

Demonstrating Interest In and Ability to Advance Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Thank you for your interest in a position at Columbia University. As one of the world's leading academic institutions we value the advancement of diversity, equity, and inclusion as an integral part of the University. The purpose of this information is to prepare you to write an effective statement on contributions to diversity, and to support you in preparing for a campus visit/job interview if invited.

What do we mean by diversity, equity, and inclusion?

Diversity: The variety of personal experiences, values, and worldviews that arise from differences of culture and circumstance. Such differences include race, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, language, abilities/disabilities, sexual orientation, gender identity, socioeconomic status, geographic region, and more. Many institutions of higher education focus on groups that have traditionally been underrepresented in top tier research institutions, including women and certain minority groups (including African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans).

Equity: As opposed to equality, where everyone receives the same support regardless of circumstance, equity focuses on fair treatment, and access to supports and opportunities necessary for advancement and success. Equity acknowledges structural issues and barriers such as racism, sexism, homophobia, bullying, and sexual harassment that have prevented the full participation of individuals from marginalized groups.

Inclusion: The proactive effort through personal actions, programs, and policies to ensure that all individuals feel welcome, respected, supported, and valued, and to identify and address situations in which this is not the case.

Columbia is dedicated to increasing diversity in its workforce, its student body, and its educational programs. Achieving continued academic excellence and creating a vibrant university community require nothing less.

Both to prepare our students for citizenship in a pluralistic world and to keep Columbia at the forefront of knowledge, the University seeks to recognize and draw upon the talents of a diverse range of outstanding faculty, research officers, staff, and students and to foster the free exploration and expression of differing ideas, beliefs, and perspectives through scholarly inquiry and civil discourse. In developing its academic programs, Columbia furthers the thoughtful examination of cultural distinctions by developing curricula that prepare students to be responsible members of diverse societies.

In fulfilling its mission to advance diversity at the University, Columbia seeks to hire, retain, and promote exceptionally talented individuals from different racial, cultural, economic and ethnic backgrounds regardless of their sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability status. Through effective and fully compliant affirmative action and equal opportunity policies, Columbia strives to recruit members of groups traditionally underrepresented in American higher education and to increase the number of minority and women candidates in its graduate and professional programs.

How do we assess your ability to advance equity and inclusion?

Faculty and Staff candidates may be evaluated in three main areas:

1. Awareness of and ability to articulate understanding regarding diversity broadly conceived, and historical, social, and economic factors that influence the underrepresentation of particular groups in academia. Life experience may be an important aspect of this understanding.
2. A track record, calibrated to career stage, of engagement and activity related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Demonstration requires specific details about these activities, including goals, strategies, and outcomes, as well as information about the role played. Strong evidence typically consists of multiple examples of action from undergraduate through current career stage.
3. Specific, concrete goals, plans, and priorities, calibrated to career stage, for engagement on diversity, equity, and inclusion as a potential faculty member or staff member at Columbia University. Ideally these plans involve an awareness of current programs and initiatives already taking place on campus.

Many candidates are asked to submit a “Statement on Contributions to Diversity,” either as part of their initial application, or if they are under serious consideration for a position. The purpose of this statement is to showcase your understanding and activities in the three areas described above. A typical strong statement is two to three pages in length, and includes specific, detailed examples and descriptions that demonstrate both understanding and actions. Weaker statements tend to be brief, vague, contain little information about the specific role in an activity, or mostly highlight efforts that are already fundamental to a position.

Example areas of evidence for demonstrating contributions to advancing equity and inclusion

Knowledge and understanding:

- Knowledge of, experience with, and interest in dimensions of diversity that result from different identities, such as ethnic, socioeconomic, racial, gender, sexual orientation, disability, and cultural differences.
- Familiarity with demographic data related to diversity in higher education.
- Comfort discussing diversity-related issues.
- Understanding of mentorship power dynamics and personal-professional boundaries between faculty and students.
- Understanding of the challenges faced by underrepresented individuals, and the need to identify and eliminate barriers to their full and equitable participation and advancement.

Teaching (where applicable):

- Strategies to create inclusive and welcoming teaching environments for all underrepresented students.
- Strategies to encourage both critical thinking and respectful dialogue in the classroom.
- Using new pedagogies and classroom strategies to advance equity and inclusion.

Research (where applicable):

- Inclusive and respectful research environments.
- Mentoring and supporting the advancement and professional development of underrepresented students or postdocs.

- Research focused on underserved communities.

Service/professional activities:

- Outreach activities designed to remove barriers and to increase the participation of individuals from underrepresented groups.
- Participation in workshops and activities that help build multicultural competencies and create inclusive climates.
- Supporting student organizations that serve underrepresented groups.
- Participation with professional or scientific associations or meetings that aim to increase diversity or address the needs of underrepresented students, staff, or faculty.
- Serving on university or college committees related to equity and inclusion, or preventing sexual harassment and sexual violence.

How to incorporate information about advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion into a campus visit

Some search committees ask candidates to make a formal presentation on diversity, equity, and inclusion as part of their campus visit/interview, either as part of a job talk, teaching presentation, or as a standalone topic. Such a presentation should be prepared with the same level of consideration as a research presentation.

In some departments, candidates are interviewed by a department's DEI leadership where they may be asked to discuss their experiences related to equity and inclusion, and specific ideas for contributing at Columbia in these areas. In other cases candidates discuss these topics with the search committee, and with current graduate students or postdocs.

All candidates should be prepared to demonstrate their ability to make a positive contribution to the climate at Columbia University and to specifically advance equity and inclusion if hired as a faculty or staff member.

These materials were developed based on the work of UC Berkeley and other institutions that have created resources for Faculty and Staff Search Committees and Faculty and Staff Candidates.