Considerations for educational developers working with academic applicants on writing diversity statements

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Abstract

This article builds on previous research on diversity statements, adding insights to the resource sharing among educational developers who provide guidance in crafting such statements. In response to the existing knowledge gap about what transpires after submitting diversity statements to hiring committees, we conducted a survey involving 299 academic hiring committee members serving between 2015 and 2021 at five predominantly White, research-focused institutions in the Midwest and Southwest. The findings from the survey are the basis of this reflection on practice. Our analysis reveals a lack of preparedness and a prevailing sense of uncertainty among committee members, coupled with nuanced considerations associated with the complexities of this genre. Based on firsthand experiences and feedback from committee members, this article attempts to go beyond current literature, fostering a deeper understanding of the challenges and providing new perspectives for educational developers engaged in supporting diversity statement writing.

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Educational developers in teaching centers and graduate schools support faculty and future faculty professional development (Wright et al., 2018) and frequently work as consultants and workshop facilitators for those who prepare faculty job applications. Many graduate students turn to educational developers to learn about diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in teaching in the absence of such engagement within their departments or disciplines (Perez et al., 2020) and may seek support in how to address DEI in the application materials, possibly including a separate diversity statement. While a diversity statement typically encompasses more than the teaching realm, educational developers holistically aim to support faculty and future faculty in preparing for and developing in their faculty roles (Palmer & Little, 2013). Such professional development support is informed by evidence and existing scholarship about the subject matter.

However, given the recency of diversity statements as stand-alone materials, there is little empirical evidence available, especially regarding the handling of diversity statements by hiring committees upon submission. Either separately or as part of cover letters, diversity statements have only been around since roughly the mid-2010s, following the slowly increasing commonality of teaching statements as application materials in the 2000s and 2010s (Lu, 2023; Meizlish & Kaplan, 2008; Walsh et al., 2022). Few studies have analyzed sets of diversity statements, at times combined with interviewing committee chairs, yet with little data directly from the experiences of hiring committee members (Schmaling, Baker, et al., 2019; Schmaling, Trevino, et al., 2015; Sylvester et al., 2019). Based on multi-year feedback from our colleagues in the Professional and Organizational Development (POD) Network, the largest national organization for educational developers, most candidates and those who support them heavily lean on the somewhat more standardized genre and criteria for teaching statements as an analogy and consult various evidence-based online resources to guide the writing of diversity statements.

Generating such empirical evidence would help fill a current exigency, especially given the prevalence of controversy regarding

diversity statements in higher education. As a small group of educational developers, we thus decided to collect data of the kind we felt was missing in taking a sustained, evidence-based approach to developing our consulting work and workshops. We solicited quantitative and qualitative data via an online survey garnering input from 299 academic hiring committee members across five research-focused institutions in the Midwest and Southwest. The project fills a knowledge gap by gathering and reporting data about committee members' preparedness, individual perspectives and approaches, committee tools and processes in the handling of diversity statements, and challenges in deciphering and evaluating diversity statements between 2015 and 2021.

As we report in detail below, we found a discrepancy between the frequency of diversity statements as part of application materials and the very limited or lack of preparation of hiring committee members to engage with diversity statements. As for ideas about the content of diversity statements, we found that next to addressing DEI in teaching, research, and service, the most desired component was candidates expressing their awareness of DEI issues within their own discipline and/or higher education in general. In evaluating diversity statements, few respondents experienced working with specific criteria or a rubric focused on DEI in application materials. Questions about authenticity, writing style, jargon, and variability were cited as most challenging. Notably, skepticism about diversity statements as part of application materials was nuanced with a deep acknowledgment of frequent under-preparedness for candidates and committee members and of associated power dynamics and risks. The key points of this skepticism inform educational developers working with academic applicants on writing diversity statements in workshops and consultations. They can also inform how we engage our teaching centers or other units and facilitate outreach to hiring committees and those who support them. The findings of this article may also help hiring committee members to better understand how to make sense of diversity statements.

Initial Considerations From the Literature

Diversity statements emerged as a response to the desire to diversify faculty and to support institutional goals around DEI. There is a sense that asking for diversity statements offers the opportunity to make invisible labor count by highlighting what is often undervalued and encourages everyone to engage in diversity work (Canning & Reddick, 2019; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). As much as teaching statements prompt conversations about the role of faculty in practicing evidence-based teaching, there is an expectation that the request for diversity statements sparks deeper conversations about the role of faculty in fostering DEI (Canning & Reddick, 2019). A survey study by Sarah Bombaci and Liba Pejchar (2022) found that advantages of diversity statements included expressing the candidate's genuine commitment, illustrating how the candidate may interact with diverse others, signaling institutional commitment, engendering commitment in the candidate, raising awareness for the need of such efforts, and broadening qualifications to include such work.

However, many job postings and requests for diversity statements lack specificity, which leads to high uncertainty about content and style in writing these statements. Furthermore, it potentially leads to undefined or vaguely defined criteria and committee members resorting to their own preferences and biases to fill the void of structured guidance and definitions (Liera, 2020). Such a lack of guidance, standardization, and critical engagement has rendered diversity statements and DEI themes in application materials an open battleground for a larger political discourse about DEI efforts.

Among the few studies focused on analyzing diversity statements, much attention has been given to the issue of identity disclosures. Schmaling, Trevino, et al. (2015) found in their sample of 191 applications that the foci of the statements varied widely with self-disclosures in less than one-fourth of the documents. While identity disclosures are still a prevalent feature, the study concluded that the exact nature of the risk associated with self-disclosure remains ambiguous

for respondents (Schmaling, Trevino, et al., 2015). A follow-up study confirmed a low tendency of self-disclosure and often unspecific references to diversity but also marked higher diversity in the applicant pool and materials when diversity selection criteria were included in job postings (Schmaling, Baker, et al., 2019). In turn, in an analysis of 39 diversity statements, Sylvester et al. (2019) found that having received guidelines for writing diversity statements led to a 90% rate of self-disclosure of social identities. Despite shared guidance, the statements show high variability, and the researchers found that search committees might have to provide clearer information about how the statements would be evaluated. Yet three main content themes could be identified: understanding of DEI, background and experience, and skill building and personal growth. The study highlighted the nature of these statements by identifying the role of elaboration and reflection in offering information about the quality of someone's engagement and sphere of influence (Sylvester et al., 2019). Therefore, this publication has been a helpful resource for the consulting practices of many educational developers.

Educational developers in teaching centers are particularly interested in evidence about how teaching-related materials are requested and evaluated by hiring committees. Following the rise of teaching statements in the 2000s and 2010s, diversity statements contribute to communicating teaching to hiring committees (Lu, 2023; Meizlish & Kaplan, 2008; Walsh et al., 2022). Walsh and colleagues found in their data from 166 hiring committee chairs across institutions and disciplines that 35% of hiring chairs asked for diversity statements (as separate documents, part of cover letters, or part of teaching statements) to assess teaching effectiveness, whereas the most cited reason for requesting a diversity statement was to observe the applicant's perspectives on diversity and inclusion with respect to institutional and departmental values (Walsh et al., 2022). In the perceived importance of features in a diversity statement, the study reports the highest score for demonstrating an understanding of diversity and inclusion, closely followed by teaching and mentorship. The study also notes a variety

in responses regarding the content of diversity statements and the purpose of evaluating them, indicating a lack of agreement (Walsh et al., 2022)

Upon submission of an application, implicit bias, possibly overt bias, and hierarchy-based power dynamics in search committees complicate how committees engage with the statements (Hakkola & Dyer, 2022; Liera, 2020). Centralized professional development around DEI, specifically regarding the hiring process, is not readily available across institutions (Bombaci & Pejchar, 2022). Furthermore, common conceptualizations of merit (as in qualifications) and fit (as in socio-cultural context), which is particularly prone to affinity bias and grown from the conceptualization of a White, male, Western professional legacy, may render hiring processes racialized and gendered (Liera & Ching, 2020; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Few committee members have received formal training to interrogate hiring procedures, can act as equity advocates on search committees, and can indeed render less exclusionary hiring processes (Cahn et al., 2022; Liera, 2020). Committees may further struggle with tokenism in their composition, the influence of the search chair, or the lack of influence given the hierarchical positioning of the chair toward other committee members in their academic home contexts (Hakkola & Dyer, 2022). Such committee issues tend to promote status-quo approaches and an undue prevalence of bias (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017).

Yet with all the scholarly insights and reliable exchange of knowledge, strategies, and even materials for workshops between educational developers at conferences and through individual professional networks, we know little about the experiences hiring committees have had with diversity statements, and so we decided to ask.

Launching an Inquiry

As educational developers who are regularly approached as consultants for writing diversity statements, we decided to complement our

review of available resources by gathering data directly from hiring committees in the regions in which our work takes place. We wanted to hear from hiring committee members about frequency and prompts for separate or embedded diversity statements, preparation of committee members, perspectives on content and experienced foci of interpretation, and influence on the hiring process. Granted, self-reported data may be prone to respondent-related errors, that is, various errors connected to characteristics of respondents (Dykema et al., 2008) and response bias (Villar, 2008). And yet hiring committee members' perception, however selective, is what candidates ultimately need to write to as a simple matter of audience awareness.

We developed a one-time online survey tool in Qualtrics consisting of 35 questions, both open- and closed-ended (multiple choice), organized into six sections: Service and Academic Hiring; Preparation and Professional Development; Job Announcement & Requirement; Evaluation; Job Interview; and Demographic Information. Most questions did not differentiate regarding required statements, optional statements, or DEI-related comments in other application materials. Additionally, we did not distinguish between different types of faculty positions and academic careers for which the committees hired. Survey questions were reviewed by several colleagues before being sent to participants, and they provided feedback on the clarity and any missing elements.

Upon IRB approval, we reached out to 10 research universities in the Southwest and Midwest. In the end, 299 participants from five universities took the online survey, all having served on at least one hiring committee in the years 2015 to 2021. Participation varied widely across the institutions represented in the study. Among our respondents, the vast majority identified as White/Caucasian; there was a relatively even split between male- and female-identifying participants; and over 70% were over 41 years old. Most of the participants were either full professors or associate professors. Twelve individuals indicated they were deans or chairs. The highest represented field was Agricultural and Life Sciences, followed by Health Sciences, Education, Humanities, and

Social Sciences. Not all participants responded to all survey questions. Response rates decreased along the progression of the survey.

The quantitative data file was imported into SPSS and reviewed and cleaned before any data analyses were performed for simple descriptive statistics and frequencies. For the qualitative analysis of the open-ended questions, a mixture of deductive and inductive approaches (Bingham & Witkowsky, 2022) was adopted. Three of the authors rated, discussed, and identified potential codes and created a codebook used for individual coding. There was 94.7% agreement between the three raters.

In the following, we share selected data and takeaways that are particularly useful for helping educational developers think about their consulting on diversity statements.

Frequency of Diversity Statements and Preparation of Hiring Committee Do Not Correlate

We found that the occurrence of separate diversity statements in job applications was not uncommon in these five Midwest and Southwest institutions in the years 2015 to 2021. In response to how often embedded or separate diversity statements were requested by faculty hiring committees, of 202 respondents, 94 (46.5%) stated never, 37 (18.4%) stated either half of the time or sometimes, 71 (35.1%) stated most of the time or always. In a mark-all-that-apply question ($n = 225$), the most common format was identified as a separate statement (76 times). Other formats included diversity statements embedded in a teaching statement or portfolio (28 times), in a research statement (28 times), and via a writing prompt within the application form (13 times).

The prevalence of institutionally provided language and references to mission statements in job postings indicates that institutions, colleges, and departments had little experience with intentionally crafted messages and prompts for the applicants. Of 281 respondents, 146 (52%) indicated template language provided by the institution—for

example, by human resources—for their job postings. Furthermore, 109 (38.8%) marked language crafted by the college, department, or hiring committee yet focused largely on mission and values. Eighteen mentioned messages directed at the potential applicants specifically to identify and support more diverse candidates.

When exploring committee members' preparedness through a series of follow-up questions, we found that even when training for service on hiring committees included DEI as a theme, it less often addressed the nature of diversity statements. Of those who responded (n = 234), 182 (77.8%) stated that they had attended some training or professional development on serving on faculty hiring committees. Furthermore, 143 (61.1% of the 234 respondents) specified that they previously had training or professional development with DEI as an explicit element, whereas 16 (6.8%) said they were not sure. When we asked the 159 individuals who responded "yes" or "not sure" whether it was made explicit in the training how candidates should address DEI in application materials, 154 responded and 71 (30.3% of the 234 respondents) answered yes. We did not ask if that training included any work on evaluating diversity statements specifically. But in short, only 71 out of 234 respondents had any training that included how DEI may be addressed in application materials (Figure 1).
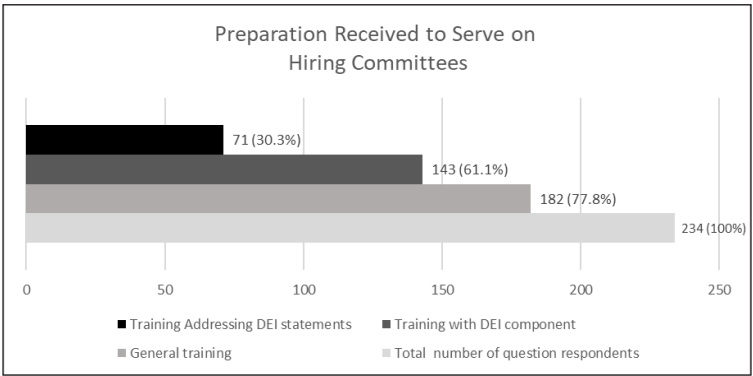

Figure 1. Preparation of Faculty Hiring Committee Members by Headcount (and percentages)

Moreover, committee members often did not know about or did not perceive themselves as the target audience for workshops on writing diversity statements. Of 240 respondents, only 53 (22%) indicated that their institution offers training or professional development on writing diversity statements inclusive of faculty. A surprising number, 108 (45%), did not know whether such offerings even existed. Twenty-two (9.2%) participants indicated that training was not offered to faculty but to graduate students and postdocs. Of 234 respondents, only 37 (15.8%) indicated that they had participated in consulting or other training or professional development on writing diversity statements, 30 (12.8%) had participated in a session more broadly themed, whereas the largest proportion of respondents, 167 (71.4%), had not participated in any such learning opportunities.

In conclusion, given the frequency of diversity statements, the lack of preparedness among hiring committee members was concerning. Interestingly, 33 (51%) of a total of 65 respondents in an open-answer question felt that diversity statements added value or were relevant as part of an application package, citing the same benefits we see in the public discourse, such as providing holistic, supplemental information about the candidate and as a marker of institutional commitment. Twenty respondents (31%) stated that the statements had no value, were irrelevant, or even had a negative impact. Nevertheless, we found that lack of preparedness did not correlate with a disinterest in diversity statements.

What Should Diversity Statements Include?

One of the most elusive aspects of separate or embedded diversity statements for both candidates and search committees is the question of what to include. In our survey, we used a matrix question twice to ask committee members what they feel candidates should include and later to ask what, in their observation, the search committees focused on in their evaluation (Table 1). The criteria we offered were drawn from the most common ones we found in the existing literature.

Table 1. Comparison of Percentages by Respondent Selections of Criteria to Be Included in Diversity Statements

Criterion Response data for "Definitely/probably yes"	Personally desired focus in %*	Perceived committee focus in %**
The candidates' identities and backgrounds	21.6	28.1
Knowledge of the theories and key terms in the discourse around DEI	49.7	30.2
Awareness of DEI issues within their own discipline and/or higher education in general	79.5	52.4
Potential to increase diversity and/or inclusivity in the department or at the university	67.4	64.6
Contributions to DEI in research	72.1	53.6
Contributions to DEI in teaching and mentoring	86.3	64.6
Contributions to DEI in service activities on campus or in professional organizations	79.0	55.0
Community outreach and volunteer work	53.2	37.2

*Personal Opinion: "In your personal opinion, should applicants include the following in their diversity statements?" (*n* = 190).

**Committee Focus: "What does the committee tend to focus on when discussing the applicant's engagement with diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)?" (*n* = 172).

Considering the risks involved in identity disclosures (Schmaling, Trevino, et al., 2015) yet recognizing the frequency with which such disclosures may occur (Schmaling, Trevino, et al., 2015; Sylvester et al., 2019; Walsh et al., 2022), we were not surprised to find the respondents' opinions about identity disclosures to be largely ambivalent or negative. In turn, the candidates' ability to address knowledge of theories and key terms in the discourse around DEI rendered strong support in the personal opinions with 49.7% in support, whereas the committee experience painted a different picture with only 30.2% of respondents noting that committees focused on this criterion.

A related criterion, the candidate's awareness of DEI issues within their own discipline and/or higher education in general, resulted in a similar incongruence between high personal value and low committee focus. We see that 79.5% of committee members are personally interested in candidates addressing issues in their disciplines and higher

education, valuing context awareness perhaps more than scholarship and theoretical understanding. However, the perceived focus of committees in this aspect is much lower with only 52.4% having experienced their committees focusing on this issue. Interestingly, another criterion, the potential of the candidate to increase diversity and inclusivity, was supported by 67.4% personally and similarly by the committees with 64%. In conclusion, personal opinion and perception of committee focus were almost congruent.

The most common criteria concern DEI contributions in research, teaching, and service. Here, most respondents consistently chose "probably yes" or "definitely yes" expressing their personal opinion (over 70% for each criterion) and the observed committee focus (over 50% for each criterion). The emphasis on research, teaching, and service is not necessarily surprising given the focus of these areas both in the work of faculty and the preparation given to future faculty (Palmer & Little, 2013). The highest percentages were found regarding DEI contributions to teaching and mentoring, which reflects the possible assumption that instructor-student relationships are a key area in which contributions to DEI play out. This also promotes a close relationship between teaching and diversity statements, or the double role of teaching statements as partial diversity statements should the latter not be requested or accepted as separate application material.

In addition to teaching and mentoring, service along with community outreach and volunteer work are common areas of active DEI commitment. Interestingly, the numbers for service in the academic realm are not much higher than for research. They are even lower for the criterion of community outreach and volunteer work. One factor affecting this result could be the perceived nature of the faculty role and the expected level of service, which may vary between tenure-track and teaching/service-oriented career paths. Furthermore, Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) observed that these aspects are often undervalued contributions and glossed over because they do not fit traditional categories of evaluation.

The overall numbers show us that committees engage with various criteria less than our respondents personally valued and looked for in diversity statements. It also indicates that committee members are more interested in disciplinary awareness than the broader DEI discourse and scholarship, which is helpful to point out when consulting on the topic. The professoriate's traditional pillars are strongly and, interestingly, somewhat equally supported along with candidates' general potential to further diversity and inclusion.

In Search for Evaluation Criteria

In combination with a prevalent lack of preparedness and specific prompts in job postings, committee members found themselves overwhelmed with interpretation challenges and unclear evaluation criteria. We asked participants to select options for tools used to evaluate diversity statements by the committee (*n* = 139) and, separately, by themselves (*n* = 79) from a table with prepared options. We found 30.2% of committees and 41.8% of individuals not having, or using, specific criteria. Committees and individuals working with overarching rubrics or guiding questions of which DEI might be a component lay between 21% and 27% each. Only 19.4% of committees and 15.2% of individuals noted using DEI rubrics. Hence, many respondents relied solely on their personal judgment and strategies in the absence of given criteria.

In an open-ended question about personal criteria (*n* = 59), the most common themes included descriptions of concrete contributions and impact to illustrate "'habit' as opposed to promise" (#233), for instance, "how they've attempted to implement accessibility and diversity measures in their pedagogy" (#4) or by "articulat[ing] the relationships between language and power" (#204) when considering positionality in research. In other words, respondents looked for candidates who could "walk the walk and not just talk the talk" (#229). Along

the same lines, respondents were interested in the applicant's personal experiences and authenticity, demonstrated by avoiding "canned or HR safe answers [and showing] vulnerability or willingness to share information or experiences supporting DEI" (#26). Respondents further reiterated their interest in reading about the candidates' DEI knowledge and awareness along with any training and specific examples of involvement in initiatives. Overall, the comments stressed the significance of concrete examples and specificity of experience.

To shed more light on committee members' experiences with evaluating diversity statements we next asked in an open-ended question what they found most challenging in that process (*n* = 60). The highest number of comments focused on the uncertainty of authenticity (*n* = 16) with too many buzzwords and "fluff" (#28) or fearing that "[m]ost are cut and paste from the web" (#121); the style of narrative, including rambling, storytelling, or general vagueness (*n* = 16); too much jargon to identify specific practices (*n* = 12); and variability or subjectivity (*n* = 9), observing for instance, "[t]hey vary across cultural and socio-economic backgrounds so sometimes apples or orange problem" (#126). These themes focused on the concern that the authors were not sincere in their diversity statements or provided poorly written or vague statements that made it hard to know how accurate their information was or if it truly reflected their beliefs and practice. This observation complements the respondents' emphasis on looking for concrete examples of practice along with experiences of training and contributions to initiatives as major personal evaluation criteria.

Another theme of challenges is contextual aspects including the lack of agreed-upon criteria within the committee, issues with comparability, and disagreement on the impact of interpretations on the hiring process. Respondents addressed the evaluation process with comments on the lack of criteria (*n* = 6), having a bad rubric (*n* = 3), or having to navigate the evaluator's own biases (*n* = 4) or evaluator's resistance to them in general (*n* = 8), such as stating that "[t]hey are a waste of time" (#74). One noted that "[i]t is almost impossible to

rank them. All one can do is to judge where [*sic*] the candidate treated the requirement for such a statement seriously" (#153). One respondent expressed concerns that "[j]ust because someone isn't researching DEI issues or actively serving on DEI-related committees doesn't mean that they aren't an advocate, that they don't have the potential to do so in the future, and that they aren't a worthy candidate" (#115). Lastly, committee or institutional dynamics were cited (*n* = 9), including conflicts between committee members on how to review diversity statements and whether to put much weight on them. One respondent noted that their biggest challenges were "#1: Convincing faculty on the search committee about whether the statement is genuine. #2: That we are not creating a litmus test for service work that ends up actually screening out minoritized candidates" (#124). Lastly, two participants highlighted the potential risks for candidates of marginalized identities feeling like they might need to exhibit greater vulnerability in their diversity statements and interviews than others.

Nuanced Skepticism

Echoing the public discourse while more nuanced, we also encountered notions of skepticism and resistance, which we will discuss here looking holistically at responses and tendencies spanning various survey questions. Across those promoting and those rejecting the practice of diversity statements, there was a strong tendency to lament the poor quality of the submissions from bad writing to pro-forma sameness to authenticity concerns. At the same time, committee members were keenly aware of being unprepared to meaningfully engage with these documents. Very few respondents had any opportunities to learn about diversity statements, and the implications of such a lack of institutional support for committee members may be insufficiently addressed in the public discourse. Without more structural support, committee members struggle with composing meaningful prompts in job postings that point at the evaluation of how candidates express their competencies

to conduct their work regarding DEI considerations. Consequently, the perceived low quality of many submitted application materials reflects a lack of guidance and criteria by the committee. Our survey participants repeatedly alluded to the unclear criteria for evaluating diversity statements and, therefore, potentially opening room for biases and judgments based on personal impressions.

Like in the discourse pertaining to requests for teaching statements, one key concern is skepticism regarding diversity statements fueled by fears about applicants using buzzwords, engaging in lip service, or providing political messaging versus substance (Brown, 2019; Canning & Reddick, 2019). The key concern of writing quality was palpable in responses across various questions in our survey. Respondents remarked that badly written statements either leave the committee clueless as to what to think of the candidate or even have a harmful effect on the candidate's otherwise promising application. The most common observations uttered in our survey were about these statements being vague and insubstantial; jargon-laden; lacking clarity in expressing definitions or understanding of concepts; insufficiently using concrete practice examples; resorting to personal storytelling; and/or presenting social identities and life experiences as a sufficient credential to subject matter expertise and competence in DEI work. In our study, however, individual perception (67.4%) and committee focus (64.6%) aligned well with regard to candidates expressing their potential to increase diversity and/or inclusivity in the department or at the university. This indicates committees' focus on practical implications and outcomes as opposed to awareness and expertise where we observed greater incongruence between personal opinion and committee focus. The following quote poignantly summarizes the sentiment regarding the lack of practical specificity: "They're [diversity statements are] often vague and nobody really knows what to put in them, so they vary greatly in quality and usefulness. Some people write excellent ones that advance their candidacy, some people write terrible ones that knock them out of the running, but most write statements that aren't helpful or useful" (#4). This observation indicates a

need within institutions to offer integrated support to candidates and committee members regarding the genre of diversity statements and to possibly curate a cadre of equity advocates to support committees (Cahn et al., 2022; Liera, 2020).

A second key concern expressed across responses to survey questions was that diversity statements may place an undue burden on underrepresented candidates to describe their DEI efforts or might unfairly open those candidates up to bias and possible discrimination given that they would be more likely to provide information about their background in the context of the statement (Schmaling, Trevino, et al., 2015). People's identities often shape their professional choices and practices. Hence, however cautiously written, many diversity statements offer strong clues about salient identities of candidates. Our respondents saw identity disclosures as a less desirable content component. Deliberate or unwittingly implicit identity disclosures lead to several risks. They could undermine a committee's attempt to strip applications of identity clues that could trigger bias. Bias could work for or against certain identities and put some candidates at risk of discrimination (Brown, 2019; Flier, 2019). Inexperienced committee members may falsely assume that certain identities alone may offer evidence for or against expertise in, or potential for, inclusion and equity work, leading to tokenism and identity politics. One participant noted, DEI efforts combined with tokenism often results in unfair expectations of colleagues of color: "the vast majority of what we do is directed by one person: a Black assistant professor. She is overworked and also seems to have free rein on all content related to DEI" (#116). Furthermore, depending on the hiring committees' notion of where DEI practices may be observed, one respondent suggested the danger of "creating a litmus test for service work that ends up actually screening out minoritized candidates" (#124). Some of our respondents felt that the responsibility for a diversity statement ought to reside with the institution instead, as one respondent suggested: "I feel as though the university itself should be the one proving our commitment to DEI—if we are trying to hire a diverse group of faculty,

we should be clearly delineating how WE will create a safe, equitable, inclusive space" (#120, emphasis in original).

As reflected in previous publications (Brown, 2019; Canning & Reddick, 2019), a third key concern addressed in our study was committee members' apprehension about authenticity, especially if this was a required component of the application. Committee members in our study wondered, "Does it seem like there is genuine feeling in the statement? Is it sincere? Does it cover the breadth of DEI" (#39)? Some concerns were the same as those brought toward teaching statements, such as worry that candidates use standard answers in higher education at any given time, including buzzwords, citing perceived best practices, all as performative acts solicited from available examples and discourses. Given the prevalent suspicion of pretense, a committee member noted, "[c]onvincing faculty on the search committee about whether the statement is genuine is challenging" (#124), which places a guilty-until-proven-innocent burden on the candidates. While looking for concrete examples from candidates' teaching, research, and service activities might counterbalance the fears around authenticity, committee members noted that many statements were vague, jargon-laden, and lacked concrete examples of action—the same shortcomings as can be observed with many teaching statements. These challenges prompt a sincere need for complementary resources and institutional support for evaluating such statements (Bombaci & Pejchar, 2022). Given the need for a sophisticated approach to writing diversity statements, the endeavor may also bear the risk of creating an unfair burden on some individuals (Bombaci & Pejchar, 2022). Inviting rather than requiring diversity statements in an application process and stating clear expectations to describe practice and habitual actions paired with evaluation criteria could help reduce some of the authenticity concerns.

Concerns about authenticity are especially poignant given the noted critiques that, if required, diversity statements and criteria to evaluate them could potentially become a political litmus test

similar, perhaps, to religious institutions' faith statements (Flier, 2019; McBrayer, 2022), a fourth key concern we observed. Like faith statements, diversity statements ask for a high degree of knowledge (and/or rhetorical skill) from the applicant and may indirectly signal social and political allegiances (McBrayer, 2022). Given the frequent lack of clear guidelines for evaluating and weighing application materials and without much oversight, politically influenced practices can arise and prevail, turning hiring into a political litmus test (Flier, 2019) and potential viewpoint discrimination undermining the First Amendment (Leiter, 2020). These perspectives were represented in our survey responses too. While no respondents mentioned the idea of diversity statements as a "political litmus test," those who most opposed DEI statements described them as documents that "provided no added value. Symbolic act of performance only. Counterproductive to DEI, in reality" (#17) or were strongly opposed to all DEI efforts. Recently, legislation and lawsuits to ban the use of diversity statements and/or the use of specific words have added to the controversy (Lu, 2023).

As a fifth key concern our respondents pointed at the dynamics of ideological differences in the evaluation process of the DEI statements. Some participants mentioned that only underrepresented committee members addressed DEI-related questions during the interviews: "I am asking. The others—the old white males—are not. . . . I am the token female" (#69). Others mentioned that many hiring committee members lack knowledge about DEI statements, stating for instance that "[d]iscussions end up being very shallow. . . . People seem to think DEI is just about occasionally hiring minorities, which is unfortunate" (#105). Moreover, the participants' resistance around ideology was also related to their perceived sense of how candidates would view their potential workspace, as mentioned by a participant: "No one wants to work for an ideologically polarized department, which is what DEI language signals to candidates" (#5). These examples call for discussions about ideological differences, power dynamics, and general unpreparedness and unfamiliarity among the hiring committee

members. The main issue here may not be the presence of diversity statements or DEI-related interview questions but committee dynamics and the equity question about whose voices are heard and whether they are valued.

The varied nature of skepticism among hiring committee members is a crucial component to address with compassion, critical analysis, and a mindset of problem-solving. Some resistance against or dismissal of diversity statements may simply be a symptom of lack of support and preparedness. It would be highly useful to intentionally co-develop writing guidelines, questions, and evaluation criteria and tools within institutions. Institutions can greatly support hiring committees if they equip them with tools, proper guidance, and specific materials such as rubrics to reflect on DEI from a critical perspective and to create a culture where DEI efforts are discussed and evaluated not as an end but as means to achieve an equitable work environment. Lastly, training and using equity advocates on hiring committees could further the effectiveness and integrity of the process overall, not limited to but including the handling of diversity statements (Cahn et al., 2022; Cavanaugh & Green, 2020; Liera, 2020).

We recommend that faculty committee members ask for more structural support from their institutions and individually seek out experts, including educational developers, who may offer workshops about writing diversity statements and could help inform committees. Furthermore, institutions might greatly benefit from conducting a self-assessment of their internal landscape regarding support for candidates, hiring committees, and institutional communication, training, and policy to work toward a more holistic approach to addressing DEI and other topics, such as teaching, in hiring. University leaders are best situated to initiate a thoughtful institutional effort to engage in conversations between units overseeing and providing training for hiring, diversity offices, teaching and writing centers, graduate schools, and any individuals offering workshops on writing diversity statements.

Considerations for Educational Developers

Our own positionalities as educational developers who are asked to offer workshops and consultations in writing diversity statements motivated this study that confirms many aspects discussed in prior studies and the public discourse and contributes some nuance about the experiences and perspectives of hiring committee members. What we take away from our inquiry into the workshops and consultations we facilitate is to acknowledge the general under-preparedness of everyone involved, the barely emerging criteria for a more standardized approach to the genre of diversity statements that is largely based on standardizations regarding teaching statements, and the very limited extent of research and evidence.

Candidates and committee members alike often feel uncertain about and unprepared to write and evaluate diversity statements. Thus, while diversity statements as segments or stand-alone text may enjoy some liberties in genre and style, keeping them close to the more familiar nature of teaching statements may be a good idea. Candidates need to clearly identify what arguments they make about themselves, what evidence from their practice supports the arguments, and why these arguments are relevant in their field. Required or volunteered, diversity statements likely fare better if the relevance and purpose of including them are made explicit by their author. Guidance by the authors may help balance the personal judgment and strategies of committee members who have been given little to no helpful evaluation criteria.

We use our workshops and consultations to invite conversations to help candidates think about what DEI means within their specific academic contexts, particularly for teaching yet also for research, policy, and disciplinary culture and norms. As Walsh et al. (2022) found, diversity statements were often requested to learn about candidates' perspectives on DEI with regard to institutional or departmental values. Our survey highlighted the role of grappling with DEI in the context

of one's field. What does representation look like in a field, institution, or department historically, what does it look like in the classrooms now? How might that impact diverse students' sense of belonging and career visions? One simple way to get insights on DEI issues in a field is for candidates to review the titles and abstracts of their disciplinary journals and conference programs, if accessible, and note what issues were addressed in the recent discourse. Candidates addressing the DEI needs and concerns within a given discipline or field may allow committee members to relate more than statements addressing general theoretical knowledge within the DEI discourse. The focus on one's field and practice may also help avoid identity disclosures as much as possible, acknowledging that these may not necessarily help the candidate and make it harder for the committee to handle bias, tokenism, and othering.

As with teaching statements, a focus on DEI-related practice in research, teaching, and service based on concrete practice examples remains paramount for diversity statements just as with other application materials. It is always helpful to remind candidates that listing service roles or other references of affiliation or learning belong in the CV. As a show-don't-tell approach, statements should qualitatively describe what behaviors were enacted, actions completed, or learning put into practice and to what effect. A small selection of concrete practice examples that indicate habit, not exception, and are described without resorting to jargon would remedy several triggers of skepticism and stated challenges for evaluation. Such specificity supports the expression of intentional practice and authenticity while it counteracts the common pitfalls of vagueness, buzzwords, or focusing on the person rather than their work.

According to Walsh et al. (2022), 38% of hiring chairs looked at diversity statements to assess teaching effectiveness, which makes it a particularly valuable topic for candidates to write about. As educational developers we can use diversity statement workshops and consultations to share selected books or encompassing websites from teaching centers on inclusive teaching practices to allow applicants

who are entering the job market to engage in at least short-term learning and professional development around DEI in their teaching practice. While such an opportunity is not trivial, given that many graduate students may not receive any resources or professional development within their field on such topics (Perez et al., 2020), it has limited outcomes. In our experience, job applicants will compose clearer and more concrete teaching and diversity statements if they have spent some time intentionally and critically thinking about evidence-based and equity-minded teaching earlier in their career. The emphasis on teaching effectiveness in diverse classrooms offers teaching centers, graduate schools, and other units much agency in supporting faculty and students long before they even step into the role of a job candidate and may need to address DEI in their teaching in various application materials (Walsh et al., 2022). Educational developers may communicate their knowledge of diversity statements in the hiring process to teaching centers and graduate schools to call for earlier and consistent professional development outreach and programming on inclusive and equity-minded teaching and the benefit of addressing DEI in teaching during consultations, mentoring, and advising meetings.

To further develop their consultations and workshops and indirectly enhance the visibility of their expertise, educational developers may foster interaction between teaching centers, graduate schools, diversity offices, writing centers, career centers, human resource units, and others to converse and critically engage with the hiring process, materials, and committee effectiveness. Educational developers in teaching centers especially may rely on colleagues from other units for support in addressing aspects of diversity statements that are not directly tied to teaching (Walsh et al., 2022). Examples of such collaborative approaches may include joint panels or Q&A sessions and collaborating on workshops geared toward both candidates and hiring committee members. After all, the writing and reading of diversity statements are two sides of a holistic process for everyone involved and cannot be effectively developed in isolation from each other. This requires more

research, institutional collaboration between stakeholders and campus partners, and more guidance through higher education associations. Outreach and collaboration may also empower hiring committee members to ask for more structural support and initiatives to produce explicit goals and criteria for diversity statements to facilitate a review and evaluation process. Ultimately, the instructions for and evaluation of application materials is an assessment process, an area of expertise of educational developers.

In conclusion, we will continue to engage with fellow educational developers and willing local campus colleagues about the intricacies of expressing DEI practice in teaching and learning and strive to support job and promotion candidates. At the same time, we call for scholarship and institutional engagement with a more holistic approach to the hiring process and the role of articulating and evaluating educational practice in our diverse higher education landscape.

Biographies

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors have no conflict of interest.

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