

Reducing Bias In OCE Leader Selection

Implicit bias refers to the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner. These biases, which encompass both favorable and unfavorable assessments, are activated involuntarily and without an individual’s awareness or intentional control. Residing deep in the subconscious, these biases are different from known biases that individuals may choose to conceal for the purposes of social and/or political correctness. Rather, implicit biases are not accessible through introspection.

The implicit associations we harbor in our subconscious cause us to have feelings and attitudes about other people based on characteristics such as race, ethnicity, age, and appearance. These associations develop over the course of a lifetime beginning at a very early age through exposure to direct and indirect messages. In addition to early life experiences, the media and news programming are often-cited origins of implicit associations.

A Few Key Characteristics of Implicit Biases

- Implicit biases are **pervasive**. Everyone possesses them, even people with avowed commitments to impartiality such as judges.
- Implicit and explicit biases are **related but distinct mental constructs**. They are not mutually exclusive and may even reinforce each other.
- The implicit associations we hold **do not necessarily align with our declared beliefs** or even reflect stances we would explicitly endorse.
- We generally tend to hold implicit biases that **favor our own in-group**, though research has shown that we can still hold implicit biases against our in-group.
- Implicit biases are **malleable**. Our brains are incredibly complex, and the implicit associations that we have formed can be gradually unlearned through a variety of de-biasing techniques.¹

Because implicit bias is pervasive and tends to create favor for those in an individual’s in-group (those with similar identities, experiences, beliefs), it can affect the selection process for student leadership positions and other similar processes. Instead of creating student leadership teams that reflect a depth and breadth of experience and are best suited to the work of the program, implicit bias may lead to a reproduction of the past or existing approaches and identities.

Because we value integrity, social justice, and inclusion, our leadership selection process needs to engage with and reduce implicit bias. This guide will help you accomplish this important work.

Bias Reduction Process for Selection Process

1. Craft/Review position descriptions to identify clear qualifications: What does this role do and how do they do it

| Responsibilities | Qualities |
|---|--|
| <i>ex. Plan pre-trip team meetings, with group building, education, orientation, and training</i> | <i>Create effective meeting agendas, facilitate group discussion, research and share resources</i> |
| | |

2. Use the position description to create an application review rubric

| Quality | Rate 1-5 (low to high) |
|--|------------------------|
| <i>Communicate the value of education equity</i> | |
| | |

3. Build applications that ask candidates to speak to the responsibilities and qualities in the position description. When possible, ask candidates to share an experience when they exemplified one of the position’s requirements.

ex. Provide an outline of a 30 minute training that you think would benefit student volunteers?
ex. What is your experience leading students in community service? What have you learned from that?

4. Use a mechanism to keep candidates anonymous during the first round of review

ex. Ask your staff advisor to download and code all applications or designate a student leader to mark out student names on applications.

5. To reduce group think and bias reinforcement, have each member of the review committee separately evaluate each applications and record their feedback on the rubric. Then compare scores as a group to decide on candidates to interview. During group review, you may decide that some qualities are more important than others and weight your scores accordingly.
6. Build interview questions that tie into the responsibilities and qualities and that ask candidates to speak to their experiences.

*ex. Tell me about a time you were able to successfully deal with another person, when they didn't have buy-in or did not agree with you.
ex. When do you know that a training session has been a success? Can you give an example of a time that happened?*

7. During interviews, ask each candidate the same set of questions so they have an equal opportunity to share their qualifications. Asking follow up or clarifying questions to individual candidates is acceptable.
8. Similar to the applications, have each committee member individually evaluate each candidate and record their feedback before the group discussion.
9. During the final selection process be sure to refer to the position descriptions. If you see other qualities in a candidate that you believe make them a good fit for the position, discuss this as a group with attention to potential bias.
10. Notify the selected candidates and tell them what qualities stood out about them in the selection process and welcome them to the team.

ex. Nathan, we are pleased to offer you the position of Communications Coordinator. Your experience creating outreach campaigns for different audiences and your ability to manage competing priorities stood out and aligns with this position. We look forward to have you as a part of our leadership team.

Bonus Benefits to the Bias Reduction Process

1. Increased clarity about leadership position requirements so candidates and leaders are better prepared for their work. This makes leadership transitions easier as well.
2. Greater investment of existing student leaders as all voices are equally valued through the selection process
3. Developing an equity skill that will benefit you well beyond W&M student leadership

ⁱ Kirwanis Institute, The Ohio State University, 2019, "Understanding Implicit Bias"
<http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/research/understanding-implicit-bias/>