SES Hiring Handbook

Preface

In 2021 a group of graduate students formed the JEDI (justice, equity, diversity, & inclusion) committee in the department of integrative biology. In February 2022, the Rainbow Diversity Institute (RDI) was hired to support the committee by narrowing down the focus of the project. In collaboration with RDI, we decided the area of focus for the project would be conditions of employment including job ads, interviewing, and onboarding. As such, this handbook will serve as a research-based resource for those hiring undergraduate research assistants. It is written for the School of Environmental Science at the University of Guelph and may be adapted as needed.

The Ontario Human Rights Code (OHRC) prohibits discrimination against people based on the following protected grounds:

- Age
- Ancestry, colour, race
- Citizenship
- Ethnic origin
- Place of origin
- Creed
- Disability
- Family status
- Marital status (including single status)
- Gender identity, gender expression
- Receipt of public assistance (in housing only)
- Record of offences (in employment only)
- Sex (including pregnancy and breastfeeding)
- Sexual orientation

Many students fall under one or more of these protected grounds and as such, policies in this handbook fall not only under equity, diversity, and inclusion but also human rights. Therefore, a human rights and EDI lens are used throughout this handbook.

Table of Contents

Handbook Overview

This handbook will walk you through the process and provide templates and examples for each step of hiring for Research Assistant positions using a Human Rights and EDI lens.

An overview of the suggested equitable hiring process is as follows:

1. **Recruiting**
   a. Form Hiring Committee
   b. Create list of required and preferred skills
   c. Create Job Advertisement
   d. Post Job Advertisement
   e. *Email all students on the Future Notice list with the link to the job posting*
2. **Shortlisting**
   a. Anonymize applications
   b. Enter required and preferred skills in the Cover Letter & Resume Shortlisting Matrix
   c. Evaluate applications using the Cover Letter & Resume Shortlisting Matrix
   d. Select candidates to be interviewed from completed matrix
3. **Interviewing**
   a. Create list of interview questions
   b. Enter selected questions into interview rubric
   c. Send candidates questions and schedule before the interview
   d. Interview selected candidates
   e. Notify candidates of decision results
   f. Notify candidates who did not get an interview
   g. Notify candidates who interviewed but did not get the position, with feedback
   h. Notify candidate(s) chosen for the position, with feedback
   i. Create Future Notice Email List
4. **Onboarding**
   a. Create onboarding document
   b. Distribute onboarding document

Recruiting

Recruiting: Steps

1. Form Hiring Committee
2. Create list of required and preferred skills
3. Create Job Advertisement
4. Post Job Advertisement
5. Email all student on the Future Notice list with the link to the job posting

Recommendations

➔ Job Advertisements should be created by a hiring committee, not an individual
  ◆ Establish a hiring committee to ensure job requirements are created utilizing different perspectives (Woods and Tharakan 2021).

➔ Intentional inclusive language within Job Advertisement.
  ◆ Important first step in setting the tone for inclusion and equity for all potential candidates (Woods and Tharakan 2021, Rainbow Diversity Institute).
  ◆ Beyond affecting the diversity of your candidate pool, job advertisements are an opportunity to ensure consistency throughout and set the stage for an equitable hiring process (Collier and Zhang 2016).

➔ List job requirements as concrete skills.
  ◆ Helps candidates determine their suitability for a role and helps employers identify a wider range of individuals who meet the requirements (Rainbow Diversity Institute, Workplace Equity, 2022).
  ◆ The hiring committee should together decide on a list of required and preferred skills for the research assistant position in their lab. The skills chosen will then be used throughout the duration of the hiring process as a basis of assessment.

➔ Post Job Advertisements on an online platform (Rainbow Diversity Institute).

Recruiting Examples and Templates

Examples: Skills

Below is a list of skills commonly utilized in research assistant positions and more generally in lab settings that could be selected for a basis of evaluation for the entire hiring process.

Interpersonal Skills	Collaboration	Teamwork Leadership Delegation
	Communication	Active Listening Verbal communication Written communication Presentation
Professional Skills	Independence	Initiative Self-motivation Proactivity Commitment to continuous learning
	Problem Solving	Task prioritization Managing resources Resourcefulness Adaptability
	Project Management	Project Planning and Scheduling Project Documentation Time Management
	Organization	Attention to detail Strategizing Prioritization Documentation

Analytical Skills	Data Analysis and Statistics	Statistical analysis Database Management Excel R (with packages like dplyr)
	Research	Laboratory Skills Critical Thinking Curiosity Record-keeping

Job Advertisements: Where to Post

Below is a list of websites suggested for posting your job advertisement:

- ➔ University of Guelph - Experience Guelph
  - ◆ Directly through University.
- ➔ Indeed
  - ◆ Highly used.
- ➔ Guelph Today Job Listings
  - ◆ General Guelph reach.
- ➔ Handshake
  - ◆ Student targeted.

Template: General Job Advertisement

Job Summary	1. **Job Summary** ➔ Overall objective of the position 2. **Lab Summary** ➔ Overview of lab 　◆ Lab Goals (overall research objective) 　◆ Lab Strategies (how objective is achieved) ➔ Lab website link 3. **The job** ➔ Tasks 　◆ Name the main tasks expected in the role and for each explain: 　　● How it relates to the Lab Strategies & Lab Goals ➔ Include information on: 　◆ Equipment used & notice of any potentially dangerous materials or procedures 4. **Required and preferred skill list** ➔ Refer to skills chosen
Job Location (City)	
Hours Per Week	
Salary or Wage	
Additional Information	
Expected Start Date	
Application Deadline	Consistent set amount of time, ex. 2 weeks.
Requests for Accommodations	List accommodations available

How to apply / Contact Information	If not directly through site: Send Email with: 1. CV and 2. Resume Email subject as: "Research Assistant Application - [*Name*]" To this email address: [*email address of hiring committee member*]
FOR APPLICANT: Please include the below information in your application email.	
Would you like to be notified by email of future open positions?	Y/N Email:

Generate email list of students interested in being notified of the next position opening. When the next position opens, all students on this list should be notified via email.

Template: Job Ad for Experience Guelph

For easy input to: https://www.experienceguelph.ca/home.htm

Job Title		
Job Summary		
	Required Skills	
	Preferred Skills	
How to apply / Contact Information		
Job Location (City)		
Hours Per Week		
Salary or Wage		
Additional Information		
Expected Start Date		
Application Deadline		
Remove After	(Use a minimum consistent amount of time, for example, two weeks)	

Template: Email to Notify Previous Applicants of Position Opening

Hello [*Applicant Preferred Name*],

I am reaching out on behalf of the [*Lab Name*] as you have expressed interest in being notified of future available positions. We have opened a new research assistant position to which you can apply starting today, [*Date*] until [*Job Advertisement Closing Date ie. 2 weeks later*] on [*link to Job Advertisement/Posting*].

Thank you for your interest in joining our lab,

[*Name*] & [*Lab Name*]

Shortlisting

Shortlisting: Steps

1. Anonymize applications
2. Enter required and preferred skills in the Cover Letter & Resume Shortlisting Matrix
3. Evaluate applications using the Cover Letter & Resume Shortlisting Matrix
4. Select candidates to be interviewed from completed matrix
   a. Revisit applicants who self-identified as being from equity-deserving groups who came close to being included on the shortlist.

Recommendations

➔ Candidate name removal
   ◆ Each candidate's name should be removed from their application and assigned a candidate number to be used for the duration of the shortlisting process. This can be done by creating a spreadsheet with the candidate names and assigned numbers to refer back to when shortlisting is completed.
   ◆ Removing candidates names and personal information reduces implicit and explicit bias towards equity deserving groups (Rainbow Diversity Institute).

➔ Hiring Committee
   ◆ Establish a resume-screening panel in which multiple individuals assess each candidate profile to ensure candidates are evaluated from different perspectives (Woods and Tharakan 2021).
   ◆ To avoid conformity bias, each hiring committee member should submit their feedback about each candidate before discussion about candidates within the committee.

➔ Shortlisting Matrix Rubric
   ◆ Shortlisting matrix rubrics provide a standardized way to evaluate candidates'

cover letters and resumes once the names have been removed.

➔ Make decisions in batches, not individually (Gregory 2020).

➔ Revisit candidates' applications who self-identified as being from an equity-deserving group who came close to being on the shortlist (Gregory 2020).
  ◆ This reduces the possibility that bias results in members of underrepresented groups being excluded from the shortlist.

Shortlisting Examples and Templates

⊞ Example of Cover Letter & Resume Shortlisting Matrix

Candidate Name Removal

Candidate name removal can be done manually or with use of resume name removal tools and cleaned up as needed.

Below is a list of resources for resume removal of names and other identifying information:

➔ Resume Redactor | Affinda
  ◆ Free, web-based, easy to use, provides instant results.

Template: Shortlisting Matrix Rubric

Shortlisting matrix rubrics provide a standardized way to evaluate candidates' cover letters and resumes once the names have been removed. Below is a link to an example template for a Research Assistant position in an ecosystem ecology lab.

Once skills are chosen, expectations for each skill should be established so scores are comparable.

How to evaluate skills

1 = An incomplete answer that missed the key point of the question
2 = An incomplete answer that had good elements but was significantly flawed
3 = A convincing but flawed answer that falls short because of problems with either the content or breadth of the answer
4 = An ideal answer that understood the question and answered it fully while indicating high competence

Example use of Matrix with 40 candidates:
1. One lab member removes names from cover letters and resumes.
2. Two lab members score the cover letters and resumes using the Shortlisting Matrix Rubric.
3. Sum the two scores for each candidate. Sort by value.
4. Professor scores the top 15 candidates. Add these values to the sum for these candidates.
5. Re-sort the top 15 candidates by value.
6. Select the top five candidates to be interviewed.

Template: Interview Offer Email

Hi *[Applicant Preferred Name]*,

I am reaching out on behalf of the *[Lab Group]* regarding the Research Assistant position. After reviewing your application, we would be excited for the opportunity to discuss your application further and get to know you more.

We would like to schedule a 15-20 minute interview next week. Would you be available during any of the following days between *[available times; ex. 9-12 am]*:

➔ *[Date]*
➔ *[Date]*
➔ *[Date]*

Thanks again for your application, and we are excited to talk with you soon.

We are committed to providing any accommodation requests for the interview. Requests can be sent to this email at any time.

- *[Hiring Committee member name]* & *[Lab Name]*

Template: Interview Rejection Email

Hi *[Applicant Preferred Name]*,

I am reaching out on behalf of the *[Lab Group]* regarding the Research Assistant position. With careful consideration, we have selected another candidate for the position.

We greatly appreciate the time and effort spent throughout this application process. Thank you for your interest in the [*Lab Name*] and we wish you the best of luck in your future endeavours.

- *[Hiring Committee member name]* & *[Lab Name]*

Interviewing

Interviewing: Steps

1. Create list of interview questions
2. Enter selected questions into interview rubric
3. Send candidates questions and schedule before the interview
4. Interview selected candidates
5. Notify candidates of decision results
   a. Notify candidates who did not get an interview
   b. Notify candidates who interviewed but did not get the position, with feedback
   c. Notify candidate chosen for the position, with feedback
6. Create Future Notice Email List

Recommendations

→ Prior to the interview, provide candidates with interview questions, process, schedule, and expectations.
   ◆ Providing candidates with interview questions in advance gives adequate time for preparation as on-the-spot questions can cause unnecessary challenges for neurodiverse candidates (Alexis-Martin and Leigh 2023; Caruso et al. 2020).

→ Structured and standardized interviews.
   ◆ Structured and standardized interviews are likely to produce higher levels of validity than other types of interviews (Campion, Campion, and Hudson 1994; Pulakos and Schmitt 1995).
   ◆ An Interview Assessment Tool is valuable to the interview process as it will help structure your thoughts and evaluations of candidates in a way that is fair and efficient.

→ Stick to the outline.

◆ To avoid affinity bias when interviewing, stick to the outline and do not initiate unplanned conversations with candidates over non-work related activities, experiences, or preferences (Woods and Tharakan 2021).

➔ Expectation of in-person attendance.
◆ The expectation of in-person attendance for interviews can introduce bias and as such, interviews should take place within normal working hours, offered remotely or in person, and should not include social activities beyond the interview (Alexis-Martin and Leigh 2023).

➔ Hiring Committee
◆ Schedule interviews and follow-up discussions with a hiring committee rather than one-on-one.
◆ It is recommended to have each interviewer/hiring committee member to schedule in not only time for the interview, but time before and after (Woods and Tharakan 2021; Caruso et al. 2020).
◆ This ensures your hiring process is as consistent and structured as possible and that feedback is recorded while it is still fresh in mind. An easy tactic to implement is to block off ~15 minutes before and after each interview to allow for prep and feedback time.

➔ Offer feedback to each candidate who was interviewed.
◆ Can improve hiring committee accountability

Interviewing Examples and Templates

⊞ Interview Schedule, Rubric, & Question Bank

Examples: Interview Questions

The first step of the interview process is choosing interview questions to enter into the Interview Assessment Tool. Interview questions can be written or choosen from the following curated list of Research Assistant position-relevant questions. Interview question selection can be guided by the already decided upon skills, choosing an interview question to address each skill.

Opening
What made you decide to apply for this position? Describe what interests you about the research going on in this lab. What do you like the most about research, and what do you find the most challenging? What skill sets do you think you would bring to the research assistant position? After learning about this opportunity, what made you take the next steps to apply?

Interpersonal Skills
Collaboration
What steps have you taken to promote a positive team culture and morale? Describe a time when you needed to work as part of a team to get a job done, and the team functioned very effectively. Describe a time when you had to support others in a team. Describe a team experience you found rewarding. Describe a time when you worked to build a sense of commitment and ownership in a group, and you shared or delegated responsibilities.
Communication
Describe a significant piece of written communication that you completed and how you went about the completion. Describe a time in which you had to use written communication skills in order to get an important point across. Describe a time when you recognized that others weren't grasping what you were saying or writing.

Personal Skills
Motivation / Values
Tell me about your proudest professional accomplishment. What motivates you to perform your job to the best of your abilities? Among people you've worked with, who do you admire and why?
Independence
Describe a time when you undertook an independent project. Describe a time when you recognized an opportunity and acted on it. Describe a time when you worked independently to complete a goal. Tell us about a time you had to solve a problem on your own. What does 'independent work' mean to you?
Problem Solving
Describe a situation in which you identified a problem and evaluated alternatives to make a recommendation or decision. Describe a situation when you had to modify an existing plan or otherwise had to change direction in response to a changing situation. Describe a time when you completed a complex task or project.
Project Management
Describe an occasion when you had to prepare in advance for a meeting or project. Describe an occasion when you needed to consider several possible scenarios when planning.

Describe a time you were part of a team project working to achieve the project goals within given constraints.

Describe a time when you planned, implemented, and/or monitored a project.

Organization

Describe a situation where it was especially important for you to correctly interpret and apply a policy or follow a procedure.

Describe an assignment where it was very important that a work product you were responsible for was accurate.

Describe a situation where you utilized organizational skills and strategies.

Describe a situation where that required a number of things to be done at the same time. How did you handle it? What was the result?

What are some organizational methods you feel are effective?

Analytical Skills

Lab Skills

Describe the project or situation that best demonstrates your analytical abilities.

Describe skills you have built in a laboratory setting.

How do you ensure you work safely in a lab?

What lab equipment do you have experience working with?

What is your favourite type of lab work and why?

Data Analysis and Statistics

Describe a time when you had to analyze information and make a recommendation.

Describe an experience you have with data analysis and statistics.

Describe a situation in which you needed to carefully analyze and interpret information. Describe the project or situation that best demonstrates your analytical abilities. What was your role?

Research
Describe a time when you had to plan a significant project. Describe a situation where you had to set clearly defined objectives. What is the most important thing you have learned from your academic experiences about research? Tell us about a time when you had to analyze information to make a recommendation. Tell us about a time you were able to identify key or underlying issues in a complex situation.

Closing
Is there anything else you want to tell us about yourself or your qualifications that you feel you haven't had a chance to highlight yet? Do you have any questions about the role or the lab? Describe what you see as your strengths that apply to a research assistant position.

Template: Interview Assessment Tool

Interview Assessment Tool				
Candidate: Role: Interviewer(s): Date:				
Skills	**Question**	**Level 3 Expectations**	**Rating on 1-4 scale**	**Comments**
Opening / General Skills				
Time management				
Teamwork				
Communication				
Analytical				
Adaptability				
Closing / Opportunity to discuss any topics they haven't had a change to yet.				
Strengths	Opportunities for growth		Other notes	

Template: Interview Schedule

Adapted from (Woods and Tharakan 2021).

Interview Component	Actions	30-minute Interview	60-minute interview
Interviewer Preparation	1. Review job posting and interview question bank 2. Create a list of questions & predetermined probing questions 3. Familiarize yourself with questions and script 4. Review & customize interview assessment tool as needed 5. Review candidate's application materials	20-30 minutes before interview	20-30 minutes before interview
Opening/ Introduction	1. Introduce yourself and allow candidate to do the same 2. Go over interview schedule	3 minutes	5 minutes
Explanation of role	1. Clarify the need for the role and how it relates to your lab 2. Emphasize the key functions and responsibilities of the position 3. Briefly describe your lab culture if you feel there is time	4 minutes	5-7 minutes
Questions	1. Ask questions in intended order 2. Take notes to refer to when completing assessment tool later	16 minutes	30 minutes
Candidate Questions	1. Give the candidate time to ask questions	5 minutes	15 minutes
Closing/exit	1. Thank the candidate for their time 2. Explain the timeline and next steps	2 minutes	2 minutes
Interviewer Evaluation	1. Thoroughly fill out the assessment tool 2. Write down any remaining thoughts and impressions	15 minutes after interview	15 minutes after interview

Template: Position Rejection Email

Hello *[Applicant Preferred Name]*,

I am contacting you on behalf of the [Lab Name] regarding your interview for the Research Assistant position. With careful consideration, we have selected another candidate for the position.

Does the candidate have the needed experience? (Yes / No)
Why? (Explain in short paragraph form)

Use a short paragraph to describe your experience with the candidate and what stood out to you about them.

We greatly appreciate the time and effort spent throughout this application process. Thank you for your interest in the [*Lab Name*] and we wish you the best of luck in your future endeavours.

-[Lab Member Name] & [*Lab Name*]

Template: Position Acceptance Email

Hello *[Applicant Preferred Name]*,

I am contacting you on behalf of the *[Lab Group]* regarding your interview for the Research Assistant position. With careful consideration, you have been selected to fill the position.

Use a short paragraph to describe your experience with the candidate and what stood out to you about them.

-[Lab Member Name] & [*Lab Name*]

Onboarding

Onboarding: Steps

1. Create new Research Assistant onboarding document
2. Distribute onboarding document
3. Optional: Assign an experienced mentor to inform new Research Assistant of informal processes

Recommendations

→ Formalize the onboarding process
  ◆ New lab member onboarding document

→ Assign a lab member as a mentor
  ◆ Cultivates relationships and provides guidance (Woods and Tharakan 2021).

→ Lab Feedback
  ◆ Consider what feedback is most important to you and your lab, seek this out formally (Woods and Tharakan 2021).

→ Reflect on what worked and what did not work and revise the process for the future hires.
  ◆ The hiring process should continue to evolve as you gain experience and reflect on strategies that worked or that can be improved.

Template: New Research Assistant Onboarding Document

Refer back to your Job Advertisement to help fill out this Onboarding Template.

New Research Assistant Onboarding Document	
Lab Summary	→ Overview of lab 　　◆ Lab Goals 　　◆ Lab Research Strategies → Lab website link
Lab Members	*Here list all members of the lab, their roles, and what they are working on.* *For example, fill out this template for each lab member:* Lab Member: Position: Project: Email:
Research Assistant Position Summary	→ Overall objective of the position
What you will be working on: Specific Tasks	→ Specific Tasks 　　◆ Name the specific tasks expected in the position and for each explain: 　　　　● How it relates to the Lab Strategies & Lab Goals 　　◆ *Provide SOPs for relevant Laboratory Procedures*
Your Hours & Compensation	*Hours per week:* *Pay per hour:*
Online Safety Training Courses:	SES HR will be sending you a detailed email regarding confirmation of your appointment with your required forms and online safety training courses. Below is a summary. Please find below instructions on how to register, then take the mandatory online safety training courses (WHMIS, Worker Safety, and Lab Safety).

	1. Link to EHS online registration: https://www.uoguelph.ca/ehs/courses/index.cfm? 1. After 48 business hours of registering with EHS: The relevant courses should show up in your COURSELINK: A) Please visit the Courselink website here: https://courselink.uoguelph.ca/shared/login/login.html B) Please select the orange 'Login' button. Your login details are your UG central login account details. C) Once logged in: You should be able to see the following courses on your screen: ● WHMIS; ● Lab Safety; ● Worker Health and Safety Awareness. Highly Recommended Training: ● Principles of Belonging: Anti-Oppression & Anti-Racism This training module provides core principles to foster more inclusive spaces and create an authentic sense of belonging for all campus community members. ● Positive Space Project is a training program for faculty, students and staff to increase awareness and support of the LGBTQ2SIA+ community at the U of G and beyond. ● Security Awareness To improve the University of Guelph's community's awareness of important Information Security topics such as Phishing, Malware, Passwords, etc., CCS has partnered with SANS to provide Faculty and Staff with a great learning environment. If you need any assistance with CourseLink, please email courselink@uoguelph.ca
Resources/files you need access to	
Who to contact for	Below is a list of potential areas of help and who to contact for that

what	area.
	Schedule: Lab Procedures: Meetings: Data Entry:
Graduate Opportunities in SES	https://www.uoguelph.ca/oac/future-students/current-graduate-opportunities
Any other information that may be useful	

Template: Annual Lab Group Feedback

Annual Lab Feedback Form Template

Resources

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