

Overview of Initiatives and Activities for the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee (EDI) for 2017 – 2018

The EDI committee began the year by soliciting ideas for initiatives from committee members. What follows is a summary of EDI initiatives and activities.

Parental Leave Policies: *Summarize current situation and advocate for improvement.* Self-reported policies for numerous astronomy departments including UMD are available at [Astrobetter](#). For postdocs and other professional faculty, UMD's policy of 8 weeks paid parental leave plus additional modified duty plans is better than any other institution except IAS, which also offers 8 weeks. For graduate students, UMD offers 6 weeks, better than UIUC, similar to 8 departments, but less than Brown and Columbia (8 weeks) and Dartmouth, MIT, Princeton, and Wisconsin (12 weeks). *Action item:* In Fall 2018, ask department faculty to consider supplementing university-mandated leave with additional leave for graduate students similar to Wisconsin.

AGN Mission Statement: *AGN revised its mission statement with feedback from EDI.* See <http://agn.astro.umd.edu>

Mentoring Group for Men: It was noted that no mentoring group for men similar to AGN exists. *Proposals are invited from men who wish to volunteer to lead this (e.g. similar to AGN, which is led by volunteers).* Contact member of EDI committee if interested.

Preferred Pronouns and Names: *Promote use of preferred pronouns and names and provide instructions on their use.* For department directories and web pages, all department members have control; see [Google Doc](#) for instructions. For university systems except payroll-associated systems, faculty and staff can edit their preferred names (e.g. first, last) by following instructions at [Google Doc](#); only gender-binary identities are available. Students need to contact the registrar. Professorial faculty in particular are encouraged to provide personal pronouns and to invite and respect use by their students. *Action item:* In Fall 2018, ask department faculty to make this policy.

Undergraduate Interaction Room: *Made interaction room and ATL building available 24/7 to all astronomy majors via ID keycard.*

New Graduate Student Orientation Panel: Some things incoming grad students need to know are not documented or not obvious. EDI recommends a graduate student panel discussions on this topic. *This has been arranged for first week of classes in ASTR 695 (TA orientation turns out not to be a good time to do this).*

Graduate Student jobs: *Diversity service work should count as one of the graduate student "jobs" taken on by our graduate students.* *Action required:* Talk to grad student leadership

ASTR Majors Seminar: *GRAD-MAP should not be tasked with making the presentation on graduate school offered in the new 1-credit seminar for astronomy majors. GRAD-MAP volunteers are already overloaded. The EDI committee recommends that either this be done by the instructor, or made a minor graduate student job.*

Suggestion Mechanism: *Implement a “suggestion mechanism” for department members to offer suggestions for improvements to climate in the department. Now implemented via EDI web pages. The EDI committee recommends that the EDI chair send out a reminder message about this at the start of each semester.*

Convenient, Affordable, Quality Daycare: Paucity of affordable, convenient, quality daycare on-campus or nearby is a major barrier to equity and inclusion. EDI spoke with Anne Martens, Asst VP for Administration & Finance, who is responsible for the project. Construction of the new Calvert Road UMD/College Park daycare center, with completion slated for Summer 2019. The center will have 120 slots; it is hoped that the Graduate School will be able to secure subsidies for grad students and postdocs with children.

Accessible ASTR 101 Labs: The labs have various accessibility issues. About half of the labs had been updated prior to 2017-2018. Older labs are only available in a poorly readable print format. All labs will have been rewritten by the Fall 2018 semester, so that all will be available in PDF format. Eventually all will be transferred to a LaTeX format enabling versions to be formatted for those with non-typical eyesight. Also, the current schedule makes it difficult for students with documented disabilities to get extra time for roughly half the labs times. To remedy this, some lab sections now have enrollment caps set at two seats less than the maximum of 20; seats will be released after the first couple of weeks if it is determined no students in the prior section need extra time.

Long-term tracking of admission demographics, post-graduate outcomes: Department has demographic information for applicants, accepted students, and students matriculating going back to 2000, and will endeavor to keep these going forward. These were presented to EDI committee.

Annual Performance Reviews: *The EDI Committee recommends that performance reviews should be provided for all members of the department.* The EDI Committee encourages the Plan of Organization Committee (PORC) and the PTK faculty mentoring committee to complete this work.

Publicize available mental health resources on web pages: *Now available on EDI web pages.* Resources should be described when Department Chair or EDI chair sends out e-mail suggesting that everyone look out for struggling members of the department.

Graduate Student Mental Health Survey: The department chair asked the EDI committee for advice on whether to accept a proposal from the Physics grad students conducting a mental health survey in the Physics department to extend the survey to Astronomy. The committee

met with the people leading the survey; following that, EDI recommended that Astronomy participate. The department chair accepted the recommendation and is working out the details with the Physics chair and students.

EDI Web Pages with Resources for Mental Health Assistance: These are now highlighted on the new EDI web pages. Additionally, the committee recommends that the EDI chair or department chair periodically remind department members of these free resources.

Pay Attention to Struggling Members of Department: The EDI committee recommends that the EDI chair or department chair periodically send e-mail to the department reminding all to be mindful of colleagues and students who might be struggling. The EDI committee recommends that the e-mail include a link to the [Counseling Center web page for faculty to aid in helping students](#). The web page contains links for 1) Consulting with a Counselor; 2) Behavior Evaluation & Threat Assessment (BETA); 3) Helping Students in Distress (with specific things to do and things to avoid for many situations such as anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts, hazing as well as awareness of cultural differences; and 4) on-line training modules. This could be part of an e-mail mentioning campus mental health resources.

Minimize Use of GREs in Graduate Admissions: Vogel reported on revisions to the admissions process, including the use of Skype interviews with standard interview questions and rubric. A number of astronomy departments have made GREs optional or even forbidden their use, and the AAS President recommended that they not be used. The Department should stay tuned for the recommendations of the AAS Task Force on Graduate Education, expected in the next year.

Equity Constellation: EDI discussed connections to the [the Equity Constellation](#), a group which represents itself as “dedicated to making our physics and astronomy departments more humane places”. EC is part of the [Access Network](#), which consists of several groups similar to EC. With support from the department, Milena attended the recent Access Network meeting in Denver. EDI plans to meet with EC to discuss natural connections and ways to mutually support our missions.

Increase Attendance at BANG! Seminars: Part of the charge to the EDI committee is to support equity/inclusion topics in this seminar. BANG! will be rebooted in the Fall, with the plan to have a seminar every other week. The EDI committee recommends that the seminar be advertised in the Physics department and other science departments.

Select EDI colloquium: EDI has a colloquium slot reserved for colloquia on EDI-related topics. A panel of women in astronomy who have been sexually harassed was planned (with strong support from the department chair), but several of the panelists ended up having to defer, so this colloquium is now planned for the Fall. A colloquium by an APL diversity leader was substituted. EDI also hopes to attract Professor William Smith (Utah), a social scientist. He gave a plenary talk at the annual AAS Division of Planetary Sciences (DPS) meeting on “Racial Battle Fatigue” which was very well received.

Physical Access to Department Spaces A subcommittee evaluated physical access to department spaces. Poor signage (especially the map in the ATL lobby) was identified, and the group worked on an improved sign. Work is in progress.

Publicize and Celebrate Appreciation Days: Appreciation days should be publicized and celebrated. The EDI committee will make a list of “appreciation days” and recommends that the department chair send out announcements for each appreciation day. Mass e-mails from individuals to the department expressing “appreciation” should be strongly discouraged; department members are encouraged instead to express their appreciation to individuals, not via bulk e-mails.

Increase Awareness of Resources Available for Addressing Gender Bias, Harassment, Bullying, etc: A task force was established to work on this. A document is being generated for the EDI web pages to outline how to obtain support for victims of harassment and how to report misconduct. It will present options for students, staff, and faculty and link to the appropriate campus resources. The intention is for this to be a living document which is updated as information and available resources change. The task force finds there is a relative lack of visibility of resources relating to general bullying and workplace harassment. The department should make a strong and visible statement against the practices, backed by department policy.

Effective Mentorship: The EDI committee recommends that the department develop a mentorship training program for faculty and students. Effective mentorship practices help promote student success.

Improve Sexual Harassment Training: The EDI committee believes that existing on-line training is ineffective. Workshops, including role playing, would be more effective. Bystander intervention training should be explored as a possible way to engage all members of the department, especially the more senior members, by providing actionable knowledge and skill

Preparation for ASTR Major: EDI is exploring whether a 2-week course or program at the end of the summer is possible.

Annual Event in Minority-Serving Middle Schools: *No action taken due to limited resources (in particular potential volunteers are already overloaded).* EDI is investigating whether resources are available

Outreach to PG County Middle (or High) Schools to Talk About UMD: *No action taken due to limited volunteers resources.* EDI is investigating whether resources are available.