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### Equitable Hiring Policy in Higher Education at the University of Montana

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Equitable Hiring Policy in Higher Education at the University of Montana

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**Introduction:**

The University of Montana (UM) is home to around 550 academic and administrative staff, faculty and professional positions and over 10,000 students. The University of Montana has a mission of, "...building and sustaining diverse communities," yet the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles at UM has come into question. Despite over a century of women being denied access to full-time work and being excluded from most positions in the public administration sector because of their gender, "...women now make up slightly more than half of the labor force, but it is not the top half." (Stivers 32). As full-time staff members on the University of Montana campus, we have observed leadership positions being filled by a disproportionate number of men. There is a lack of standardized recruitment and hiring procedures with equity specifically in mind. For these reasons, the proposal of an Equitable Hiring Policy (EHP) at the University of Montana will confront the recruitment and hiring process and make specific procedural recommendations to create more equitable opportunities for women to professionally advance into leadership positions at the University of Montana.

At the University of Montana we have seen disproportionate opportunity for women to advance through leadership than male professionals on campus. For example, "Of the 11 dean positions at UM, six are currently held by interims. Of those six, three are held by women. All permanent dean positions are held by men." (Slanger). Alternately, when the University fills a position as "interim" or "temporary," women are disproportionately given these roles until, with notable regularity, a male is hired to fill the position permanently. For example, since becoming a college in 1991, the Davidson Honors College at the University of Montana has had four permanent male deans, and between each, there have been four interim dean positions all held women (UM Davidson Honors College). In addition, there has never been a woman as

permanent President of the University of Montana; only an interim position, whose term was held for the shortest amount of time in UM presidential history, of less than one year (UM Office of the President).

Research has demonstrated that leadership roles have historically been disproportionately appointed to men for reasons like women are not fit for the job because of their inherent femininity and softer skills. Alhaundry & Tower state, “the socially constructed masculine images of leadership make it much more difficult for women, who are viewed as feminine, to shatter the glass ceilings and walls that keep them in lower-echelon positions and occupations, respectively.” (A & T 134). Furthermore, these bureaucratic organizations are a modern replacement of patriarchal traditional models, exemplified in institutions such as in higher education. According to *Inside Higher Ed*, “Only 30 percent of college presidents in the U.S. are women, the number a dismal five percent for women of color. On institutional governing boards, men outnumber women by more than two to one. Women represent less than half of all chief academic officers. As for professors, only 32 percent of full faculty tenure positions are held by women.” (Lincoln). These are just a few of the reasons why we propose the Equitable Hiring Policy to address these issues.

The overall goal of the Equitable Hiring Policy is to standardize hiring and recruitment practices to promote the most subjective look at the hiring process. With equitable hiring practices in mind, UM will continue its work towards overcoming the observed underrepresentation of women to promote equal and active representation in positions such as Dean, President, and other higher level administrative roles. To accomplish this goal, the EHP mandates a four-part process. The first step of the process is that each job posting is approved

through gender neutral job postings; the second step is a mandatory implicit bias training for search committee members; the third step is at least one diversity representative to be present on each hiring committee; and finally, the fourth step is that each candidate's application materials are redacted to withhold gender (through photos and/or names, age, race or ethnic backgrounds, and political and religious associations. In the following paragraphs we will present current policies and legislation, details of the EHP, and potential views of various stakeholders impacted by this policy.

**Background:**

Currently, the University of Montana has a non-discrimination hiring policy. "As an Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action employer, we encourage applications from minorities, veterans, and women" (Human Resource Services 2019). According to this Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action statement, potential applicants of protected classes are encouraged to apply and will not be discriminated against in the hiring process. This being said, what is stated in policy is not necessarily the reality applicants are facing. Although there are good intentions with the current policies, according to interviews conducted, there is still quite a ways to go.

As a result of this, in the last academic year (2017-2018), the University of Montana recruitment office has begun to make an effort to better implement more trainings and practices that promote diversity throughout the recruitment and hiring processes. The Provost's Office has asked search committee members to take in-person implicit bias training before starting meetings. However, we have found that there is still no "standard" to these processes and have found some grey area in these trainings and operations. To delve deeper into this issue, we

conducted four interviews with human resource professionals, academic administrators, professionals on the UM Diversity Council, and the Provost's Office. For example, in an interview with a UM campus professional, acknowledging personal bias before starting a search minimizes the chance of that bias being present during review of application materials (Interview 1, 2019). By requiring hiring committee members to take implicit bias training, the hope is that they are less biased during the remaining steps of the process. This is a foundational step of the proposed Equitable Hiring Policy.

The software platform used by University of Montana hiring committees is not blind, meaning the search committee may receive personal or identifying information that could link applicants to a protected class. Introducing personal information into the search process can create bias leading to the continuation of promoting men into high-ranking leadership positions over women. Sabrina Spagsdorf described this phenomena as "The Glass Slipper Effect" which is based on the Glass Ceiling that describes keeping women from advancing professionally, "yet it refers to the tendency to see different personality traits as inherently masculine or feminine, making different genders feel that certain job roles aren't the right fit." (Spangsdorf). The Equitable Hiring Policy would challenge this unequal bureaucratic pyramid, to create more equal and equitable professional opportunities. Paula Short, UM spokesperson, noted that, "the 'homogeneity' of Montana's demography could be a dissuader to diverse candidates and an obstacle for recruitment. But, she said, she believes Missoula provides a more unique demographic, which could become an attractant to potential applicants and UM should try to emphasize the appeal more" (Slanger).

**Policy Details:**

As stated above, the Equitable Hiring Policy has a four-part mandated process to pursue the goal of equal hiring and recruitment practices. Step one involves the use of gender decoder software to create gender neutral job postings. This category breaks down into two further categories of posted job descriptions and “blind” hiring. First, when posting a job description it is important to note the language used. Often times, and perhaps unintentionally, job postings will use gendered language. This means the language used in the recruitment is tailored towards traditional personality types or characteristics of a certain gender. As interviewee 1 discussed, when job postings demonstrate masculine language women are 40% less likely to apply for that job over a posting that is gender neutral or feminine. This being said, to encourage the most gender diverse group of applicants, the EHP suggests using free gender decoder software on each job posting to ensure neutralized language.

Gender decoding software such as, “Gender Decoder for Job Ads” engine, has the ability to analyze specific words and overall language used in a job posting and then gives a gendered percentage rating. The percentages then fall into categories of masculine, neutral, or feminine. After the write-up receives a score, the software provides suggestions for ways to use different language to create a more gender neutral posting. Gender decoder software is free, web-based, easy to use, and provides instant results for job description creators. In this way search committees will receive a more diverse candidate pool before the hiring process truly begins. According to a UM campus newspaper interview, “Paula Short, UM spokesperson, said a more diverse faculty starts with a more diverse application pool. She said UM needs to make an effort to encourage women to apply in the advertisement stage, part of the goal of the gender decoder.” (Slanger).

The second step of the EHP mandates implicit bias training for hiring committees. Each new job recruitment calls for a search committee that includes one chair and a few members. Search committees are made up of university employees, both staff and faculty, and students who have come from a variety of backgrounds and face a different organizational reality. As a result, each has an implicit bias. If implicit bias is not acknowledged and accounted for before the beginning steps of the hiring process it can result in the underrepresentation of certain classes of people such as women. Training will consist of in-person or online sessions that will assist members in identifying what their implicit bias is and how they can actively work to avoid it during the hiring process. There are simple and accessible ways to take an implicit bias test to be aware of one's own biases. Harvard University has a web-based module that is free and easy to use, and has been used by search committee members at the University of Montana, but has not been a requirement. This is why the EHP proposes mandatory training for all members of a search committee.

The second category of the Equitable Hiring Policy that will ensure a more equitable hiring process is an initial blind application screening. As stated above, UM hiring software does not redact information such as names or resume photos and this could potentially bring in bias to the hiring process. In recent high-level searches such as the Vice President of Operations & Finance and various Dean positions administrative support personnel have been required to manually redact information such as names or other identifying information that could link applicants to a protected class. Although this sounds easy in discussion, it is extremely labor intensive for administrative staff. For each application, administrative staff in the Human Resource Department must search, by hand, for these names and words that associate applicants



with a protected status. After the words are identified they use a tool in Adobe Acrobat Pro to redact the information which leaves giant white out areas where the redacted information once was. A blind hiring process creates an environment in which applicants are viewed for their skills and knowledge only in the initial stages such as application review. This will encourage a more diverse group of applicants ultimately leading to a diverse group of leaders on campus. As demonstrated, depending on the number of applicants, which are sometimes upwards of 50 applications ranging from 5-20 pages per application, this process can take an impractical amount of time. To date, there is no software on the market that currently redacts the type of information necessary to be considered blind hiring. For this reason, the EHP suggests redacting information only for high-level type searches at this time.

Finally, the EHP suggests having a diversity representative on every search committee, regardless of the level of search. A diversity representative is an employee at UM who has received specialized diversity training and sits as an additional member of a search committee to advocate for diversity. As an additional member of the committee, the diversity representative will focus on advocating for those applicants with a less traditional career or education path. As discussed in our interview, some applicants have resumes that show they did not received their degrees one after the other or they took time away from education to pursue a career. This less traditional path can, at times, cause these applicants to be overlooked in the initial review process. If the diversity representative feels that a candidate is being overlooked for reasons such as this, they are trained to bring the conversations back and to help committee members keep an open mind. Having the additional member trained in diversity will promote a more equitable

search process and ultimately lead to a more diverse group of employees. Overall, the Equitable Hiring Policy is a sensible compliment to the current hiring practices at UM.

Comparing the University of Montana to other universities around the United States, the University of Washington (UW) is similar in geographic location, student body, and in academics. The University of Washington's Human Resources Department equips its search committees with a "Diversity Toolkit," that includes policies, support, and resources to ensure a fair and equitable search for positions at their University . Also included in the Diversity Toolkit is a "Diverse Staff Hiring Checklist," that encourages employers to critically think about the job posting they are writing, who they are targeting, and even requests that applicants include a "Diversity Statement" as part of their application (University of Washington). Applicants are then reviewed by the committee via an assessment rubric that includes diversity as a priority to ensure the most holistic review of applicants. Due to the similarity between UW and UM, there is opportunity for the University of Montana to pivot to a more holistic look at how searches are designed, implemented, and offers made to new employees centered around the value of diversity in the campus workplace.

**Stakeholder Impact:**

Proposal of the EHP will inevitably have stakeholders who are in support or opposition to the policy. The most notable supporter on the UM campus would be the Diversity Advisory Council. The mission of this council is "...to enhance diversity by recognizing and embracing the differences in age, ideas and perspectives, disabilities, creed, ethnicity, gender identity, gender expression, veteran status, national origin, race, religious and spiritual beliefs, sex, sexual orientation, and the socioeconomic and geographic composition of its faculty, administrative

professionals, staff, and students” (Diversity Advisory Council). The EHP is in direct alignment with the mission of the Diversity Advisory Council which will give the policy a strong ally on campus. Another ally of the EHP will be the UM Hiring and Recruitment Office. Through our interviews we discovered that they are working to create a more equitable hiring process and the proposed policy will compliment their current efforts.

The strongest opponents of the EHP will be the overworked administrative staff tasked with these additional duties placed on them during the recruitment and hiring process. All members of a search committee already volunteer their time to serve and adding additional tasks such as redacting identifying information can add to the stress and workload of administrative personnel.

**Conclusion:**

As demonstrated, the hiring process at the University of Montana has room for growth and change that can positively impact diversity in leadership positions. Through campus interviews, comparison analysis, and first-hand accounts on the University of Montana campus, we have observed a need to create concrete policies and expectations for hiring at UM. The Equitable Hiring Policy is the solution for a complicated issue that the University of Montana is struggling to manager. Creating an equitable hiring process will promote diversity at all levels and will ultimately lead to a diverse group of high-ranking leaders at a premier higher education institution such as the University of Montana. We hope our findings will be taken by recommendation to the University of Montana Human Resources and will ultimately become a standard for hiring processes.

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