

Graduate Applicant Review Guide

Reflections to Address Potential Bias in the Review of Grad Admission Applicants

(Adapted with permission from Boyden's Guide for Application Reviews)

Self-Reflection and Examination

When we review applications, we use our personal experiences as our lens. As you undertake the process of reviewing the information provided by applicants in their application for admission to your program, please reflect on your own unconscious/implicit biases. Some of the more common biases that we all share include:

Performance Bias

- Am I evaluating demonstrated achievements and potential based on stereotypes?

Confirmation Bias

- Am I looking for evidence or information that confirms preconceived ideas or expectations based on stereotypes?

Performance Attribution Bias

- When considering an applicant's past achievements, am I attributing their achievements to their personal skills, academic abilities, and/or talent, or am I attributing them to luck and/or external supporting factors?

Competency/Likability Trade Off

- Am I overlooking an applicant's competencies and potential by focusing on their likability based on stereotypical expectations?

In-Group Bias

- Am I giving preference to some applicants because I relate personally to some aspect(s) of their identity, background, previous education, or interests?

Projection Bias

- Am I drawn to certain applicants because they appear to share my interests, values, or ways of thinking?

Normative Bias ('groupthink')

- When evaluating applicants, do I tend to conform to the thoughts of others on the committee? Do I tend to be swayed by what the majority think, or by what someone in a position of authority thinks?

In addition to reflecting on our potential biases, below are some tips to keep in mind when reviewing applicants, especially self-identified Black and Indigenous applicants:

- Avoid comparing applicants with one another – rather, consider each applicant’s potential in relation to the requirements of your program.
- Be as inclusive as possible in the initial review of applicants – emphasize the strengths of applicants, as opposed to reasons to reject applicants.
- Avoid making assumptions about what may appear as gaps in education timelines, or the length of their education timelines.
- Avoid over-emphasizing “prestigious” awards or recognitions.
- Avoid over-emphasizing the “prestige” or “reputation” of institution(s) previously attended.
- When the list of applicants selected for offers of admission has been determined, examine the list and interrogate whether it reflects diversity. If it doesn’t, consider why that may be and what could/should be revisited.