JEDI Committee Meeting Notes

2021.12.14

Attendance:

2. Board: Stien, Nik (gave advance notice of schedule conflict and was not able to attend the meeting, but read notes and commented with input afterward).

Quick question from Comms [1 minute]

Public use of “JEDI”

- Spell it out first, then ok to use acronym

1. Blog review process - [5 minutes]

Stien had the idea to develop a process for making sure we don’t publish anything on the blog containing unintentional negative connotations for the JEDI space.

Discussion:

- Cat’s proposed process: Since there is almost always someone on the JEDI committee involved in the creation of a blog post, it’s certainly possible that this could happen but not very likely. My suggestion is: Immediately after a new blog post is published, I can alert the JEDI committee and ask for someone to review the post within 1 business day.
- This process accomplishes the goal of having the post reviewed before a wide audience sees it, but does not delay the publishing schedule.
- We can also keep a record of the things we missed that were corrected by committee members, and then check that record (a living document) before publishing future posts, to avoid making the same mistakes repeatedly.
- **Cat’s main question:** How will we decide who has the responsibility of reviewing the new post each time?
  - Luke when it’s a post from the research team
  - Stien for non-research ones, post-publishing. CK will set reminders to email Stien when there’s a new post up.
- LH: Some topics might require more review/revision than others and would require more work from the reviewer.
2. Opportunistic hiring - [30 minutes]

Cam had a strong preference for us to discuss this as a committee. As our staff grows significantly in 2022, this is an issue that we should have a plan for to avoid inequitable hiring.

Discussion:

SvdP: Important to set up our processes to be diverse and inclusive now, so we don’t end up falling into a pattern of “shoulder tapping” and perpetually hiring people like us. It might be more tempting now to do quick hires of people we know, but it’s more important to do it equitably as early as possible.

- What should we do when we have a specific person in mind who we think would be a good hire?
  - Scenario 1: We have a need, and we know someone who can fill it right away.
    - Example: Mark as interim hiring manager
  - SvdP: Reasons it could be ok to do this:
    - Ok when short-term position (not necessarily contract roles though)
    - If the person increases the potential future diversity and equity of our staff when they are hired, that makes this scenario more ok too.
    - Unsure of: Is it ok to use this method if someone “checks some boxes” of being from a marginalized group or is that not a valid reason. (Could be tokenizing or could exclude people in other groups)
  - LH: Short-term vs permanent role distinction is most important. Maybe we need a hard rule, like we should only hire people ad hoc if it’s for a temporary role. Not everything temporary should be filled this way, but some are ok. No permanent positions should be filled this way.
○ Instead of hiring people this way for permanent roles, we could just strongly encourage them to apply and provide more information.

○ If they were short term and then want to transition to permanent, they still need to go through the full hiring process like all external applicants. Shouldn’t be able to slide into the new permanent role but they do have a “leg up” by being familiar with our team, norms, priorities, etc. Slightly inequitable but tolerable.

○ SvdP: The impact they will make based on their knowledge of our needs means they will have a better chance.

○ LH: Have a realistic view of how long it would take for someone external to match the level of institutional knowledge/alignment of the person we know. (And also consider the risk that the unknown person could never become value aligned, whereas the known person definitely is.)

○ SvdP: Also consider the loss of good, known people if we don’t foster an environment with promotions and personal progress. It should be possible to move up. (Of course it’s different if the role you want to move to is completely different from what you’ve been doing)

  - NV (post-meeting comment): yeah, this is a good point -- don’t want to end up like tech with high turnover & constantly having to retrain fresh talent etc. Dunno how common completely different roles might be, since everything seems interconnected, e.g. having a better understanding of research aims would benefit somebody in an outreach position.

○ Scenario 2: We know someone great, and we want to put them to use ASAP but we aren’t sure how.

  - Example: Stien said I’m here and available, feel free to put me to use anywhere
  - SvdP: But sometimes this might happen and then later on, a better person for that role could show up. What then?

    - NV (post-meeting): wouldn’t a better person only show up in the context of another job ad? There would almost certainly be better candidates than those chosen for any given role (who’d also be able & willing to work at WAI), but presumably once the ad period ends and the decision is made that’s that, until the next hiring round?
CK/LH: Very rare case and probably ends up fitting into one of the other scenarios better, most of the time.

SvdP: Could happen more easily with us than other orgs or fields. Could strengthen our field and advance it much faster if we take someone great away from the work they are currently doing. Could see it happening, but we could only do it if the research team could make a very strong case for it (or director of strategy). Then think about how hard it would be to find someone else equally qualified.

LH: Encountered this in giving people funding. We knew people who were looking for post-doc and we coached them on relevant projects that we would probably fund. Relevant because we are giving them money, though not as much as an actual hire.
  - Maybe talk about this again in the next JEDI meeting, with focus on grantmaking.

  ○ Scenario 3: Someone applies for a role, but there's a different role that we think that would be great for instead.
  ○ Scenario 4: Someone internal desires a new role and would be a good fit.

CMS: If the internal person was originally hired via a system that we believe is just and equitable, maybe then it's fine. SvdP agrees; CK agrees
  - NV (post-meeting): yeah it seems like there'd be a sort of transitivity / conservation of fairness at play here, although if this gets super common I could see it possibly exaggerating disparities in applicant pools? Like, if different pipelines yield different [insert set of demographic categories] ratios -- if we primarily source applicants from one pool to another, we might risk extending the make-up of that one pool across the lot?

CMS: The internal person would leave a vacancy in their prior role that could be filled by an external person in a just and equitable way.

SvdP: Short-term urgency feels prominent but long-term thinking is just as important for impact as finding someone good right now. If we only make quick decisions now that lead to capable/good people doing the work but we end up being homogenous because of it, then later on we will not be able to do as much good as if we had spent longer now to make sure we were JEDI. It might feel good to snatch a good person before they go to another org, but it might not be the best long-term.
  - NV (post-meeting): I guess there's also a sense of what's good for WAI vs. what's good for the welfare biology movement as a whole. If a promising researcher goes to another org to work on WAI-aligned research, WAI may miss out in that counterfactual, but the competition between orgs isn't 0-sum
Note on diversity: How to describe how we align with principles of EA without precisely subscribing to EA as a brand. We want people with organizational alignment but psychological and philosophical diversity. Should be open about our connections to EA without causing people to believe we are a subset of EA.

- NV (post-meeting): I think there's language that can work well here, e.g. "inspired by" or else even just describing what the principles are (e.g. focusing on "evidence-based, cost-effective" approaches, going after I-N-T problems, etc.) without explicitly invoking EA by name.

CK: Referrals: How do we take away undue bias in a referral situation but also take advantage of the valuable information we might have from the employee who referred them.

SvdP: It may be best to be as transparent as possible about our biases, good or bad, so we can identify where they might have influenced our thinking so we can focus on measurable behaviors and results.

SvdP: Already harder for BIPOC/minority people to get into leadership roles, but then once they're there, it's also harder for them to persist because they constantly have to explain themselves. This might cause them to resign or burn out. A reason it's important for us to make sure our JEDI processes in hiring are solid upfront. And good as a model, because we are not only working within our org but trying to set examples for a field.

We shouldn't do the scenarios listed until we have a proven track record and a diverse team.

Photos on website: Should we take them down? Might make it easier to recruit diverse people (not sure), but also could feel like a trick if someone later realized we were mostly racially homogenous.

- Maybe we should talk about this with the whole staff. What are the values of having the photos and what are the risks? Which way is more likely to be better?
  - NV (post-meeting): it seems like photos could exploit subtle pressures to make people like us more, like the halo effect or similarity bias, and make us seem more personable, painting us as real people and not weird robots with weird ethics. But those things should be irrelevant to the "mission".

3. Other JEDI updates

- Mark and Stien did the LifeLabs workshop on inclusive interviewing. Some useful tips. We can incorporate this info into our hiring for next year. Stien will share notes and key points in the shared drive.
- Mark also did the racial equity training by Encompass.
- Luke is planning to go to the webinar this week: Leading Practices for Accessibility and Inclusion "on the history and representation of disabled experiences in STEMM, the intersection of racism and ableism in the context of science and research, and offer key insights into how intersectionality can be addressed in STEMM."

4. Goal tradeoffs - [Postponed until next meeting]

Another suggestion from Cam for discussion. JEDI goals are important. Programmatic and operational goals are important. There are some situations when we might need to decide which type of goal is the priority.

**Discussion:**

- This might have been discussed in a previous meeting, but without resolution. Can someone recap what was discussed already and what is the current status?
- How will we quantitatively measure the value of JEDI goals?
  - CMS: In other areas of our mission, it’s easier to quantify things. (i.e. causing short-term harm to animals with the goal of creating a field that makes things better for them long-term.)
  - CK: If we don’t have an answer for this now, how can we make a plan for working toward answers?