strongly encouraged writing a diversity essay. Writing this type of essay as part of my application materials to programs became so normal I never bothered to wonder what the purpose was, how it was being evaluated, or why it was required. However, after serving as a Ph.D. ambassador and struggling to give advice to an international student during the fall quarter of 2021, I have begun to critically examine this practice of having students write diversity essays.

The purpose of this presentation is not to give answers but rather to question assumptions about diversity essay prompts, sometimes referred to as a diversity statement. I will situate my comments in my own experiences navigating applications, serving on committees, being an ambassador, and leading a peer group seminar focused on our Ph.D. program's DEI statement (diversity, equity, and inclusion essay prompt).

As part of my critical examination on the practice of diversity essay prompts I have wondered about their purposes in higher education. Part of the discussion will be anchored on the preliminary research I have done on the history of diversity essay prompts, and the history of the diversity essay prompts in my own institution. I will use these two anchors to raise questions such as when did the diversity essay become a requirement and why.

Along this same line of inquiry, I think about the experience of students who write this type of essay. Speaking from personal experience, I know the challenge of writing a diversity essay—finding the "right" experience to share, making sense of the experience, deciding how much content to provide, questioning if the reader might think I am complaining, trusting the reader with my personal story, and somehow turning my story into skills I have gained and can contribute to a particular space (in my case, a graduate program).

Diversity essay prompts vary across institutions and programs, but most tend to ask prospective students to share opportunities or obstacles they have encountered in their academic journey. As I addressed earlier, it is a task that requires students to wrestle with many things. Therefore, when we have the power to request or require prospective students to write diversity essays we should be asking ourselves what responsibilities do we (as application reviewers) have in terms of avoiding unintended consequences and honoring what is submitted. For example, how can we ensure that we do not incentivize people to share painful personal stories? And how should we be guiding each other on ways to evaluate or use the information in the diversity essay responses?

Journeyocracy as an Alternative to Meritocracy

Rod D. Roscoe, Ph.D., Arizona State University. Meritocratic ideologies assume that success is the result of skill, knowledge, and effort, and that apparent success is "evidence" that a person is skilled, knowledgeable, and a hard worker (Guinier, 2015; Liu, 2011). In academia, meritocracy manifests in how we "objectively" evaluate candidates for recruitment, hiring, and promotion based on credentials like degrees, publishing outlets, citation counts, and grants. Such traits and indicators are correlates of success, but they are incomplete. Meritocratic practices and policies ignore the myriad personal, contextual, and cultural factors that influence (or control) whether our talents can ever be manifested as success. Meritocratic ideologies ignore how our journeys are affected by variations in experience, opportunities, obstacles, and luck. By ignoring journeys, meritocracy inequitably rewards existing power and privilege as much as (or more than) actual success (e.g., Au, 2016; Dixon-Román et al, 2013; Guinier, 2015).

A potential counter to meritocratic approaches that *ignore* journeys is to explicitly *acknowledge* and include journeys in our evaluations of applicants and candidates–a "journeyocracy" or "journeyocractic" ideology (Roscoe, 2022). In practice, a journeyocracy might first concretely acknowledge individuals' narratives, experiences, resources, and needs. This process entails recognizing and respecting the diverse *assets* and *funds of knowledge* (Calabrese Barton & Tan, 2009; González et al., 2006) that emerge from these journeys. What unique and powerful perspectives does a person bring to the table? How do these perspectives differ from the status quo and what is already well-represented in the organization? Similarly, we can interpret peoples' achievements within their individual contexts. What have people achieved despite *unmet* needs? And, what outstanding heights will people attain if their needs *were met*? A journeyocracy might explicitly ask whether recruiting, hiring, or promoting an individual may be the very action that begins to meet those needs. It important to note that none of the above "lowers standards" for recruitment or hiring. Rather, *more* criteria are being considered rather than *fewer* criteria. A journeyocracy is an expanded or expansive approach to evaluation whereas meritocracy is very restrictive and limited in vision.

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