

2020 UW Bioengineering Departmental Commitment Letter

(Letter from 2020)

BioE commitment to anti-racism and inclusivity

In Bioengineering, we are bound by a belief that public health and human dignity are inseparable. One is impossible without the other. Equity and inclusivity is fundamental to our mission of inventing the future of medicine. Over the course of the past months, we have carefully examined our policies, procedures, and departmental climate, to ensure they are consistent with our values. In doing so, we have realized that despite our good intentions, we have a great deal of work to do. We can and must do better. We have identified the following steps that we commit to taking this year to better create a climate of inclusive excellence.

We commit to training in Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI)

It has become clear that we need to better understand the structural barriers – especially structural racism – that have acted to make academic institutions exclusionary in the name of excellence. We recognize the need to provide training in Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) within our department so that it is relevant and accessible to the BioE community. We will make use of established resources to ensure we are providing the best quality training most efficiently. We are actively identifying the full range of resources available, as both the School of Medicine and College of Engineering are developing and implementing training plans. This training will be critical to our advancing our mission to create a comprehensive long-term plan with which we can – and will – achieve equity in our profession.

1. **Faculty training.** We recognize that our faculty usually set the climate in both labs and classrooms. We, your faculty, commit to learning from experts in the field how to recognize exclusionary and racist practices and policies, to increase our cultural competency, and to develop or adapt equitable practices and policies that support inclusive excellence. We will then leverage our JEDI training to make requisite changes around admissions, hiring and retention, inclusive pedagogies, and expectations regarding professionalism.
2. **Student training.** We recognize that our students must experience inclusive classrooms and become knowledgeable and skilled in JEDI to meet their full potential in inventing the future of medicine. We commit to using evidence-based inclusive teaching methods, highlighting diverse voices in our field, teaching discipline-specific knowledge about structural barriers to inclusivity, and providing professional development in skills around equity and inclusion. Finally, because our trainees become leaders who invent the future of medicine long after they leave our programs, we will incorporate concepts of equity and inclusion throughout our Bioengineering curricula.
3. **Mentor training.** We recognize that in addition to faculty, our graduate students, postdocs, and research and administrative staff do much of the individual mentoring and importantly contribute to the climate in our research and educational mission. We will therefore provide JEDI training for individuals in our community who act as mentors in our labs or educational programs. This will provide essential professional skills training for trainees who act as mentors, in addition to contributing to the creation of inclusive research labs.

We will ensure implementation and transparent communication

To help us ensure that our values are consistent with our policies and practices, we commit to embedding and institutionalizing training and activities around JEDI into all aspects of our program. We also recognize the need to listen to voices in our community who are not always at the table where decisions are made. We commit to empowering and transparently communicating with all members of our Bioengineering community, and we will continually evaluate the extent to which our changes are working.

1. **Faculty and staff leadership for enacting change.** We as faculty and staff commit to using our service on departmental Committees to enact these training and curricular changes. To start, we will revamp the procedures we developed to monitor COVID 19 training to monitor JEDI mentor training in our labs and educational programs. We already are required to consider JEDI-related activities in our tenure and promotion process, and commit to considering JEDI-related activities in our merit (raise) process as well.
2. **Listening to Feedback.** To determine if the planned changes are making a difference and are enough, we will implement new policies that make it easier for us to hear from all of you (and us!) in our BioE family. As part of our JEDI training, we will learn to **call in** others in our community, meaning kindly point out exclusionary behavior with a growth mindset that expects improvement. We also hope this training will provide practice for everyone to accept the gift of being called in by listening without reacting defensively. We know that this direct approach will not always work or feel safe, so we will also implement new procedures to empower feedback, such as by including questions about inclusivity on course evaluations, reexamining and leveraging existing infrastructure for reporting (and modifying this infrastructure if needed), or contacting confidential advocates about exclusionary behavior. We will work with the University to develop guidelines on behaviors that are deemed not acceptable, and plans that address such behaviors in a transparent manner.
3. **Transparently communicating who we are, and who we aspire to become.** We recognize that the physical and virtual spaces in our department need updating and do not represent many in our community. We commit to updating these materials this year. We also commit to making our “outward facing appearance” consistent with the actual state of our departmental values, policies, and practices in a manner that is introspective, transparent, and accurate. We will provide transparent communication on departmental JEDI challenges, plans, and status, using the public website, program canvas pages, and emails. We will communicate ways for the BioE community to learn more, to provide input on our plans, and to actively contribute during this important process.

We will improve recruitment, admissions, hiring, and retention

We recognize the imperative of recruiting and hiring more diverse faculty, postdocs, and staff, and continuing to recruit and admit diverse students. In addition, we recognize the need to build a stronger community to not only recruit, but also support, promote, and retain all members of our community after they join the department.

1. **Hiring and supporting a more diverse faculty** Our only faculty search this year is for department chair, and the committee is following best practices for increasing diversity. This new chair will be instrumental in future hiring efforts, so we strongly encourage each member of our community to participate actively in the chair search process when invited to do so. Beyond the 2020-2021 academic year, we commit to follow similar best practices for recruitment of diverse and diversity-minded faculty when new faculty lines are opened, and will continue to include staff and students in the search process. The COE is also running a strategic planning process for the next 5-10 years. This process includes a Diversity, Inclusion, Equity, and Sovereignty subcommittee, which

Pat Stayton is co-chairing and Kelly Stevens is a member. Part of this subcommittee's output will be a vision and plan for hiring more diverse faculty.

In addition to hiring, it is critical that we support and retain faculty. We therefore commit to ensuring equitable tenure and promotion policies to support retention of diverse and diversity-minded faculty. To do this, we will ensure that scholarship and research, teaching, and service that address diversity and equal opportunity are included and rewarded in the appointment and promotion processes. We will also actively identify known disparities that hold some faculty back from attaining promotion and tenure (e.g., racial funding and citation disparity), and we will actively work to dismantle these barriers.

2. **Students.** We have recently instituted several practices demonstrated to recruit and admit diverse students, including dropping the GRE requirement and providing implicit bias training to our graduate admissions committee. We commit to further enhancing retention with a more formal mentorship and support infrastructure, and a broader appreciation and action towards cultural, racial, and ethnic inclusivity. In order to identify remaining issues with graduate and undergraduate recruitment and retention, we will closely monitor admissions, retention, and graduation, demographics, and climate. We will use this information to continuously improve our recruiting, admissions, retention, and support processes.
3. **Postdocs and staff.** To inform hiring managers, we will post best practice guidelines for hiring postdocs or staff on our internal website. Hiring managers will be directed to these guidelines when they request to hire research staff. These practices are demonstrated to increase the diversity of applicant pools and to increase the inclusivity of the hiring process. We will also work to build a more inclusive and supportive environment for our postdocs and staff, and evaluate this environment using the strategies above.

We each commit to doing the hard work needed to achieve equity

We, as members of our Bioengineering faculty and staff, commit to ensuring that our departmental family supports all of our students, staff, and faculty equitably. We recognize that a critical aspect of JEDI is that each and all of us reflect, commit, and improve upon our own roles in achieving JEDI. Towards this end, in addition to these commitments above, our JEDI Committee and many individual members of our leadership team are working on many other projects to improve our community, which we will continue to share with our community as these projects mature. Furthermore, those of us not yet actively engaged in JEDI take the opportunity here to state that we realize that equity will not be achieved until *all* members of our community are rolling up our sleeves and doing the hard work it will take to make our profession and world more just, and we henceforth commit to doing our part. We each commit to building a family, profession, and world that not just reflects, but also serves, all members of our broader community and society.