Hiring the best and brightest:

Understanding unconscious bias and

improving our hiring practices and decisions

**Talent Recruitment
and Engagement**
OFFICE OF HUMAN RESOURCES
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN–MADISON

Message from Chancellor Rebecca Blank

"I am Chancellor Rebecca Blank. Over the last several years, UW-Madison has made important strides toward improving our diversity and campus climate.

As we continue this work I encourage everyone to engage in topics explored by this video. Most of us have unconscious biases. They're deeply held, automatic preferences for the familiar … for people whose names and faces and language are like our own. Becoming aware of unconscious bias is an important first step – but it's only the first step. To become objective in our hiring will require using tools to help control for these biases.

This program will tell about you some of those tools. All of the work we do at this great university depends upon recruiting and hiring the very best people, and making this community where they want to stay. I want to thank you for your commitment to understanding and addressing unconscious bias, and to building a healthy, inclusive and engaging work environment that will keep UW-Madison one of the top universities in the world."

Message from Vice Provost for Diversity and Climate, Patrick Sims

"Something that keeps me going is the knowledge that I am a member of great University. An institution that was created with the intent of making our world a better place.

 Unconscious Bias was first uncovered and researched in the 80's, and since then, that research has been shared and built upon by other institutions. And sharing that research is part of what we are committed to here at the UW-Madison.

Our University is made richer by diversity of thought, of culture and of individuals. The more that we can grow by finding colleagues who are not copies of ourselves, the greater the possibility we will have of discovering ideas that are new.

 Our minds create convenient patterns for a sense of safety and certainty, but our purpose is to seek the risks of what is possible. If we do this, we can be better teachers, better learners, better employees and, dare I say it?, better Badgers."

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INTRODUCTION

A UW-Madison committed to fair hiring practices understands unconscious bias and why it occurs. The fair hiring practice is diligent in its effort to recognize unconscious bias and devotes time and energy to managing unconscious bias.

The Office of Human Resource at UW-Madison has produced the video "Hiring the best and brightest: Understanding unconscious bias and improving our hiring practices and decisions". Content in this video includes topics related to unconscious bias in the hiring process, introduction to unconscious bias, how unconscious bias relates to decisions making, and how we control unconscious bias.

This guidebook is a supplemental material for self-learners, trainers, or facilitators to learn or facilitate unconscious bias course. The guidebook includes key definitions, unconscious bias introduction, recognizing unconscious bias, controlling for unconscious bias, scenarios, and activities. The purpose of this video and guidebook is to help staff and faculty to understand and recognize individual unconscious bias to affect individuals' hiring decisions as well as improve hiring practices and processes at UW-Madison

Learning Objectives

- Acknowledge that bias is inherent
- Articulate how bias influences outcomes
- Commit to creating fair, unbiased processes

Audience

- Search and screen teams
- Hiring committee members and managers
- All people who have contact with candidates

KEY DEFINITIONS

- **Bias** is a preference or choice in favor of, or against, something or someone, usually in a way consider to be unfair, unjust, or inequitable.

- **Culture**: A set of unspoken rules that shape a group's values, norms, beliefs, habits, patterns of thinking, behaviors and styles of communication.

- **Diversity** is the range of human qualities that impact and influence how people are <u>perceived</u> and how they <u>behave</u>. These qualities include but are not limited to age, gender, race, ethnicity, physical and mental abilities, sexual orientation, marital status, geography, location, spirituality, education, values and beliefs, etc.

- **Inclusion** refers to a sense of belonging: feeling respected, valued, and seen for who you are and valued as a contributing member of the team, work group, or organization. It is providing access to the organization and creating opportunities for people to be part of the fundamental fabric of the way the organization functions—decision-making, responsibility, leadership—and then creating organizations that are culturally competent, culturally intelligent, and culturally flexible.

- **Microaggressions** are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities—whether intentional or unintentional—that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative slights and insults to the target person or group.

- **Unconscious Bias** or implicit bias refers to unintentional bias in judgments or actions that result from mental processes that occur below the level of our conscious awareness. It arises from our brain's ability to automatically categorize information and on associations, we have learned from our society and culture.

- **Types of unconscious bias**
    - **Anchoring Bias** is over-relying on the first piece of information obtained and using it as the baseline for comparison. For example, **if** the first applicant has an unusually high test score, it might set the bar so high that applicants with more normal scores.
    - **Confirmation bias** involves favoring information that confirms previously existing beliefs or biases**.** For example, **a hiring manger** has a preference for hiring candidates who have graduated from a specific college or university
    - **Halo effect** is the tendency to judge others similarly on all traits, assuming that because someone is good or bad at one thing they will be equally good or bad at another. For example, **during a search**, if a candidate has strong educational credentials the committee might conclude that he/she is also a strong leader.
    - **In-group bias** can make us so much more comfortable with those who we unconsciously feel are like us and in our group. For example, **search committee members** who perceive commonalities with applicants are more likely to view them favorably.
    - **Stereotype bias** is attributing assumed or learned characteristics of a group to individual members of the group, whether or not they share the characteristic. For example, **a search committee member** judge a job candidate by their physical appearance (e.g., race, gender, age, physical traits, and so on)

What is Bias?

Our biases impact our decision making, sometimes without us even knowing. Bias in hiring practices – whether it is conscious, unconscious or implicit – is favoring one person or group over another person or group for reasons unrelated to the actual job criteria. Research shows that implicit and unconscious bias significantly impacts everything from evaluating resumes to phone interviews to campus interview processes. UW-Madison is committed to fair and unbiased hiring practices and understanding the types and impact of bias is one strategy to more effectively prevent it is impact on hiring decisions.

What is Unconscious Bias?

Unconscious bias is a mental shortcut. An automatic part of thinking that saves time and allows quick decisions. Different than conscious or explicit bias – which are often known preferences implicit or unconscious bias results from almost automatic connections or decisions we make often without conscious consideration.

Conscious or explicit bias: Know preferences that are expressed when offered a choice.

Unconscious or implicit bias: Automatic connections or decisions made without conscious consideration. Sometimes these automated processes are based on previous experience or stereotypes common in our society.

For example, from early childhood we quickly discover that some things are similar and that making conclusions about similar things seems to be reliable. We naturally recognize and apply patterns without having to think about it. Like figure 1, when an individual sees a subject, people will naturally identify which subject does not belong to the group.
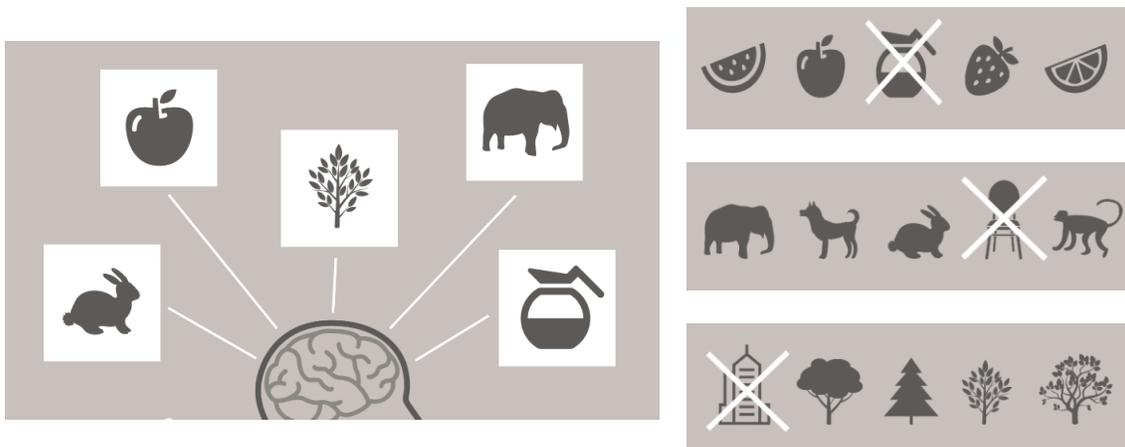
> Unconscious biases are mental shortcuts that allow for quick decisions without our knowledge.

Figure 1. Group subjects

This way of thinking becomes so natural to us that we no longer notice it. We learn that we can make decisions, difficult or simple, by relying on the patterns, we have formed and base decisions on choices made in the past. Patterns are often connected with norms and behavioral traits learned through our lives.

Activity 1

Please identity which columns are associated to male characteristics or female characteristics?

COLUMN 1	COLUMN 2
Independent	Sympathetic
Assertive	Loyal
Intelligent	Compassionate
Analytical	Gentle
Willing to take risks	Relationship Builder

Comments:

Historically leaders have been associated with values in column 1. Simultaneously, these same values are also associated with our stereotypes about men. The historical association of leaders with stereotypically male traits (column 1) causes bias against female traits leaders even though we recognize that great leaders today exhibit traits from both column 1 and column 2. These patterns result in implicit bias.

Unconscious/Implicit Bias

Serotonin and cortisol play as key regulators of unconscious bias .

Our positive attitude about a particular thing or person can transfer very easily to other things, people, and groups that share attributes with the original person or thing. This transference can occur without conscious awareness. For example, on a research study, people demonstrate a biased preference for new products that resemble their own names *(Brendl, Chattopadhyay, Pelham, & Carvallo, 2005).*

When a pattern works for us, we feel a rewarding sense of certainty. This is an actual chemical aspect of the brain. Being certain releases a feel-good chemical like

serotonin while being uncertain releases a chemical like cortisol, which does not feel good (see figure 2).

Figure 2. Serotonin and cortisol as key regulators of unconscious bias

A substantial body of evidence demonstrates that most people hold unconscious biases about group of people. Unconscious biases can also be referred to as schemas, stereotypes, mental models, cognitive shortcuts, statistical discrimination, implicit associations, spontaneous trait inference, system 1 thinking (i.e., an automatic, fast and often unconscious way of thinking). Unconscious bias is a natural aspect of how our brains work, but when decisions need to be made with care, it can lead to poor choices that negatively affect our hiring decisions. In addition, when hiring people to work at UW-Madison, it can result in not hiring the most qualified candidate. In addition to harming individual people, these biases also have consequences for the university. Diversity adds richness to our UW-Madison environment and without the multiple perspectives people bring, we limit our creativity, problem-solving capacity, and opportunities for innovative thinking. Further, organizations across the nation are legally and financially exposed to the consequences of unconscious bias.   Moreover, costs can be measured in the effort needed to recover and repair situations that result from unconscious bias. The cost of replacing an employee can be more than the departing employee's salary.

Consequences of unconscious bias

- o Limited creativity, problem-solving capacity and innovative thinking
- o Employee turnover (and the time it takes to hire someone new)
- o Committee member, Department, and University reputation
- o Credibility
- o Recovery from illegal questions or answers
- o Reduce morale and productivity
- o Legal liability

Recognize Unconscious Bias

Before we can begin to manage unconscious bias, we need to be able to recognize it when it occurs. In a hiring situation, we are likely to think we know aspects of an applicant that are in reality the results of unconscious bias. Some common things we think we know are actually impressions rather than evidence.

Impressions not evidence

Our impressions of an applicant are the result of our mind coming to a conclusion based on patterns from our experiences. These impressions begin to form early in the hiring process. The ability of the unconscious to make patterns extends to interpreting resumes, cover letters, and during interviews and meetings with candidates. By the nature of the brain, certain assumptions often occur in seconds.

Here are some things to consider:

- Men and women who looked more stereotypically masculine were more likely to be hired for leadership positions.
- Older workers are stereotyped as being resistant to change, difficult to train, and having physical limitations, younger workers (despite their inexperience) are given preference in hiring.
- These resumes are identical, hiring bias was found by resumes bearing names traditionally held by none white-sounding names (see figure 3).

Figure 3. Identical resume with different names

These assumptions result in potentially unfair judgment and bias. These assumptions are also self-reinforcing because they bring attention to the attributes of a person that fits the assumptions, and overlook the ones that set them apart. In addition, at the same time it will feel good, because we experience this as being certain.

A fair and equitable hiring decision should be challenging and take time to accomplish. In the hiring process, an amount of uncertainty is a good sign. Another way to keep this awareness is to consider the old adage about "things that are too good to be true." One way to address these issues is to discuss the evaluation criteria with the search committee prior to evaluating applicant materials or interviews.

Consider:
- What would [a skill] look like on a resume or curriculum vitae?
- What would be evidence of…?
- What are our benchmarks for criteria or interview questions?
- How will we monitor our process for managing against unconscious bias?

Examples:
- Are you consistently relying on the criteria (qualifications) developed for the position?
- Have the accomplishments, ideas, and findings of women or minority applicants or traditionally underrepresented groups been undervalued?
- Are negative assumptions about whether women, minority, or traditionally underrepresented applicants will "fit in" to the existing environment influencing the evaluation?
- Did you avoid evaluating applicants on the basis of promise or potential rather than on evidence of accomplishments and productivity?

To explore your own unconscious assumptions there is an excellent resource called *Project Implicit* (https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/selectatest.html) that has a variety of tests you can take online.

Control for Unconscious Bias

From an organizational standpoint, we are developing policies and providing training that helps to manage unconscious bias. We can also work to manage unconscious bias as individuals.

Consider these four principles about bias:

- Bias is universal
- Bias is most difficult to manage in the moment of decision
- Managing bias is intentional not instinctual

▪ Managing bias is most successful with others rather than alone

Look at your own habits of decision-making and be aware of situations that may encourage unconscious bias. One way to look at your habits is to consider the SEEDS model of situations where there is a tendency to fall back on instinctive choices. The Neuro Leadership Institute created this model and provides suggestions for managing these tendencies (see table 2).

Table 2 The Neuro Leadership Institute SEEDS^{TM} Model

SEEDS™ model	Common forms	Actions
Similarity "People like me are better than others"	In all people decisions	Focus on shared goals and focus on similarities
Expedience "If it feels familiar and easy it must be true"	When we hurry or experience high cognitive load	Break process into steps and create processes to consider all information
Experience "My perceptions are accurate"	In decisions and often happen as a result of subjective perceptions	Get other perspectives and revisit ideas after a break
Distance: "Closer is better than distant"	When making decisions where you feel closer to the subject	Decide in another time frame
Safety Avoid immediate comfort	Guard against immediately identifying different as unsafe or risky	Think long-term benefits

The NeuroLeadership Institute also suggests three research-based strategies for controlling unconscious bias in processes:

1. Use if-then plans – identify decision process that begin to make positive responses automatic in every hiring process (i.e., **if** I see a candidate with a disability, **then** I should focus on the candidate' abilities or skills rather than the disabilities)

2. Create decision guides – step-by-step protocols for making key hiring decisions

3. Implement preventative measures – work to keep biases from being activated (i.e., remover distinguishing features from resume or curriculum vitae, group hiring, or designate a "chief contrarian")

Activity 2

1. Please write down your if-then-plans to identify your decision process.

2. Is there any hiring decision guides or protocols in your department or unit? Please briefly write down your hiring decision guides or protocols.

3. Please write down three strategies of preventative measures for the hiring decisions making.

The Women in Science and Engineering Leadership Institute (referred to as WISELI) at UW-Madison, which was created to study gender equity, implement solutions, and provide methods to measure and analyze data, provides the following recommendations for minimizing the influence of bias when reviewing applicants:

Mitigate bias strategies:
1) If-then plan,
2) Decision guides,
3) Preventative measures,
4) Diversify applicant pool and review panel,
5) Acknowledge the role of bias,
6) Agree on selection criteria,
7) Focus on "Required" criteria,
8) Evaluate all materials,
9) Defend decisions, and
10) Review your own bias.

- Replace your self-image as an objective person with recognition and acceptance that you are subject to the influence of bias and assumptions
- Strive to increase the diversity of your search committee
- Strive to increase the representation of women and minority scholars in your applicant pool
- Develop well-defined evaluation criteria prior to reviewing applications
- Prioritize evaluation criteria prior to evaluating applicants
- Engage in counter-stereotype imaging to reduce the influence of unconscious assumptions (i.e., imagine an astronaut, engineer, CEO who is also a woman
- OR specific positive counter-stereotypical individuals you know)
- Spend sufficient time evaluating each applicant and minimize distractions
- Focus on each applicant as an individual and evaluate their entire application package by focusing on individuals' qualifications rather than on our assumptions about characteristics of the groups to which they belong
- Rely upon inclusion rather than exclusion strategies in making selection decisions
- Stop periodically to evaluate your criteria and their application

In addition, the mind rewards decisions that match patterns so let the sense of certainty alert you to unconscious bias. As an individual seeking to manage unconscious bias, take the time to follow the hiring procedures and guidelines provided to you by your organization.

Note: Please talk with your human resources representatives if you have any concerns.

Search and Screen Scenario

- Chair: I want to thank you all for serving in our search and screen committee. These are the final interview results.

- Panel member #1: I can't believe how many applicants we had for this position. Are you sure these are the last ones?

- Chair: Yes, these are the last ones. Based on the final feedback these five candidates are all highly qualified for the position.

- Panel member #1: That's great news. It felt like to me like we weren't going to find anyone that would fit the job.

- Panel member #3: That's surprising!

- Panel member #2: Huh, why do you say that?

- Panel member #1: Well, no reason in particular really. The people I interviewed... I just couldn't see them in the job.

- Panel member #2: That's interesting. Do you have any idea why you felt that way?

- Panel member #1: Um, no, not really. It was just an overall impression. You know, everyone gave good answers but I just felt like I couldn't connect with them. I don't know why I didn't like them. It seemed like what they said sounded good but the words didn't seem to fit the person.

- Chair: We must only evaluate individuals based on the job description criteria that we discussed with our HR representative before we started the interview process; we can't consider other factors when making a hiring decision.

- Panel member #1: Huh. Well, I still feel confident in my sense to read people, I think I'm a pretty good judge of character.

- Panel member #2: So you're going to stick with that gut feeling then?

- Panel member #1: Yup! I mean, I just don't see how that's a bad thing.

- Panel Member #3: Hey guys. have you ever heard the term "Unconscious Bias"?

- Panel member #2: Oh yes, I've heard about that.

- Panel member #1: Huh, that's a new one to me.

- Panel Member #3: Yeah, it's getting more recognition and there's actually a lot you can do about it. Making people aware of unconscious bias is an important first step, but learning that most people are actively trying to minimize bias is even more important. The more we get the word

out, the better we can keep ourselves in check and prevent unconscious bias from influencing our hiring decisions.

Activity 3

Consider some of the following questions:
1. What assumptions/unconscious bias are revealed in the case above?

2. How do you prevent search committee members from unconscious bias?

3. What strategies would you recommend to search committee members for minimizing unconscious bias?

KEY TAKE-AWAYS

What should the audience know? Do differently?

- Understand the impact of their behaviors on personnel decision making and impact on assessment process and selection and candidate's perception of UW
- Understand that they represent their department and UW
- Pause: think and consider, road bumps, A [Symbol] B [Symbol] C consequence
- Understand how it applies to entire life cycle and how concepts connect/integrate
- Unconscious bias' influence on recruiting (passing jobs through unofficial contacts)
- Fair and non-discriminatory
- Know what to focus on ("add to diversity program")
- Works, but consider things like last names and how they can throw you off
- Know data and research behind unconscious bias and diversity
- Areas on which to focus and which elements are not appropriate (height, weight, accent)
- Focus on "best qualified" to avoid distractions
- Creating questions in advance: interview prep
- Evidence of "ideal"
- Equalize
- Resources/recommended reading/case studies
- Checking references

Take-away questions

- How does it look if I am committed to hiring without unconscious bias?
- What do I think I know about an applicant?
- What habits do I need to break?

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