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diversity equity & inclusion newsletter

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“We, the Department of Integrative Biology, are committed to fostering a welcoming environment and providing equitable opportunities for all members of our community. We seek to elevate the voices of people historically excluded from science and to build a community of scientists that encompasses diversity in race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability status, socioeconomic status, nationality and cultural practices.”

— IB DEI Values Statement

what is the dei committee?

Upholding Integrative Biology’s Values Statement and meeting the University of California’s commitment to the broader public we serve is foundational to the mission of IB’s Diversity Equity and Inclusion Committee (DEI). An important function of the DEI committee has been to promote recruitment of underrepresented graduate student applicants, as through the administration of fellowships to outstanding incoming applicants from historically underrepresented groups. More broadly the committee has focused on the development and implementation of a strategic plan for diversity, equity and inclusion within our Department. In this first bimonthly IB DEI Newsletter, we will review



the ongoing efforts of the DEI committee and IB community. And, let you know about upcoming departmental and campus events and endeavors focused on DEI, that you can get involved in.

next four years: graduate division pilot proposal, part I

In the summer of 2020, Dean Lisa Garcia Bedolla launched a **Pilot Program** aimed at reducing barriers



valley life
science building

to BIPOC students entering graduate programs and improving the climate at UC Berkeley. Representatives from the IB DEI Committee developed and were granted funds to support a 4-year plan to support departmental climate work that will build upon consultation and workshops, with the goal of supporting a Pilot Summer Program that will bring students to IB and cultivate a more inclusive environment where all can succeed. The Pilot proposal has a two-prong approach: recruitment of URM faculty and mentors in the sciences, and creating a welcoming, supportive environment to retain URM faculty and students. In the first installment of a two part story, we will overview the proposals recruitment goals and objectives.

making science for everyone

As of the publication of this article, underrepresented minorities (URMs)* account for fewer than 4% faculty in the sciences in the United States. In ecology and evolutionary biology, URM faculty are even more scarce. As students seek out mentors who can relate to their own experiences and best support their needs, the absence of URM faculty and staff in our field can have a dramatic impact on recruitment and satisfaction of URM students at both a graduate and under-

graduate level. Through active recruitment of URM students in ecology and evolutionary biology, providing these students URM mentorship, and building an inclusive culture throughout a department, we create a clear path forward for underrepresented minorities to enter the next generation of leaders in our field.

In cultivating the next generation of academics, Integrative Biology will engage with URM undergraduates through an independent summer research program. Students will be provided stipends, mentorship and community building, as well as resources for navigating the graduate school application process. This initiative hopes to improve access to opportunities that will allow students to explore and build careers in science.

Over the course of 10 weeks, participants in the summer research program will work intimately with their peers and researchers, experiencing a cross-section of what Integrative Biology has to offer. Program participants will engage in individual research projects on campus with IB faculty and graduate student mentors, and gain valuable field experience at the University of California Hastings Natural History Reservation. But this vision is only possible via partnership with individual faculty, researchers and organizations to recruit URM students interested in pursuing a graduate degree in life science research.

Success of this program will depend on graduate student, staff, and faculty mentor investment in the development and refinement of the discovery approach of mentees. Participants will share common space in the Valley Life Science Building, which will serve as their meeting point and place for peer-to-peer interactions. Learning and collaborating with their peers, participants will build a stronger sense of community in academia and envision a future for themselves at Berkeley.

Have ideas or questions about the graduate division project funding initiative within the department? We'll be highlighting more information about it in future editions of this newsletter. Otherwise, feel free to reach out to us at DeiNewsletters@gmail.com.

*Underrepresented Minorities (URM) is defined by the University of California as African-American, American Indian, Alaskan Native and Chicano/Hispanic/Latino.

campus service highlight: biology scholars program

The development of Integrative Biology's summer research programs will involve close collaboration with the Biology Scholars Program (BSP), a vital campus resource serving over 650 undergraduate students each year. Established in 1992, BSP has provided support to a generation of STEM professionals through study groups, advising, paid internships, networking and services, and a sense of belonging in the Biological Sciences and at Berkeley. From their website, of the more than "3,000 BSP alumni, 60% have been underrepresented minorities, 70% women, and 80% from low-income backgrounds and/or the first in their family to attend college." And, data from the Association of American Medical Colleges has indicated the far broader impact of this program with 10% of all African-Americans enrolled in a California medical program matriculated through Berkeley's BSP between 2006 and 2009. While pivotal to the intellectual, personal, and career development of so many aspiring students studying biology and medicine, the university's \$200 million deficit has created uncertainty as to the future of this integral program. We wanted to share a more personal take on the importance of BSP and what you can do to support and sustain the Biological Scholars Program's mission.

Cara He is a fourth year PhD candidate in the Hayes Lab where she studies developmental en-



Cara He,
PhD Candidate
Integrative Biology

docrinology. She is also an alumni of BSP. When she came to Berkeley as an undergraduate Cara described herself as feeling a little lost. As a first generation college student she had worked tirelessly to get into a good school, and now that she was at Berkeley, she realized she hadn't prepared for what would come next. "I didn't really know anyone who had been to college, so I didn't have anyone to turn to, to ask questions,

or to help me process this new experience” says Cara. With 26% of the UC Berkeley undergraduate population first generation college students, and 30% recipients of Pell Grants, the situation Cara describes is not uncommon. As California public schools remain among the most underfunded in the nation, high schools don’t always have the ability to offer their students a roadmap to successfully navigate college. As Cara was discovering, there is a wide gulf between getting accepted to college and being successful at a four year college.

Fortunately, while still a freshman she learned through her classmates about Biology Scholars Program. For Cara, BSP would become essential to supporting her through study groups and cultivating better study habits and strategies. But more importantly, Cara would say that what sets this program apart from other campus learning services is the sense of community found in BSP. “I looked forward to those late night study groups, I made some really good friends who I

still talk to today, seven years later.” In the often described cut-throat environment of the Berkeley undergraduate experience, BSP unites students—many EOP, first generation, or BIPOC—facing similar hurdles. Rather than competition, the BSP community fosters collaboration and close social bonds among students and with faculty, something that gave Cara permission to ask for help and take risks.

“having social capital is hard for first generation students and POCs. You can study all you want, but networking is what will get you that job or opportunity.”

—Cara He, PhD Candidate in IB.

It was through BSP that Cara was also able to see a future for herself in academics through networking events, professional development workshops, and with grants and internship opportunities. Connecting with peers and mentors was what helped

Cara find her place on campus. Cara reflects that “having social capital is hard for first generation students and POCs. You can study all you want but networking is what will get you that job or opportunity.” For Cara, there is no question that BSP gave her leverage to go from a self-described “bumbling freshman” getting



students finding community on memorial glade

poor marks on her midterms to the accomplished PhD candidate she is today. In many ways, BSP was the starting-blocks for her impressive undergraduate career—two NIH fellowships, presenting at national research conferences and a summer internship with Harvard Medical.

Cara and countless other alumni who found their path in the sciences with the support and guidance of BSP want to make sure this invaluable program will be around for future scholars. As BSP and the university grapple with funding shortfalls alumni have been building momentum with letter writing campaigns to the university,

broader public outreach, and plans for further fundraising and the formation of an endowment. “What I love about Berkeley and BSP,” said Cara, “go hand in hand. So it’s important to me personally, but also anyone who faces similar challenges [as undergraduates] that this program is still around.”

If you would like to learn more about the communities BSP serves or to donate to this program please visit their **website**.

To add your voice to support BSP consider signing this **letter** to the university.

upcoming events + campus resources

- DEI, Justice and Belonging **calendar page** for May
- 31 May—Deadline for DEI Small Grant proposals.



Have a story or event you would like to see featured in upcoming newsletters? Email us at DeiNewsletters@gmail.com

Supervisors—please circulate this newsletter to lab members and staff who may not be on our listserv.