

Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology Diversity and Social Justice
Report: Winter 2017

In The Department

The departmental climate reporting dropbox was launched this past summer. The dropbox allows incidents of bias, discrimination, microaggressions and other incidents affecting our department climate to be officially reported either anonymously or non-anonymously. General concerns and suggestions as well as positive experiences with department climate can also be submitted through the dropbox. This will allow for better recording and tracking of these incidents and will hopefully allow for actions to be taken to address specific incidents and improve the department climate as a whole.

In the fall semester there were three reports filed through the system. All three incidents involved microaggressions toward students by faculty members. In two of these cases no further action was taken beyond the report at the request of the reporters. In one case the incident was brought to the attention of the administration who took further action with the perpetrator. There was also an incident of sexual harassment. This was not reported through the dropbox but is being dealt with through university human resources. Please continue to use the dropbox to report climate incidents, comments, and suggestions. You can access the dropbox here:

https://docs.google.com/a/umich.edu/forms/d/18gGSOOGFuNiXM3YUFWEM6HWWWLGy8v6t0kO-jI9FKY/viewform?edit_requested=true

Some progress is being made in the department's efforts to promote faculty diversity through faculty search procedures. Efforts are being made to better track demographic information for job candidates, including an anonymous survey of race and ethnicity. For the fall population and community ecology faculty search there was a 70% response rate to this survey. Based on the results of the survey, 50% of candidates in the pool were women and 15% identified as under-represented minorities. On the short list 38% of candidates were women and 23% under-represented minorities. These rates are in-line with the typical demographics of PhDs in our field, but are not representative of the demographics in our region or country as a whole.

As part of the department's efforts to improve diversity of the graduate student body, a fall recruitment preview weekend was held October 15-17. This event brought talented upper-level undergraduates who were members of underrepresented minority groups to campus to meet with faculty and students and to learn about the department and encourage them to apply to our graduate programs. The event organizers have since received positive feedback from many of the students who participated.

The department's diversity committee has been working hard to bring more opportunities for training in diversity and social justice issues to the department. On January 30 a moderately well-attended workshop on Bystander Intervention training was held for students, faculty, and staff in EEB. Additional diversity and social justice training opportunities may be offered in the future.

Several individual members of our department have been involved in efforts to address diversity and social justice issues beyond our department and university. Graduate student Katherine Crocker was part of a team of scientists that composed a letter opposing the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline, which threatens the rights, health, and livelihoods of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe as well as the health and integrity of local ecosystems. The letter was signed by many members of our department. Read more about it here: <http://science.sciencemag.org/content/353/6307/1506.1>

Faculty members Gina Baucom and Meghan Duffy have created the website Diversify EEB that maintains a list of EEB scientists from backgrounds that are under-represented in the field. The list is

intended to help identify potential speakers, hires, award recipients and others who might otherwise be overlooked. Check it out here: <https://diversifyeeb.wordpress.com/>

At the University

The University launched its Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Strategic Plan on October 5, 2016. Under this plan, each school and unit has created its own plan to address diversity and inclusion issues focusing on three areas:

“Strategy 1: Create an Inclusive and Equitable Campus Climate

Strategy 2: Recruit, Retain and Develop a Diverse Community

Strategy 3: Support Innovative and Inclusive Scholarship and Teaching”

Read more about the university-wide DEI initiative here: <https://diversity.umich.edu/>

The Council on Disability Concerns hosted a series of “Investing In Ability” events during the month of October that explored disability through an intersectional lens. Events included film screenings, panel discussions and an Army-Navy wheelchair basketball game. In recognition of Trans Awareness Week (November 15-20), the Spectrum Center hosted events including ally development training, trans identity drop-in groups, and a Trans Day of Remembrance ceremony.

There were several incidents of racially motivated hate speech on campus throughout the fall. On September 26, fliers were found posted around central campus that advocated white supremacy and perpetuated racist stereotypes of African Americans. The fliers were removed, but the parties responsible have not been identified and no disciplinary action has been taken. Read a statement about the fliers from several concerned LSA faculty here: <https://lsa.umich.edu/lsa/about/diversity--equity-and-inclusion/putting-the-racist-flyers-at-u-m-in-context.html>. In response, president Schlissel launched a campaign to put up posters asking members of the university community to “Spread ideas, not hate.”

Read more about it here: <https://president.umich.edu/news-communications/news/spread-ideas-not-hate-poster/>. However, this slogan has been criticized as not taking a serious enough stance against racism. Read an article about this by Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education Angela Dillard here:

<https://www.solidarity-us.org/node/4860>.

Over the past year and particularly in the wake of the November election there have also been many cases of islamophobic hate speech and hate crimes targeting members of the university community.

Rallies, protests, and marches in support of racial justice, immigrant rights, and indigenous peoples’ rights have occurred on campus with increasing frequency. Most notably, a large walkout organized by Students4Justice at the University of Michigan took place on November 16 to protest racism on campus. The Reverend Jesse Jackson, who was on campus for an event, gave an impromptu speech at the rally. Read more about the walkout here: <https://www.michigandaily.com/section/news/students-rev-jesse-jackson-participate-walkout-protest-campus>

The university’s Graduate Employees’ Organization (Local 3550, American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO), the union representing graduate student instructors and graduate student assistants, will be bargaining for its new contract in the coming months. Focuses of bargaining for GEO include maintaining existing health care coverage for graduate workers and increasing subsidies for childcare.

Around the Country

Diversity and social justice have been hot-button issues for many universities nation-wide. In August, the University of Chicago caused a stir when it released a statement claiming that it did not support the use of “trigger warnings” and “safe spaces” on campus. Read more about it here: <http://www.npr.org/2016/08/26/491531869/university-of-chicago-tells-freshmen-it-does-not-support-trigger-warnings> This has re-ignited debate and discussion of universities’ policies surrounding language, protest, and classroom environment. A good discussion of these issues from a University of Chicago student can be found here: <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/11/opinion/trigger-warnings-safe-spaces-and-free-speech-too.html>

In August, the National Labor Relations Board ruled that graduate student workers at private universities are covered by the National Labor Relations Act and have the right to form unions for

collective bargaining. Following this decision, graduate students at many private universities such as Columbia, Duke, and Princeton have either formed unions or begun campaigning to form them. However, students at some universities, such as Harvard and Yale, have faced challenges from university administration. Graduate workers at public universities remain covered by state labor laws and many (including those at U of M) have been successfully unionized for many years. Read more about the importance of graduate student worker unions here: <https://www.aaup.org/news/support-cornell-grad-employees#.WJDXJ7YrLVp>

Sexual assault and sexual harassment continue to be significant problems at colleges and universities around the country. Within the past few months alone, Title IX lawsuits (alleging that universities have engaged in discrimination due to their failure to prevent and address sexual assault incidents on campus) have been filed against Baylor University, Purdue University, and Michigan State University. Read more about campus sexual assault and Title IX lawsuits and track Title IX complaints against universities here: <http://www.chronicle.com/article/How-to-Use-The-Chronicle-s/236676>

Further Reading

On microaggressions: <https://higheredtoday.org/2016/07/27/understanding-and-combatting-microaggressions-in-postsecondary-education/>

On trigger warnings: <https://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/2016/jun/14/i-use-trigger-warnings-but-im-not-mollycoddling-my-students>

Decolonising Science reading list: <https://medium.com/@chanda/decolonising-science-reading-list-339fb773d51f#.a2m9aaw37>

Science is Political reading list:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1qhhHXXL7Teqc_L3LpohgopoEUvnn7E8tVPkPLc5A0/edit

Scientists' March on Washington: <https://www.marchforscience.com/>

Follow EEB Social Justice on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/JustEEB>

About The Report

The purpose of the diversity and social justice report is to highlight the status of climate and diversity issues in EEB, important current events related to social justice in STEM, and relevant resources, training, and perspectives on diversity and social justice. This report was compiled and written by Paula Matzke. Additional support and assistance were provided by the EEB diversity committee and GREES. Please direct questions, comments, and/or concerns about the report to Paula Matzke (pteich@umich.edu).