

Factors influencing underrepresented geoscientists' decisions to accept or decline faculty job offers in the US

Corresponding Author: Dr Margaret Duffy

This file contains all editorial decision letters in order by version, followed by all author rebuttals in order by version.

Version 0:

Decision Letter:

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Dear Dr Duffy,

Your manuscript titled "Factors influencing underrepresented geoscientists' decisions to accept or decline faculty job offers" has now been seen by 2 reviewers, whose comments are appended below. You will see that they find your work of some potential interest. However, they have raised quite substantial concerns that must be addressed. In light of these comments, we cannot accept the manuscript for publication, but would be interested in considering a revised version that fully addresses these serious concerns.

We hope you will find the reviewers' comments useful as you decide how to proceed. For publication in Communications Earth & Environment to be appropriate, we would need you to

- * provide compelling new insights into the reasons why geoscience faculty applicants from underrepresented groups accept or decline offer, along with clear, specific and compelling recommendations how retention can be improved

- * fully explain and justify your methodological choices, especially where queried by the reviewers.

In addition, please make it clear in the abstract and title that the article is solely about the situation in the US.

Should additional work allow you to address these criticisms, we would be happy to look at a substantially revised manuscript. If you choose to take up this option, please either highlight all changes in the manuscript text file, or provide a list of the changes to the manuscript with your responses to the reviewers.

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We are committed to providing a fair and constructive peer-review process. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you wish to discuss the revision in more detail.

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Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions or would like to discuss the required revisions further. Thank you for the opportunity to review your work.

Best regards,

Heike Langenberg, PhD
Chief Editor
Communications Earth & Environment

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REVIEWER COMMENTS:

Reviewer #1 (Remarks to the Author):

The paper draws from interviews with 19 geoscientists from underrepresented backgrounds who declined tenure-line job offers to unpack factors that make departments more or less appealing work environments for faculty from diverse backgrounds. The paper opens by summarizing research on factors that keep gender and racial diversity low among geoscience faculty before turning to documenting the various factors that participants cited as reasons to decline (or comparatively, to accept) job offers. The paper then uses these insights to create recommendations for departments seeking to increase the diversity of new hires.

The paper's strength is that it shines a light on an important contributor to the persistence of gender and racial inequalities in the discipline by showing that inequalities in geoscience careers are not just due to problems of the pipeline (as often discussed within STEM fields) but also how departments, universities, and individual faculty treat job candidates during the hiring process. Some of the negative experiences push prospective job candidates away from departments or out of the discipline entirely.

The paper's weakness is that, in my opinion, this argument gets lost in the current version of the paper. The paper covers a lot of ground in both the literature review and the findings, and how this paper extends existing research on inequalities in the academy doesn't come through as strongly as it could. The paper would benefit from tightening the literature review and making the paper's main argument and contributions clearer.

In addition, I had some questions about the methods and analysis. First, given the interview schedule, was the "strength" of reason for declining measured by the order in which a given reason was mentioned (e.g., if a participant gave three reasons, was the one mentioned first considered the strongest)? Or were participants asked what their most important reasons were? Why was the specific analytical choice selected? Second, were certain themes more common among certain sets of participants (e.g., which themes were more gendered versus racialized)? Third, one of the challenges of the current design is that we only see the reasons for declining for under-represented groups, so we don't get a clear sense of whether these factors are unique to (or stronger among) under-represented groups or if these are common across all job candidates. Finally, the recommendations (except the discussion of tokenism in the text) are quite general and would be lovely to have but do not provide clear guidelines on how to implement, especially in departments where gender or racial inequalities or biases are deeply entrenched. Providing more specificity (along the lines of what is described in the tokenism discussion) would help this section feel more actionable.

Reviewer #2 (Remarks to the Author):

This manuscript aims at understanding the lack of diversity at the tenure track level in geoscience. To do so, the authors have selected and interviewed 19 geoscientists from underrepresented groups who declined tenure track offers between 2016 and 2023. Their goals were to identify factors influencing their decisions and to provide a list of suggestions on how to overcome those barriers.

To my point of view, the strength of this manuscript is to have focused on scientists who declined job offers. This is a much-needed vision as too many initiatives suffer from survivorship bias (i.e., focus on the few who “made it” and ignore the vast majority who struggles). It is very important to hear the reasons behind those decisions in order to characterize the failures of the system.

However, the main issue preventing the manuscript to have a real impact on the community is the lack of quantification. When it comes to talking about identities, statements must be strongly backed up by references and data must go beyond subjective experiences. Objective quantification of the factors is essential to build a strong case and to provide an impactful illustration of the shortcomings of the recruitment strategies. I detail my point below.

The first main concern is the sampling. The authors say that they “did not interview every white cisgendered woman who met the eligibility requirements because they are overrepresented in [their] survey responses”. First how did they select the ones interviewed among the larger cohort of respondents? But most importantly, it is hard to understand why the authors did not decide on focusing on the population of white cisgendered women by including all the prospective participants which met the criteria. A large cohort would have enabled to draw stronger conclusion for this group instead of weaker ones for a wider and more heterogeneous group known to encounter different barriers (as mentioned by the authors). The group of 6 underrepresented race/ethnicity could have still been included in the analysis and in a separate discussion providing a strong argument about the lack of diversity reaching this career stage to begin with.

The second concern is the fact that surveys are very objective. As all the interviews are of course merged (due to the importance of anonymity), it is hard to know which factor of the recruitment procedure was the most determinant one. Indeed, the fact that 1) some findings can include “experiences that did not meet the criteria” 2) the number of participants giving quote for each factor is unknown and 3) that one participant gave twice more quotes (i.e., and potentially skewed the results based on their own subjective experience) weaken the conclusion. In order to strengthen the impact of their findings, I would greatly advice the authors to look for quantitative measures to gather evidence on recurrent patterns of responses across participants. For instance, by using algorithms to detect and to plot the most used terms to answer different questions across participants, or throughout the entire interview for each participant.

In the same vein, while the introduction is well written, documented and depicts clearly the actual situation, the discussion is poorly detailed. The recommendations are too mixed with, on one hand concrete actions at the administrative levels: visa, training committee, full transparency in the recruitment and the negotiation processes, changing the way calls are written etc., and on the other hand, the ones targeting individual behavior: respect, civics, awareness. For instance, the authors wrote: “In particular, helping candidates with any visa needs they may have [25], and using candidates’ correct pronouns can help make an offer more appealing.” Despite the importance of both recommendations, they should not be in the sentence as they do not concern the same level of administrations.

Finally, the vast majority of the recommendations are not specific to geoscience, and can be instead applied to the science community at large. This also means that the authors should consider looking into literature of other fields to know what can be implemented in geoscience to improve DEI.

Minors:

It would be good to get a sense of how many departments in the US the authors are talking about in order to provide a better understanding of the job market in geoscience.

The manuscript being US centric, the quotes not related to US jobs should be specified. Identities 7, Interviews 12, 16, 17 are not identified as accepted or declined. The quotes could also be split between accepted or declined offers.

Typo: two “to” in Strongest 13.

Anais Llorens

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Version 1:

Decision Letter:

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Dear Dr Duffy,

Your manuscript titled "Factors influencing underrepresented geoscientists' decisions to accept or decline faculty job offers in the US" has now been seen by our reviewers, whose comments appear below. In light of their advice we are delighted to say that we are happy, in principle, to publish a suitably revised version in Communications Earth & Environment.

We therefore invite you to revise your paper one last time to address the remaining concerns of our reviewers. At the same time we ask that you edit your manuscript to comply with our format requirements and to maximise the accessibility and therefore the impact of your work.

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We hope to hear from you within two weeks; please let us know if you need more time.

Best regards,

Heike Langenberg, PhD
Chief Editor
Communications Earth & Environment

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REVIEWERS' COMMENTS:

Reviewer #1 (Remarks to the Author):

The paper does a good job of streamlining the introduction and providing more details about the methods. Two suggestions include highlighting:

1. One contribution of the paper: that while STEM faculty often blame a lack of diversity on the problem of the pipeline, the paper shows that how universities and search committees behave serves to artificially constrain the diversity of the pipeline through acting in ways that exclude or turn off under-represented candidates from their institutions.
2. Moving the recommendations table (Table 8) to later in the text; when it comes before the text of the recommendations, the recommendations in this table still sound overly vague (e.g., "value diversity")
3. Highlight in the conclusion when discussing that the paper does not discuss factors that lead cis-gendered white men to turn down offers that some of these factors may be similar across groups and fixing hiring procedures can both increase diversity and make departments appealing for all candidate groups.

But otherwise, the revision satisfies my prior concerns.

Reviewer #2 (Remarks to the Author):

The revisions made by the authors answers most of my concerns. The manuscript is nicely streamlined. Adding the interviewee ID and whether the offer was declined or accepted for each quote help a lot. The main objectives of this qualitative study are clarified and the discussion is strengthened.

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Dear reviewers and editor,

Thank you very much for your thoughtful review of our paper. We are very excited about the updates to our manuscript which resulted from your review, the most major of which are enumerated here. Line numbers refer to the updated manuscript.

Major changes for this submission:

- Shortened introduction
- Participant numbers now accompany each quote in lieu of old Figure 1 (which showed the distribution of responses from each participant)
- More description of methods has been added to Section 2
- The subsection titled (In)civility during job interviews is now titled campus visits and it separated into two subsubsections: incivility and culture
- A quantitative text analysis of the interview transcripts has been added (Section 5.2)
- “Other” has been moved to an Appendix to streamline the main text
- The table in Section 3 (now Table 8) has been modified to focus on concrete, actionable recommendations and Section 3 now includes subsections for easier navigating
- A conclusion section has been added with a summary and some areas of future research
- More details have been added to the Methods section, including a text analysis

Sincerely,
Margaret Duffy and coauthors

Reviewer #1 (Remarks to the Author):

The paper draws from interviews with 19 geoscientists from underrepresented backgrounds who declined tenure-line job offers to unpack factors that make departments more or less appealing work environments for faculty from diverse backgrounds. The paper opens by summarizing research on factors that keep gender and racial diversity low among geoscience faculty before turning to documenting the various factors that participants cited as reasons to decline (or comparatively, to accept) job offers. The paper then uses these insights to create recommendations for departments seeking to increase the diversity of new hires.

The paper's strength is that it shines a light on an important contributor to the persistence of gender and racial inequalities in the discipline by showing that inequalities in geoscience careers are not just due to problems of the pipeline (as often discussed within STEM fields) but also how departments, universities, and individual faculty treat job candidates during the hiring process. Some of the negative experiences push prospective job candidates away from departments or out of the discipline entirely.

The paper's weakness is that, in my opinion, this argument gets lost in the current version of the paper. The paper covers a lot of ground in both the literature review and

the findings, and how this paper extends existing research on inequalities in the academy doesn't come through as strongly as it could. The paper would benefit from tightening the literature review and making the paper's main argument and contributions clearer.

Thank you for this comment. Sticking to a focused scope has been the most challenging part of conducting this research because there are just so many interesting findings and it's such an open and important area of research. We think this updated version of the paper is more concise. Specifically, the second paragraph of the introduction (lines 77-87 in the updated version), which describes motivation for diversifying, has been shortened and the information about previous recommendations (lines 103-117) has been reduced from two paragraphs to one. We also moved the subsection titled "Other" (previously Section 2.5) to an Appendix, now Appendix C, in the interest of focusing the main text. Finally, we've added subsections to Section 3 and a conclusion section which summarizes our main findings.

In addition, I had some questions about the methods and analysis. First, given the interview schedule, was the "strength" of reason for declining measured by the order in which a given reason was mentioned (e.g., if a participant gave three reasons, was the one mentioned first considered the strongest)? Or were participants asked what their most important reasons were? Why was the specific analytical choice selected?

"Strongest" is determined from participants' answer to Question 6 "Briefly, what made you decline the offer(s) that you did and what made you accept the offer that you did"? This is now described at lines 147-150 and 1283-1294. We simply list what the participants said and don't limit them to a specified number of reasons or interpret the first as the most important. Note that Table 9 is not always every since thing a participant said in response to Question 6, but rather the quote or quotes which summarizes every since thing they said. This is necessary for interview-based research, where participants vary greatly in how they answer questions.

Second, were certain themes more common among certain sets of participants (e.g., which themes were more gendered versus racialized)?

Our methods aren't well suited to an in-depth analysis of race vs gender, but we agree the identifying the barriers which are unique to racial minorities is important given that the geosciences have seen increases in the representation of women but not racial minorities in the past few decades (lines 1160-1170). We do highlight that discussion of safety was unique to our nonwhite participants (lines 1110-1112, 1164-1170).

Third, one of the challenges of the current design is that we only see the reasons for declining for under-represented groups, so we don't get a clear sense of whether these factors are unique to (or stronger among) under-represented groups or if these are common across all job candidates.

That's right; the scope of our project is to share the unique narratives of a handful of geoscientists from underrepresented groups. Therefore, our methods are not well suited for comparing across demographics. In order to compare experiences across demographics, one would need a larger number of participants and responses in a format that can easily be compared across participants (e.g. a survey with numerical or multiple choice responses). Marín-Spiotta et al., 2023, Earth's Future is a nice example of a methodology which allows for comparison across demographics.

Finally, the recommendations (except the discussion of tokenism in the text) are quite general and would be lovely to have but do not provide clear guidelines on how to implement, especially in departments where gender or racial inequalities or biases are deeply entrenched. Providing more specificity (along the lines of what is described in the tokenism discussion) would help this section feel more actionable.

Yes, the previous version was too vague. Please see the updated Section 3 and Table 8 for more specific and actionable recommendations. We hope that departments can use this guide in their hiring.

Reviewer #2 (Remarks to the Author):

This manuscript aims at understanding the lack of diversity at the tenure track level in geoscience. To do so, the authors have selected and interviewed 19 geoscientists from underrepresented groups who declined tenure track offers between 2016 and 2023. Their goals were to identify factors influencing their decisions and to provide a list of suggestions on how to overcome those barriers.

To my point of view, the strength of this manuscript is to have focused on scientists who declined job offers. This is a much-needed vision as too many initiatives suffer from survivorship bias (i.e., focus on the few who “made it” and ignore the vast majority who struggles). It is very important to hear the reasons behind those decisions in order to characterize the failures of the system.

However, the main issue preventing the manuscript to have a real impact on the community is the lack of quantification. When it comes to talking about identities, statements must be strongly backed up by references and data must go beyond subjective experiences. Objective quantification of the factors is essential to build a strong case and to provide an impactful illustration of the shortcomings of the recruitment strategies. I detail my point below.

As a group of mostly geoscientists, we agree that there is tremendous value in quantification. We do add a quantitative text analysis in Section 5.2 and Table 10, but we nonetheless mostly view this as a qualitative paper. In a topic as under-studies as hiring diverse faculty, it is useful to collect qualitative narratives to identify which areas of future quantitative study are warranted. Additionally, when studying human experiences, reducing experiences to statistics can neglect important complexities and nuances. For those reasons, we keep this particular paper qualitative. We do add some

areas of future research, many quantitative to the new Conclusions section (Section 4).

The first main concern is the sampling. The authors say that they “did not interview every white cisgendered woman who met the eligibility requirements because they are overrepresented in [their] survey responses”. First how did they select the ones interviewed among the larger cohort of respondents? But most importantly, it is hard to understand why the authors did not decide on focusing on the population of white cisgendered women by including all the prospective participants which met the criteria. A large cohort would have enabled to draw stronger conclusion for this group instead of weaker ones for a wider and more heterogeneous group known to encounter different barriers (as mentioned by the authors). The group of 6 underrepresented race/ethnicity could have still been included in the analysis and in a separate discussion providing a strong argument about the lack of diversity reaching this career stage to begin with.

White cisgendered women were selected based on who filled out our survey first, which is now mentioned at lines 1231-1234. There were only one or two not used for the study, so not enough to make a robust sample of white cisgendered women. More importantly, the geosciences has seen increased representation of white women while racial representation remains stagnant. Therefore, including the experiences of racial minorities is tremendously important, even if they are diluted by the experiences of white women in our study.

Additionally, our methods are not adequate to compare experiences of different groups. To do so would require many more participants and metrics which are easily comparable (e.g. numeric survey responses) as in Marín-Spiotta et al., 2023, Earth’s Future. Rather, our paper is meant to anonymously share the detailed narratives of a small group of geoscientists.

The second concern is the fact that surveys are very objective. As all the interviews are of course merged (due to the importance of anonymity), it is hard to know which factor of the recruitment procedure was the most determinant one. Indeed, the fact that 1) some findings can include “experiences that did not meet the criteria” 2) the number of participants giving quote for each factor is unknown and 3) that one participant gave twice more quotes (i.e., and potentially skewed the results based on their own subjective experience) weaken the conclusion. In order to strengthen the impact of their findings, I would greatly advice the authors to look for quantitative measures to gather evidence on recurrent patterns of responses across participants. For instance, by using algorithms to detect and to plot the most used terms to answer different questions across participants, or throughout the entire interview for each participant.

We have added participant IDs next to each quote to address point 2. The number of quotes from P18 has been reduced from 19 to 13, which helps alleviate point 3. As for point 1, very few of the quotes fall outside the scope of our work, and in the case of not receiving an offer they are noted. Only in the event that a participant described an experience prior to 2016 or outside of the US did a quote not meet the criteria, and

given that we only interviewed participants who were on the job market in the US after 2023 there are very few stray quotes which don't meet our criteria.

We have added the suggested analysis in Section 5.2 and Table 10, which shows how often words associated with each theme came up over the 19 interviews. This analysis shows that several of the themes related to the personal identities came up as often as research and teaching.

In the same vein, while the introduction is well written, documented and depicts clearly the actual situation, the discussion is poorly detailed. The recommendations are too mixed with, on one hand concrete actions at the administrative levels: visa, training committee, full transparency in the recruitment and the negotiation processes, changing the way calls are written etc., and on the other hand, the ones targeting individual behavior: respect, civics, awareness. For instance, the authors wrote: "In particular, helping candidates with any visa needs they may have [25], and using candidates' correct pronouns can help make an offer more appealing." Despite the importance of both recommendations, they should not be in the sentence as they do not concern the same level of administrations.

This particular issue has been resolved. Further, this entire Section has been substantially modified since the initial submission.

Finally, the vast majority of the recommendations are not specific to geoscience, and can be instead applied to the science community at large. This also means that the authors should consider looking into the literature of other fields to know what can be implemented in geoscience to improve DEI.

You are correct that the barriers to full participation in the geosciences are probably the same as those in other fields, especially other STEM fields. However, we cannot extrapolate our results beyond the geosciences because we only interviewed geoscientists. There are a few findings which are specific to the geosciences. One is that because of the interdisciplinary nature of the geosciences, it can be hard to know which jobs to apply for (lines 973-976). The second is that some participant's political concerns are amplified by the politicization of climate change (Geography 4). There are other features of the geosciences which are unique but did not emerge as themes in our interviews, but could have. The geosciences have a unique combination of theoretical, modeling, lab work, and fieldwork, which is not the case in many fields. Further, there are stereotypes which are unique to geoscientists: "the stereotype of geoscientists as white, able-bodied, cisgender, straight men" (Mattheis et al., 2022, PLOS one). For those reasons, we tried to use geoscience-specific literature where possible, but used literature from other fields, especially other STEM fields in the absence of appropriate geoscience literature.

Minors:

It would be good to get a sense of how many departments in the US the authors are talking about in order to provide a better understanding of the job market in geoscience.

The manuscript being US centric, the quotes not related to US jobs should be specified. Identities 7, Interviews 12, 16, 17 are not identified as accepted or declined. The quotes could also been split between accepted or declined offers.

Typo: two "to' in Strongest 13.

Anais Llorens

Reviewer #1 (Remarks to the Author):

The paper does a good job of streamlining the introduction and providing more details about the methods. Two suggestions include highlighting:

1. One contribution of the paper: that while STEM faculty often blame a lack of diversity on the problem of the pipeline, the paper shows that how universities and search committees behave serves to artificially constrain the diversity of the pipeline through acting in ways that exclude or turn off under-represented candidates from their institutions.

Great point! We've added some language to the Conclusion section at lines 645-650.

2. Moving the recommendations table (Table 8) to later in the text; when it comes before the text of the recommendations, the recommendations in this table still sound overly vague (e.g., "value diversity")

At this point, we place all the tables at the end of the paper, but we will look out for this when we review the preprint.

3. Highlight in the conclusion when discussing that the paper does not discuss factors that lead cis-gendered white men to turn down offers that some of these factors may be similar across groups and fixing hiring procedures can both increase diversity and make departments appealing for all candidate groups.

Another good point. We've added some language to the limitations section at lines 838-843.

But otherwise, the revision satisfies my prior concerns.

Reviewer #2 (Remarks to the Author):

The revisions made by the authors answers most of my concerns. The manuscript is nicely streamlined. Adding the interviewee ID and whether the offer was declined or accepted for each quote help a lot. The main objectives of this qualitative study are clarified and the discussion is strengthened.

Thank you!