



SUSTAINABLE CAREER MAPS FOR [HIRE ED]

Identifying and Transforming Oppressive Hiring Practices in Higher Education and Student Affairs

DISCERNING ORGANIZATIONAL [SUPREMACIST] CULTURE

CONTENTS

THIS RESOURCE: WHY + HOW + WHEN	3
GROUNDED FRAMEWORK	7
DISCERNING OPPRESSIVE ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE	8
ANTIDOTAL PRACTICES	11
JOB EUPHEMISM IMPLICATIONS + ANTIDOTES	15
NEXT STEPS	26
REFERENCES + CONTENT AUTHORS	30

WHY THIS RESOURCE?

ACPA’s Report on 21st Century Employment in Higher Education offered “a call to action meant to serve as a guiding framework for a sustainable future for the profession.” To make further meaning of the analysis and recommendations of the report, members of ACPA’s Commission for Career Services, an entity group of educators, developed a suite of supplemental resources intended to support higher education and student affairs (HESA) practitioners as they, “work, lead, and support their career and the careers of those around them.”

While the functional area of career services is primarily toward students, the authors took a collegial lens with aims to inform HESA practitioners for the wellness of their career and the careers of those around them. As career services educators, regular interactions with employers across industries and students across disciplines have led us to believe these resources will help to critically examine problematic workplace norms in higher education that are often not identified or addressed.

HOW TO APPROACH THIS RESOURCE

(1) Begin with clarity for resource intention

- This resource identifies the overt and subtle characteristics of organizational [supremacist] culture in hiring models.

(2) Comprehend the problem deeper

- “Okun’s (2021) White Supremacy Culture framework illuminates the conception, continuation, and legacies of white supremacy in the United States.” Guided by this framework, this resource connects common HESA hiring practices to systems that maintain white supremacist culture in the field.

(3) Review examples and considerations for improvement

(4) Prepare actions for implementing

WHO SHOULD USE THIS RESOURCE?

(PRIMARY) HESA Job Seekers/Candidates

RED COLOR DENOTES THIS AUDIENCE THROUGHOUT THE RESOURCE

- By clarifying the purpose and intent of common hiring practices and acknowledging potential problems with each practice, this resource educates and empowers candidates to make intentional decisions during their searches. Ideally, this will result in candidates accepting roles at HESA institutions with aligned values.

(SECONDARY) HESA Hiring Managers and Allied Mentors*

GOLD COLOR DENOTES THIS AUDIENCE THROUGHOUT THE RESOURCE

- Ultimately, to transform biased practices in higher education, current HESA professionals must also be able to identify and advocate for systemic reform.

WHEN TO USE THIS RESOURCE

While discussing career opportunities with mentors and advisors

While participating in professional development events

While completing informational interviews

While researching and applying for specific roles

During performance reviews

*While advising emerging HESA graduates and leading in professional hiring processes

GROUNDING LOGIC + SCHOLARLY FRAMEWORK

The problems and recommendations in this document are based on lived experiences of ACPA professionals and peers. To honor relevant scholars and their work, we also cite a selection of sources to further contribute to a growing body of scholarship on these topics.

DISCERNING ORGANIZATIONAL [SUPREMACIST] CULTURE

FRAMING HEALTHY WORK CULTURE

Organizational culture informs how people complete their work and interact in a workplace. The goal is to nurture and protect a supportive, inclusive environment that actively rebukes harmful and outdated norms.

NAMING A KEY PROBLEM

Of Okun's (2021) *seven-domains used to understand the maintenance of white supremacy within HESA culture and organizations*, fear, or the “conditioned belief and attitude that we can be perfect based on a standard or set of rules that we did not create” is perhaps most salient.

Traditionally, candidates and gainful employees alike feel significant pressure to align their statements and actions with workplace norms as opposed to presenting their fully-authentic selves.

ANTIDOTAL JOB SEARCH PRACTICES

ADVOCACY OVER ACCUSATION

Too quickly the moment mistakes are made, blame and accusation are the first to surface during a troubleshooting conversation. There is no room for grace, and little shared responsibility in the face of reprisal.

Workplaces need to provide examples to foster an environment that promotes advocacy over accusation, group accountability over gross assumptions.

ANTIDOTAL JOB SEARCH PRACTICES

Give careful attention to job descriptions

The job description is one of the best ways to discern organizational culture. Candidates should analyze aspects that may be mentioned or omitted including salary, benefits, “other duties as assigned”, opportunities for collaboration, workplace culture, and modality of work (hybrid, remote, in-person, etc.).

JOB DESCRIPTION EUPHEMISMS

The following collection of frequently audited terms and statements from higher education job descriptions are prompts for both job seekers and hiring terms alike to be attentive and responsive to clarifying through interview dialogue. While the implications skew to critical, there could also be positive influencers and/or factors at play.

Through reciprocal disclosure, values and skills can be discerned with the aim of healthy alignment and boundaries to protect all parties before an offer is extended and accepted.

JOB DESCRIPTION EUPHEMISMS

(Not an exclusive or expansive suite of examples)

“Lots of
growth
opportunity”

Language
like
“nimble,”
“fast-
paced,” or
“scrappy”

“Salary
depends on
experience”

“Other
duties as
assigned”

A DEEPER REVIEW OF EUPHEMISM IMPLICATIONS

JOB DESCRIPTION EUPHEMISMS

“Lots of growth opportunities”

Possible lack of structure around work duties.

May prompt working for future opportunities rather than compensating for additional work in current role.

Role/organization may be disorganized or under-resourced.

JOB DESCRIPTION EUPHEMISMS

Language like “nimble,” “fast-paced,” or “scrappy”

Reckoning with an unsustainable organizational pace.

Possible tension for resource access and maintenance.

JOB DESCRIPTION EUPHEMISMS

“Salary depends on experience”

May not prioritize transparency as an equity practice within the unit or broader organization.

JOB DESCRIPTION EUPHEMISMS

“Other duties as assigned”

Nebulous role responsibilities + responsibility creep.

Positioned for decreased ownership or agency in the role.

THINK: EXPECTATION TO BE EVERYTHING, EVERYWHERE, ALL AT ONCE.

ANTIDOTAL JOB SEARCH PRACTICES

Create a stakeholder support plan

Whether just launching into the job search or navigating a transition, creating a stakeholder support plan for your professional development journey can help alleviate stress and employ colleagues both inside and outside your network in your professional development success. This includes the search for allies in a job search process, esp. for navigating politics, mitigating harm, and clarifying expectations.

ANTIDOTAL JOB SEARCH PRACTICES

Identify communication challenges

- Discern what different kinds of communication style or frequency come about during different seasons of the role/organization
- Use the job description to investigate or explore any gaps or inconsistencies
 - CROSS-CHECK FOR POTENTIAL GROWTH OR PROBLEM AREAS BASED ON ARTICULATED NEEDS IN THE JD
 - FOR EXAMPLE, IF THE JD FOCUSES HEAVILY ON THE IMPORTANCE OF COLLABORATION THAT MAY BE AN AREA THE ORGANIZATION HAS STRUGGLED WITH IN THE PAST

ANTIDOTAL JOB SEARCH PRACTICES

Identify communication challenges (cont'd)

- "You don't know what you don't know."

MANAGERS, PARTICULARLY WHO HAVE PERFORMED A SIMILAR JOB (ESPECIALLY AT THE SAME INSTITUTION) WILL WRESTLE WITH "WHEN" THEY LEARNED "WHAT" ON THE JOB. PROMPTING THEM TO RECALL THEIR MILESTONES CAN OCCUR DURING THE INTERVIEW AND DURING THE WORK

- Acknowledge bias and difference in perspective when preparing responses or engaging with others

ANTIDOTAL JOB SEARCH PRACTICES

Ask deep, clarifying questions

Before an interview, engage with...

- PREVIOUS (OR CURRENT) EMPLOYEES ABOUT ORGANIZATIONAL PRIORITIES AND/OR SUPPORT
- THE CONTEXT OF INTERVIEWERS' STAKES AND PRIORITIES IN RESPECT TO THE ROLE YOU'RE CONSIDERING

During an interview, ask about...

- HOW TEAMS WORK TOGETHER
- HOW EMPLOYEES ADVANCE WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION
- HOW SUCCESS IS MEASURED AND CELEBRATED
- HOW TO CONNECT WITH EMPLOYEE RESOURCE GROUPS OR IDENTITY-SHARING PEERS CURRENTLY IN THE ORGANIZATION

After an interview, process and work towards clarity regarding...

- CLARIFYING QUESTIONS FOR THE RECRUITER/INTERVIEWER
- ANY INCONSISTENCIES (“CAN YOU HELP ME UNDERSTAND...?”)

ANTIDOTAL HIRING/WORKPLACE PRACTICES

***Manage milestones
with check-ins
prioritizing met goals**

**TO MANAGERS AND HESA PROFESSIONALS READING
THIS CONTENT: CONSIDER OFFERING AND MODELING
TOOLS FOR HESA JOB-SEEKERS, STARTING WITH THE
FOLLOWING PRAXIS...**

ANTIDOTAL HIRING/WORKPLACE PRACTICES

***Manage milestones with check-ins prioritizing met goals**

- Ensure alignment on priorities by co-authoring specific deliverables and expectations
 - *THIS CAN HAPPEN DURING INTERVIEWS AND WITH ONBOARDING/ANNUAL GOAL SETTING**
- Establish a review schedule that allows for work scope reevaluation as needed
- Reassign work scope/s based on staffing availability and articulated or observed strengths with mutual consent

NEXT STEPS + RECOMMENDATIONS

Processes, procedures, and policy

- Talk to employers about who they don't hire and why. Listen for language of unconscious biases like "culture fit" and for evidence of [halo effect and horns effect](#).

Effective practices for resource sharing

- What do you do if you find something you can point to? Publish it, print it, and talk about your findings with key campus personnel. This last recommendation might require you to dust off those old school networking skills, and you might have to work some rooms.

NEXT STEPS + RECOMMENDATIONS

Role-content integration

- Facilitate work autonomy and opportunities to center decolonization
- Reach out to peers to discuss and identify practices across institutions/units that promote sustainable workplaces; use those models as your benchmarks along with your own lenses for racial justice and/or decolonizing-specific content
- Which workforce-based policies are in place that you can build on? Invite a campus HR professional to give your department a training on the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and out this legislation influences hiring practices today, in their own work or in their industry's work. This puts the conversation on the table
- Write up a desktop procedure that implements some key areas you want your office to focus on. Remember its easier to get departmental processes changes than it is to get grand policy changes. Start local and work outward

CONCLUSION

Organizational discernment remains a more informal and internal process, because we are looking for unconscious biases in action. This action is often best observed and responded to by informed professionals.

...In other words, “you know when you know.” Lean in to your instincts for what feels aligned and when you feel dissonance, and work with your trusted community to process what that means as you progress in your future searches.

CALL/S TO ACTION

There is only so much content to be offered without more personal context. The primary aim of this resource is to inform HESA practitioners about the wellness realities of their career and the careers of those around them.

Regular interactions with job-seekers across disciplines employers across industries (consider the sequence and power dynamics) lead us to believe that: this resource can help critically examine problematic workplace norms in higher education that are often not identified or addressed.

CONSIDER THIS RESOURCE A PART OF PHASE ONE. CONTACT NICK.FAHNDERS@GMAIL.COM FOR ANY IDEAS AND/OR FEEDBACK FOR PHASE TWO.

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