

The Chemistry Department DEI Committee was formed in Summer 2020. Prof. Katie Hart (2020-21) and Prof. Ben Thuronyi (2021-22) have served as chairs. The group has worked toward several goals from our original [Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Action Plan](#). This document provides some updates on that ongoing work, though it should not be taken as a comprehensive list of Department DEI activities.

DEI Committee Meetings

Meetings of the Chemistry DEI Committee have been held 6-7 times each semester since Fall 2020, and DEI questions, issues, and plans have been brought to full Department meetings periodically. DEI Committee meetings have included, besides the work described here and other initiatives still in progress, faculty-led discussions on DEI and inclusive pedagogy topics such as letters of recommendation practices and inclusive curricular structures.

Feedback

The Department continues to solicit feedback systematically from students in a variety of ways. As part of re-evaluating our feedback practices and to inform our priorities, we took an inventory of current methods. DEI issues are touched on, but not necessarily explicitly addressed, in each of these formats.

- SCS forms are submitted each semester for each class and lab. Summaries of the data go to individual faculty, the Committee on Appointments and Promotions, and the senior faculty in the Department. "Blue" sheets are shared only with the individual faculty member teaching a given course.
- Annually, senior majors are invited to participate in an exit interview, usually with the Department chair, to share their overarching comments on strengths and areas for improvement for the Department.
- CSAC established a DEI working group in 2020 and has been active in hosting roundtable discussions with other STEM student organizations on DEI matters in STEM education. CSAC DEI representatives have been invited to Chemistry DEI Committee meetings periodically and have shared a summary of their findings in a written document, which in turn has been discussed with the full Department.

To help address recurring themes from student feedback, particularly from the roundtable discussions, we have focused our efforts on the issues below.

TA Training

To better equip Chemistry TAs to support all students in the classroom and lab, the Department has added formal training requirements for TAs with a DEI focus. These have taken a variety of forms so far:

- In Fall 2020 and Spring 2021, Assistant Director for Intergroup Relations and Inclusive Programming Aseel Abulhab (Davis Center) conducted live training sessions covering power dynamics, implicit bias, microaggressions/microaffirmations, and inclusive language for Chemistry TAs (and in Spring 2021, graders).
- In 2021, Chemistry TAs took online training prepared by Dr. Laura Muller, Director of Quantitative Skills Programs and Peer Support, covering effective teaching and learning strategies, imposter syndrome, ethics, and supporting students through challenges and frustrations. TAs were also invited to attend sessions from a full-day workshop from the Peer Academic Support Network in Fall 2021.

Seminars and Speakers

The Department has renewed our commitment to invite a diverse group of speakers to campus whose identities, experiences, and interests can mirror our diverse student body. This goal can be challenging because identifying and recruiting diverse speakers often relies on the faculty seminar coordinator either having a personal connection with candidates or making assumptions about how they identify. A professional culture of gradually increasing openness and affirmative sharing about identity characteristics is beginning to help with this issue, and the Department hopes to contribute to this culture.

Some speakers have been invited not only because of their research but because they have focused professionally on outreach, inclusion, and other DEI issues, for example Dr. Sheila Jaswal (Amherst College), Dr. André Isaacs (College of the Holy Cross), Dr. Rabi Musah (University of Albany), and Dr. Anne McNeil (University of Michigan; seminar postponed).

All speakers are now encouraged to broadly discuss their paths to a career in chemistry as part of their presentations and, if they are comfortable doing so, to share how their identity has shaped their experiences. We hope that this has given students a clearer picture of how they can be included and represented in the chemistry community.

Introduction to Research

To help all students navigate the process of engaging with research in the Department, Prof. Sarah Goh led a session on “Nuts and Bolts of Research in Williams Chemistry” in September 2021. The presentation described what research looks like in the Department, what is expected of students engaged in research, and why and how to get involved. Our intention is to continue to provide a session on this topic each fall semester and to collect data on its effectiveness, for example by surveying the session attendees and/or students who join research labs.

DEI Contacts

To help further open lines of communication between students and faculty around diversity, equity and inclusion, the Department is planning to designate specific DEI contacts, likely including the DEI Committee Chair and the Department Chair. These contacts would make themselves available to discuss student experiences in the Department, positive or negative, in addition to existing channels, such as chemistry course instructors and the Office of Institutional Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

Pandemic Impacts on Mental and Emotional Health

The Department acknowledges the toll and burden that the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has taken on our community, particularly in the areas of mental and emotional health for students. The cumulative effects of this enormous challenge have fallen hardest on those of us who are already facing undeserved difficulties, whether because of structural racism, marginalization, bias and discrimination, or other identity-based oppression. While acknowledging how much of the current situation is outside anyone’s control, we continue to work to make chemistry education accessible and inclusive for everyone, and to treat every member of our community with respect, dignity, and compassion.