

11/04/2020

Physics DEI Committee Meeting Minutes

Agenda: Discussion Topics

1. Introductions- All (**5 min**)
2. Approve [previous minutes](#) - All (**5 min**)
3. Discuss creating DEI Committee Slack channel (**5 mins**)
4. [ADVANCE survey](#) take-aways (**25 mins**)
5. Subcommittee updates - All (**20 mins**)

Quick links:

- [Meeting minutes](#) from previous meeting (10/21/2020)
 - [2019 ADVANCE survey - graduate students](#)
 - [2019 ADVANCE survey - postdocs](#)
 - [Recommended actions items](#) from summer
 - [Shared leadership document](#)
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Action item tracking

Proposals (based on discussion of ADVANCE survey):

1. Improve access to resources/opportunities for careers outside of academia
2. Aid students pursuing academic careers through writing workshops on research, teaching, and DEI statements
3. Improve access/advertising mental health and work-life balance resources
4. Add workshops on mentoring to improve advisor-student communication and to outline joint expectations
5. Workshop or course (perhaps UC 415) to educate graduate students on DEI to help prevent exclusionary attitudes and negative stereotyping
6. Create means for student groups to request help from professors (requester: Johnathon Jordan)

Action items from today's meeting:

1. Create group messaging system (e.g. Slack) for committee as a whole and subcommittees
2. Subcommittees prepare presentation on their action items for next meeting

Ongoing Projects:

1. Updating Physics Department/DEI Committee website (Rachel)
 2. Share events to this list (all members):
https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1ymH-GVUKBGZ1kj11jQ41h8pntP3Qz2bLyV1B17Q_1l/edit?usp=sharing
 3. Consider department newsletter to announce various conferences, events, workshops, etc
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Updates from Slack Channel:

All:

- 1) Announcement of [AIP TEAM-UP report](#) ("Systematic changes to increase African Americans with Bachelor's Degrees in Physics and Astronomy")
- 2) Call for Winter term colloquium speaker suggestions (from the representation committee or anyone else)
- 3) Call for group discussion on workshops we would like for next semester.

Outreach:

- 1) SPS EBoard approved recruitment of students for cosmology-themed talks and a line-up of students is expected in a few weeks.

Representation:

- 1) Call for recommendations on how to present demographic data (either on the physics department website or elsewhere)
- 2) Recommendation to pull speakers from [APS speaker list](#) for colloquiums.

Research Committee:

- 1) Discussion on misconceptions surrounding industry jobs.
- 2) Recommendation for mentorship (student and advisor) agreement

document.

- 3) Recommendation to develop department policies on sick leave and time off.
 - 4) Recommendation to extend PGSS into the school year (potentially multiple speakers in one session).
 - 5) Create new surveys to increase available data.
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Meeting Minutes

General Meeting Minutes:

Previous meeting minutes were approved with no changes

Discussed creating Slack channel:

About half of the committee currently uses Slack and was in favor. There was some hesitation from other members out of concerns of having time to check an additional messaging platform. Recommendation of Signal as an alternative to Slack, however few people were familiar. Decided to proceed and create a Slack channel and monitor use from there.

Advance Survey (grad students):

Presentation:

- First acknowledged the impact of the election on our physics community as well as its implications. Advertised to seek out self-care resources if needed. Information on these resources has been sent to various University members through the President's office (as well as other sources).
- Background: survey was first recommended/requested by SWIP and was administered to grad students and postdocs (separately) in January-February 2020, which is right before U-M felt the major impacts of COVID. Since then have also faced nationally and locally, effects of the pandemic, racial injustice issues, the GEO strike, and a polarizing election.
- The overall majority of respondents found the overall department climate to be welcoming. Pointed out that climate is not a majority vote however and we need to pay attention to the effects on a small number of people.
- Findings of general department climate: The department was not found to be hostile or disrespectful, however was found to be homogeneous and snobbish. Large portion of respondents felt that there was some exclusion of certain groups by students and faculty. The Physics Department staff were

found to be helpful and welcoming and had excellent reviews from respondents.

- Table 4: Large number of respondents felt that some graduate students and faculty had condescending attitudes towards women, underrepresented minorities, sexual and gender minorities, and international students. Additionally, people felt that women did not speak in meetings as much as their male peers as well as other minorities in physics.
- Table 11: Graduate students felt that qualifying exams were not very beneficial to their graduate school careers. Things graduate students felt that were beneficial to them were largely research based.
- Table 13: Respondents have been at some point discouraged during their career. The main sources of discouragement were research and personal life. Although not as many, people were also discouraged by academic performance and interactions with advisor.
- Table 18: Both a career as professor at a research university and a career in industry R&D were equally attractive to respondents. Desire for more opportunities to exposure to careers outside of academia as well as present opportunities.
- Table 21: Students found workshops and training opportunities to be very useful. People also typically feared retaliation from reporting harassment (either witnessed or experienced)

A summation of the comments by different members of the board during the group discussion can be seen as follows:

- The question was posed of how can the committee take actions towards improving the climate, especially addressing certain areas that seem to be especially problematic. Currently workshops seem to be the best means, but those are not all encompassing.
- This question was answered with several proposals. Can help with providing assistance/opportunities related to careers outside of academia. Can additionally work with students pursuing academic careers by creating workshops to aid with research, teaching, and DEI statements. Also do a better job at providing mental health resources for students and resources to improve work-life balance. Add workshops on mentoring to help improve advisor-student communication and to discuss expectations that are often overlooked (e.g. expected to work on weekends, time off, etc)
- Brought up the Rackham climate survey which is administered every three years. This year it was put on hiatus, but is expected to be given to the Physics Department in the 2021-22 academic year. One thing that is asked

with the Rackham climate survey is steps the department has taken to improve upon the results of the last survey. This action can be included among that list of steps taken.

- Requested that the committee tries to take into consideration the feelings of the students (expressed in the survey) when developing goals and initiatives. Pointed out that there should not be a disconnect between the two and we should make sure our action items are reaching people. Future assessments could tell us if we are effective in these measures.
- Highlighted the part in the survey where students felt like their research is just to advance the career of the faculty member. Pointed out that it is important for students to understand that it is there to also advance their goals.
- Highlighted the part of the survey that stated that negative attitudes towards certain groups (women, URM, international students, sexual & gender minorities) are from other grad students. Asked if we could require a workshop to assist in preventing negative stereotyping and attitudes.
- Mentioned that she covered the results of this survey in the 415 ethics course this semester. Is looking for other ways to address this as well.
- With respect to the above statements, pointed out that on the LSA website they show progress of DEI initiatives. One initiative that has not started is working with graduate students on DEI. Pointed out this is an area that we could definitely work on.
- With respect to the comment about advancing the career of the advisor, mentioned in general the University could do a better job of showing appreciation towards it's graduate students. Work from graduate students is often unseen by the University as exemplified by them suing GEO over the work stoppage. There is little appreciation for grad students on a University level and we need to do better.
- Pointed out that there was a relatively high number of people who feared retaliation but also a high number of people who liked workshops. Recommended in future workshops that the steps after making a report be discussed. Illuminating the reporting process afterwards could help address these fears. This is also crucial with the new changes to the UM sexual harassment umbrella policy as there are still a lot of questions.
- In response to the above, currently it is unclear what reporters must do. Before they were called "mandatory reporters," but are now "responsible employees" under the new policy. Mentioned that during the CRLT workshop it is clear the the policy is in place to deal with especially egregious behavior (e.g. violations to Title IX, sexual assault, etc), however there is little in place

for handling harassment that is often goes unnoticed. This includes small microaggressions that happen everyday and are rarely addressed, but strongly contribute to a negative climate. Mentioned that workshops can help with addressing some of these by discussing bystander intervention in instances of microaggressions. Information for the official process of reporting is definitely important, but we should also focus more on harassment that is “below the water on the iceberg” as this is where we could make substantial gains in the physics department.

- Pointed out that the fears of retaliation are warranted as retaliation does happen. Mentioned there are no policies in place to protect whistleblowers. We need to put protections in place to help keep people safe.

On this note, the meeting ended. Ran out of time to discuss subcommittee initiatives. Added as the first item for the next meeting’s agenda.

Subcommittee action item tracking and links

Research Subcommittee

Notes: 11/04/2020 From Slack Channel

Here's a brief list of things we have previously discussed:

1) Taking a job in industry is considered a "fail state." What can we do to change this? At least a large portion of this preconception is driven by the student culture.

2) Mentorship agreement documents: A contract between a student and advisor that spells out mentoring goals and expectations. This can be awkward considering power imbalances, especially for newer students.

3) The suggestion was made that this could be delayed until after a student has progressed to candidacy.

4) Setting department norms on research group policies, including things like COVID (and other sickness) time off.

5) Extend PGSS in some form out of the summer. Create early career focused colloquium? This could be a good place to introduce "lightning talks," where several students each speak for 15 minutes.

6) We want to confer with other subcommittees ([#teaching_subcommittee](#) [#outreach-subcommittee](#) [#representation-subcommittee](#)) about setting up workshops in the next semester or so. This requires significant investment, so we should all be on the same page.

7) Direct new surveys to increase available data, but we shouldn't wait for new data before we start working on concrete changes.

8) We discussed summer rotations, but the reception was lukewarm.

Representation Subcommittee

Notes: 11/04-11-17 Slack Channel:

Someone at CU-Boulder reached out asking how we are doing so well with recruitment/retention of URM students based on demographics listed on the APS website. APS says that between 2015-2017, on average 18% of our PhD degrees are awarded to URM students (national avg: 7%) and on average 21% to women (national avg: 19%). My best guess is it is an average of Physics and Applied Physics since there's no way to distinguish between the two on their website. This seems to under report the number of women earning physics PhDs in both programs (in addition to over promising diversity in the Physics Department where ~8-11% of the students fall under APS's definition of URM). If anyone has any opinions/recommendations on if/how we share our demographic information to provide a transparent picture of our department(s), I'd love to get feedback.

The APS has some speaker lists where we might get some good ideas for colloquium speakers: <https://www.aps.org/programs/education/speakers/index.cfm>

Outreach Subcommittee

Notes: 11/04-11/17 Slack Channel:

After our 10/21 sub-committee meeting we reached out to the SPS EBoard about the cosmology-themed talks that are planned to be given virtually. They were all on-board to recruit students from within SPS and we can very likely get a line-up of students ready for the few weeks that follow after thanksgiving. As well as for during/after break.
