



# Faculty Hiring Studies: Understanding the Role of Rubrics, Risk, Merit & Diversity

Damani White-Lewis, Ph.D. & KerryAnn O'Meara, Ph.D.  
University of Maryland, College Park

## Background

Increasing concerns regarding the vitality and diversity of the professoriate have prompted new study of faculty hiring practices, policies, and paradigms (Liera, 2019; O'Meara et al., 2020; Posselt et al., 2020; White-Lewis, 2020, 2021). Yet ethnographic observations of hiring processes are rare, especially across different disciplines and institutional types.

In this poster, we report on the four most prominent areas that our emerging AGEP research on hiring and prior published work suggests lead to non-inclusive searches in STEM fields. These areas form the basis for our three primary studies:

1. Ethnographic study of candidate evaluation & perceived risk
2. Experimental survey assessing areas of bias and intervention
3. Longitudinal data analysis examining popular hiring myths

## Methodology

### Literature Review:

- Narrative & Integrative Literature Review (Baumeister & Leary, 1997)  
Key criteria for literature inclusion:
  - a. Studies, articles, and reports on faculty hiring processes
  - b. Guidebooks on search committee best practices
  - c. Interdisciplinary literature on risk (i.e. behavioral economics), rubrics (i.e. educational and social psychology), and identity (i.e. critical studies)

### Preliminary Aggregate Data from Five Search Committee Ethnographic Observations

- Searches from three different universities
  - a. 1 Psychology Search
  - b. 2 Engineering Searches
  - c. 2 Biology Search

## Contact Us

### Principal Investigator

Dr. KerryAnn O'Meara

### Postdoctoral Scholar:

Dr. Damani White-Lewis

### Research Associates:

Julia Anderson  
Dawn Culpepper  
Lindsey Templeton



References available upon request.  
Contact: dkwlewis@umd.edu

## Findings

Area	Literature	Examples from Observation Data
Merit marginalized	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Settles and Buchanan (2019) describe this as epistemic exclusion, or "the perception of certain scholars and types of research as lacking value."</li><li>• Hiring committees position research topics or methods centered on minoritized population as "not central in the field," "too narrow", or "not impactful" unless mitigated by prestige.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• "The people who do that kind of (<i>de-identified research descriptor</i>) stuff are often in a teaching faculty position or some other position that isn't tenure-track"</li><li>• CM1: "I don't really like her approach...seems outdated." CM2: "But it was published in (Top tier journal) so someone thinks its good. CM1: "Oh! Well that supersedes what I think then"</li></ul>
Risk aversion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Many decisions are made to mitigate perceived risk, even if they avert diversity.</li><li>• Examples include (1) making fewer offers to women candidates due to their partner-status and perceptions of "immovability" (Rivera, 2017), or (2) not making certain offers when candidates are perceived as too competitive due to their qualifications and/or identity (White-Lewis, 2020).</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• "If they're interested in Duke or UCSD, you wait...but if they say Kansas State then you give them 2 weeks. You gotta play the game, but they won't always give you that data. Who wants to be in a corn field?"</li><li>• "They'll get their next R01 and will leave for a higher ranked place."</li></ul>
Inconsistently applying evaluation criteria to candidates throughout the hiring process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Few searches create consistent lines between stipulated preferred qualifications in the ad, the criteria to make selection decisions, and final candidate selection (O'Meara, 2020).</li><li>• White-Lewis (2020) found that regardless of explicit qualifications in the ad, faculty still prioritized credentials that would maximize perceived status and prestige over what matched the ad.</li><li>• Although rubrics are increasingly used in candidate evaluation, many still lack empirical research on rubrics to combat biases and mental shortcuts during evaluation (Jonsson &amp; Svingby, 2007).</li><li>• Rubrics are less frequently used in other less-structured hiring settings, such as job talks, and meetings with students, departmental faculty, and administrators.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• "If someone is really stellar and you like what you see on paper then they're that good, you don't have to call, you can bring them in."</li><li>• "Even though they don't really fit, could be interesting to expand the department."</li><li>• "When you see what else is out there, it really makes (Candidate 1) look good. Change my score of (Candidate 1) to +1"</li><li>• "(Candidate 1) seemed like a delightful colleague over dinner. (Candidate 2) was also pleasant but was uh, self-centered? Self-absorbed? There's a subtle difference."</li></ul>
Satisficing and inconsistency applying race and gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Many hiring committees purport equity in their process, yet consider identity in troubling and contradictory ways.</li><li>• Faculty satisfice when evaluating the diversity of the pool: using gender diversity to "adequately meet criteria," and suffice for a lack of racial diversity (and vice-versa).</li><li>• White-Lewis (2020) describes a "color-convenience" perspective, wherein faculty consider identity when convenient (e.g. generating a diverse pool to avoid administrative delay), but not in ways that advance equity (e.g. during review).</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• "Getting a 5/5 in the diversity statement shouldn't require as much discussion as getting a 5 in like, a research area."</li><li>• The diversity of the pool is certainly disappointing, but we can't control that. We can't control the number of Ph.D. graduates out there"</li><li>• "Lets just see what we get and then decide whether we have to cast a wider net. I just want to focus on qualifications - if we go to (Associate Dean) and its not diverse enough we'll have to go back."</li></ul>