

**FORMATION OF AN EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION COMMITTEE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF GEOSCIENCES AT STONY BROOK UNIVERSITY.** L. Campbell<sup>1</sup>, C. E. Gary-Bicas<sup>1</sup>, T. D. Glotch<sup>1</sup>, E. A. Holme<sup>1</sup>, B. Paul<sup>1</sup>, E. T. Rasbury<sup>1</sup>, V. Rivera-Banuchi<sup>1</sup>, A. D. Rogers<sup>1</sup>, and W. Shen<sup>1</sup>, <sup>1</sup>Department of Geosciences, Stony Brook University (GEO\_EDI@stonybrook.edu).

**Introduction:** Following the tragic murder of George Floyd in the spring of 2020 [1] and the growing social justice movement across the United States, the Stony Brook University Department of Geosciences formally constituted an Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) committee to improve the climate of our department, university, and surrounding community. The committee defined a mission to foster an environment that strives for equity and inclusion of individuals regardless of race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, creed, disability status, and country of origin and to help them feel safe and supported. It is our aim that this environment will, in turn, enable our students and faculty to meet their academic aspirations. Working together, committee members defined an action plan that will guide our future work. This abstract describes the formation and composition of the committee, the goals we have set for our department, and lessons learned through the process. We hope that it will be helpful to other faculty and students who have established or want to establish a similar committee in their department.

**Formation and Composition of Committee:** Our EDI committee was formed in response to a request from our department graduate students to take action in the wake of George Floyd's murder and the resulting protests across the country. We initially decided to form a committee of four faculty and two graduate students. At the insistence of graduate students on the committee, we expanded the committee to include four faculty, four graduate students, and an undergraduate liaison to provide a forum where voices from different levels of academia were heard equally and to streamline the fulfillment of our established goals. The graduate students, who put substantial work into the committee, are paid \$500 per semester for their service.

Faculty members of the EDI committee were appointed by the department chair. The graduate members of the committee self nominated and were then chosen by a vote among the graduate students. The undergraduate liaison position was open to applications from undergraduate students and then the existing members of the committee reviewed the applicants. The faculty on the committee include two white women, one white man, and one Asian man. The graduate students include a cis Latinx male, a Latinx woman, a Black man, and a white woman. Our undergraduate liaison is a Black woman.

The committee has benefited from having both faculty and students in equal representation. The students have provided much of the intellectual

framework for our actions and contributed substantial labor to produce our action plan. Faculty members on the committee have substantial corporate knowledge related to the present and past culture of the department and university and a detailed understanding of the relevant university offices, funding sources, and budget processes.

**Development of a Departmental Action Plan:** The immediate goal of the committee was to craft a statement of departmental values for prominent display on our website. This, along with the creation of an EDI-focused portion of our website, occurred within the first two months of our work. This is available at <https://www.stonybrook.edu/commcms/geosciences/about/Diversity>.

While crafting our statement of values the committee began the process of defining an EDI action plan for our department. Though we took time to edit and refine our action plan, many of the items in the plan originated with a comprehensive list originally drafted by the department graduate students, both members of the committee and not. The action plan includes the following six items:

**1. Offset or minimize the financial burdens (e.g. campus fees, language testing fees, moving/relocation costs) disproportionately faced by Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) / immigrant undergraduate and graduate students.**

We are working with the Stony Brook College of Arts and Sciences Advancement office to seek philanthropic support for this and other initiatives that support underrepresented students in our department. The department will actively seek ways to aid BIPOC/immigrant students with the payment of graduate student application fees.

**2. Reduce barriers to graduate school that are disproportionately faced by BIPOC, immigrant and first-generation graduate students.** This includes: permanently removing the GRE as a consideration for graduate admission decisions (accomplished) and providing helpful advice on what qualities and skills faculty look for in applicants. We have advertised research group openings on our department website and are working to provide increased graduate school preparation and mentoring for our current undergraduates. Furthermore, we have published frequently asked questions and answers on our website to assist applicants (<https://www.stonybrook.edu/commcms/geosciences/graduate/Applicant-FAQs>). We have also created a dedicated departmental email address for graduate

students to answer questions from potential applicants ([geo\\_grad\\_faq@stonybrook.edu](mailto:geo_grad_faq@stonybrook.edu)).

**3. Develop a plan to increase diversity within our undergraduate geoscience community.** We will continue and expand our bridge mentorship/outreach programs, advertise existing scholarships for underrepresented minorities (URMs) in geosciences, and seek ways to develop a departmental scholarship fund for BIPOC students through increased philanthropic support.

**4. Foster a more inclusive and equitable environment in our department by** (i) increasing diversity within our roster of Colloquium speakers, (ii) providing regular EDI training for faculty, staff, and students, and (iii) providing regular training on inclusive pedagogy in the geosciences.

**5. Increase diversity and inclusion within the broader geoscience workforce.** We are expanding our outreach programs to schools in underserved communities (elementary, high school and community college) and have made our colloquia accessible to the public virtually: <https://www.facebook.com/SBU-Geosciences-Colloquium-112004950630716>. We will also explore ways to develop new outreach programs to increase the exposure of the field of geosciences to local BIPOC communities, and help faculty to secure external funds to help build a more diverse next generation of geoscientists.

**6. Increase diversity within our faculty roster** through continued assessment of our advertising and networking practices to maximize diversity within our applicant pools, by seeking new ways to attract diverse applicants, and by taking full advantage of Stony Brook and SUNY faculty diversity initiatives.

**Progress:** Our committee has been active for seven months at the time of this writing, with virtual meetings occurring approximately every 3 weeks on average. We have accomplished several of the goals in our action plan, including (1) removing the GRE for consideration in our graduate program admissions, (2) providing an FAQ and a student contact for potential graduate students, (3) increasing the diversity of our weekly Colloquium speakers, (4) providing training for our faculty, staff, and students, and (5) expanding our outreach efforts to underserved communities at the elementary, high school, and community college levels.

The definition of our action plan and consideration of our future efforts have been facilitated by two key activities. First, we used current and past departmental demographic data for our students and graduate school applicants to determine how the fraction of BIPOC students in our department has changed over time. These data show that despite past efforts, the fraction of underrepresented graduate students in our department has remained relatively constant over the last ten years. In contrast, the fraction of underrepresented

undergraduate students has roughly doubled over the same time period. These data demonstrate the necessity of swift and decisive action to increase representation in our department.

Second, we conducted an anonymous survey of the faculty to gauge their knowledge of, and views on EDI issues related to race, gender, and disability status. A total of 14 of 18 faculty answered the survey. The results suggest broad support for action to create a more inclusive environment in our department. The results also demonstrated a need to provide further training on workplace accessibility and accommodations for disability.

**Challenges:** The work of the EDI committee necessarily touches on many sensitive subjects and requires open and honest communication. This leads to difficult, but necessary conversations. Microaggressions, implicit bias, and inclusive language are subjects identified by graduate students that need improvement within the department as well as in the fields of Geoscience and Planetary Science. Inclusive language, understanding of implicit biases, and elimination of microaggressions are essential components to create an equitable, diverse, and inclusive environment where all individuals can feel welcome and thrive.

Most of our accomplishments thus far have not required substantial financial resources to implement. This demonstrates that positive change can occur without financial investment. However, substantial financial resources are required to accomplish some of our objectives, including waiving the graduate application fee for BIPOC students, increasing financial support (moving expenses, etc.) for our new graduate students, offering meaningful scholarship support to BIPOC undergraduate students, and paying for diversity trainings. While we have engaged with the university advancement office, it typically takes 12-18 months for advancement officers to secure major gifts from alumni or friends of the university after first contact.

**Future Efforts:** We are working on plans for several important projects moving forward: (1) At least one diversity training per semester for students and faculty focused on the aforementioned subjects. (2) At least one Colloquium lecture per semester from an expert on racism in STEM/Geosciences. (3) Training on accessibility/ disability accommodations. (4) Training on inclusive pedagogy.

**References:**

[1] <https://www.nytimes.com/article/george-floyd.html>