

EDI Activities for 2018-2019

EDI Communications

To help remind the EDI committee as to needed actions during the year, an [EDI calendar](#) was established.

How can we communicate EDI resources and opportunities to students, staff, and faculty? It was agreed that EDI students should go into ASTR 120, 288I, 310, and 320 at the start of the year to talk about EDI, BANG, AGN, resources, opportunities to attend colloquia and seminars, etc. This should begin in Fall 2019. Also EDI info & resources should be provided to new employees and students as part of on-boarding, and also EDI info & resources as part of newsletter & e-mail at the start of every semester. The department has agreed to add these links to this information and along with department policies provided on an information page provided as part of the employee on-boarding process, and also post this in various places around the department (ie mailroom, entries to buildings). Added to EDI calendar for August

An e-mail list of the different seminars (with links) that happen regularly should be sent out at the beginning of each semester. This e-mail should also be sent to our undergraduate majors, emphasizing that they are welcome. Added to EDI calendar for the beginning of each semester.

The department now regularly (each semester) sends out an e-mail featuring the [EDI Resource Page](#), specifically noting that it includes 1) help and reporting options for targets of harassment or discrimination; 2) urging members to notice students or colleagues in distress and how to help; and 3) noting the EDI suggestion box. Include in EDI Calendar

EDI should check in with AGN and GRAD-MAP regularly to provide feedback and support. It was decided that the best way to do this is to include AGN and GRAD-MAP leadership on the EDI e-mail list, with a standing invitation to attend. Add to EDI calendar.

The department "[Suggestion Box](#)" implemented by EDI last year was updated to include more mechanisms for providing suggestions, including an anonymous [Google form](#).

EDI selected and organized two colloquia for the regular department colloquium series. In Fall 2018, Dr. Carrie Anderson, Marcia Segura, and Dr. Amy Simon led a panel discussion on [Harassment, Bias, and Bullying in Astronomy and Planetary Science](#). In Spring 2019, a leading advocate for transgender rights, Dr. Martine Rothblatt, CEO of United Therapeutics, spoke on Earthshots to Moonshots. For the 2019-2020 academic year, the department chair invited [Professor Kimberly Griffin](#), expert on access and retention of African American faculty and students and on campus racial climate, and [Professor Sharon Fries-Britt](#), expert on African Americans in STEM and URMs in higher education, who have accepted. EDI will consider additional possibilities.

The EDI committee extensively discussed an e-mail sent by a person purporting to work at APS to the UMD Society of Physics Students (SPS) leadership questioning the existence of gender or other bias in physics. The person was identified by the Physics chair as a troll not belonging to APS. The Astronomy and Physics chairs recommended that we not validate or promote the troll's message by responding to the particular claims, especially since it only went to SPS leadership.

Partly in response to the troll email to UMD SPS leadership, and noting that the department lacks a specific equity/inclusion mission statement or code of conduct, the EDI committee drafted a department [equity/inclusion mission statement](#) incorporating a department code of conduct. A link to this is featured prominently on the [department web page](#) and equity pages, and was distributed by e-mail to the department, and is to be posted by the department along with department policies and EDI resources in various places around the department. In summer 2019, the EDI committee realized that the code of conduct it recommended earlier in the year and which was adopted by the department was buried in the EDI mission statement, and that it wasn't clear that it is expected that members of the department abide by the code of conduct. This should be discussed by the 2019-2020 EDI committee.

The EDI committee discussed the new campus [Hate-Bias Incident protocol](#), [Incident Reporting form](#), and [program](#). Prominent links to this were added to the EDI Resource page. Added to EDI calendar for inclusion in the semesterly EDI email.

Following on the transformative Inclusive Astronomy 2015 conference hosted by Vanderbilt, STScI will host an Inclusive Astronomy 2019 conference, scheduled for October 14/15 2019. The department chair agreed to a request to provide funding for two EDI graduate students presenting posters to attend. We anticipate EDI and GRAD-MAP posters to be presented.

Connections to Goddard

To promote closer connections between our off-campus (such as Goddard) and on-campus employees, the department should reserve at least two colloquium spots per year to be presented by our off-campus employees. The department chair will instruct the colloquium chair to send an invitation to all employees (campus and off-campus) to propose for one of a limited number of colloquium spots available each year. Added to EDI Calendar (beginning of summer)

Also to promote closer connections between Goddard and campus, and to better serve our undergraduate majors and graduate students, there should be an annual or twice per year poster session in which scientists looking for students present their research and potential projects. This could be held in the main PSC lobby and/or the ellipse area. The department chair will appoint a local organizer and reach out to Goddard leadership to get this started.

Undergraduate Life

Eliza Kempton reported on her URM peer-mentoring program funded by her NSF CAREER award. Following this, Dr. Melissa Hayes-Gehrke was asked to report on the number of students dropping the introductory astronomy majors class, ASTR 120, and possible gender and URM disparities in these

numbers. The department chair has formed a committee consisting of Drs. Melissa Hayes-Gehrke, Derek Richardson, and Eliza Kempton to consider and propose possible changes to the astronomy major which might better serve our entire major population. Also, Stuart Vogel will teach ASTR 120 and 121 in 2019-2020 and will adopt the partially “flipped” curriculum developed by Derek Richardson, which strongly emphasizes in-class group learning which research shows is effective for a broader population of students. Additionally, he will make use of the TLTC [Academic Peer Mentoring Program \(AMP\)](#); five of our majors have signed on to be mentors, including Kris Laferriere.

The tutoring program recommended by the EDI committee several years ago is continuing. In this program, tutoring for students taking introductory major astronomy courses is available in the undergraduate student interaction room during certain hours. The tutors are more experienced astronomy majors, funded by the department.

Recommend instructors take input from students on what they expect/want from classroom experience (Derek Richardson does this). This should be suggested more broadly to faculty as a good practice, and the department chair is urged to recommend this practice.

Exit survey or interview for undergraduate and graduate students departing. Past practice has been for the director of administration (previously Eric McKenzie, currently Olivia Dent) to interview grad students prior to departure after receiving their PhD. The EDI committee recommends that all departing grad students be interviewed. Undergrads are more difficult since they don't meet with undergrad advisor at the end and many do not respond. Tracking of students following departure can be difficult even for grad students. Department has limited staff resources for this. The EDI committee believes such tracking is important and urges the department to give it appropriate priority.

Graduate Life

Graduate students should have a panel discussion with incoming graduate students in August with a topic “Things to know about grad school at UMD”. Added to EDI calendar for August

Graduate students from the physics department, led by Zach Eldredge, presented the results from their 2018 report on their [mental health survey of UMD physics graduate students](#). The EDI committee recommended to the department chair that the astronomy department participate in the 2019 survey. The survey was distributed to our graduate students in May 2019. We await results, which are expected to be presented to the department in a BANG! Seminar in late Fall 2019.

To help with mentoring of graduate students, regular lunches between a professor and a small group of graduate students were proposed. Graduate students should be made aware that they are encouraged to join faculty in informal lunches, such as those in the common areas or conference rooms. Faculty should be encouraged to invite groups of students to lunch. Added to EDI calendar.

Expectations and deadlines/timeline for 2nd year projects continue to be a source of confusion and stress for 2nd year students. The Graduate Handbook is not clear or complete. The EDI committee solicited feedback from the graduate students, which is collected [here](#). A proposed rewrite of Section 4.2.1 (on

the 2nd year project) will be provided to the department chair in August or early September 2019 with the goal of having the faculty address these concerns in early Fall, so that students completing projects in the Spring will be better informed.

In summer 2019, the EDI committee discussed expectations for time away from work for graduate students, and how grad students and faculty should discuss and set expectations. The EDI is drafting a set of recommendations to be presented to the department chair for consideration in early Fall.

EDI asked the department to move department TA training workshop one day earlier, so that TAs can attend campus [TLTC \(Teaching, Learning, & Transformation Center/Office of Diversity & Inclusion\)](#) TA training (or CMNS training). However, this may not be feasible.

Student Groups

Laura Lenkic reported on a decline in [AGN](#) (Astronomy Gentleladies Network) attendance. In the end, AGN and some of the EDI grad students and other students decided to replace AGN with Astronomy Community Engagement (ACE). Invitations of undergraduates and others to ACE meetings were broadly communicated, for example in classes, and ACE appears well underway.

Undergraduate Junellie Gonzalez Quiles reported on her experiences with the Banneker Institute, and discussed the need for a group for people of color (ie similar to AGN serving women). She graduated earlier than expected (December), and so this has stalled. We lack senior people of color to provide leadership.

PTK Life

Parental leave policies for graduate students and PTK faculty were extensively discussed. A description of the formal UMD policies is included on an [Astrobetter wiki](#), which shows UMD policies to be better than all but a few universities. However, as is the case almost everywhere, for PIs any extended leave is problematic because the work promised in the grant proposal must be performed yet no funds are provided to the PI for the additional salary needed to do the work not done because of paid leave. The EDI committee advocated for “parental leave” contacts who could help guide prospective parents as to the intricacies of opportunities for leave, particularly since sometimes flexibility is possible. However, the department chair preferred not to go this route because of the confusion and errors that might result from not working directly with the department benefits coordinator. Added Astrobetter Parental Leave Wiki resource link to our EDI resource page.

The status of [Professional Track Faculty \(PTK\) Mentoring Plan](#) was discussed, following adoption of the plan in September 2018. There seemed to be a lack of awareness in the department regarding the plan. The committee investigated and partly this was because of the very small number of PTK faculty responding to a survey sent by the Department Early Career Advisor asking whether a mentor was needed; in particular, very few (only two) PTK faculty indicated interest in having a mentor. Both were provided with mentors. As a result of our inquiries, efforts were redoubled to promote the mentoring plan and encourage mentoring. The PTK Mentoring Plan will be provided to new PTK faculty as part of

the on-boarding process, and new employees will be encouraged to meet with the Early Career Advisor. Add to EDI Calendar.

Department Culture

Vogel reported on the [AAS Task Force Report on Diversity and Inclusion in Astronomy Graduate Education](#). This report, commissioned and endorsed by the AAS, represents a great deal of thoughtful work by highly qualified astronomers and social scientists. EDI is using the report as a blueprint to evaluate the department and recommend actions.

During the recent faculty search, it was noted that women candidates were interrupted more frequently during their colloquium presentations than men candidates. This is problematic, both because such interruptions can disrupt the talk or attention of the audience and prevent all material from being covered, and because such interruptions tend to question the expertise of the speaker and have the potential to trigger well-established stereotypes. The EDI committee discussed solutions extensively. Following discussions with the department chair, it was agreed that the general colloquium web page include the statement “Anyone asking a question during a talk is asked to raise their hand and be acknowledged before speaking”, and that this statement also be included in the web page for each colloquium and in the automated colloquium reminder-email. Additionally, an e-mail noting this statement and providing an explanation of why interruptions potentially disadvantage women, URM, and junior scientists, with links to supporting resources, will be sent out to the department before the Fall 2019 colloquium series. Also, to minimize the number of people straggling in late to colloquium, an automated colloquium e-mail reminder will be sent at the same time before each colloquium, and the cowbells will be rung by a graduate student beginning at the same time and following the same route. Added e-mail regarding interruptions to the EDI calendar

The department chair asked EDI how to encourage more nominations for department awards. The EDI committee suggested to the department chair that a list of eligible candidates be provided to the department, that self-nominations be allowed, and that time be taken at colloquium or assembly to encourage nominations.

Vogel will share relevant surveys from the 7-year internal/external review of the department conducted in Spring 2017 with the 2019-2020 EDI committee. The external review was conducted by Profs Meg Urry, Lindy Elkins-Tanton, and Eve Ostriker.

The importance of Bystander intervention training was emphasized. A bystander training workshop led by [Terp Allies](#) is set for a faculty meeting in Fall 2019 September 23. Vogel proposed to the AAS Board that AAS offer this regularly at its meetings; following this, the AAS President showed a [bystander training video](#) as part of her introductory plenary address at the summer 2019 AAS meeting. The department chair will show the video at the Astronomy Assembly.

BANG! Seminars

Geoff Ryan reported on the recent AIP Statistical Research Center comprehensive report on [Women in Physics and Astronomy](#). The co-authors of the report have been invited to give a BANG! Seminar in Fall 2019 and have been scheduled.

BANG! seminars were rare this year as EDI considered how to reinvigorate the series. At least five volunteers were identified to meet during summer 2019 to organize BANG! for the coming year, with the help of the full EDI committee. A schedule for Fall 2019 is being developed.

Outreach

Based on a survey of graduate students, Teal reports that there is significant interest in K-12 outreach. Teal has developed a request form which is featured on our department. Also, the EDI committee asks that it be included on the Department of Astronomy Observatory web page, since this is a major portal for outreach. A listserv sign-up form has been distributed to the graduate students and will be distributed to undergraduates closer to the beginning of the Fall 2019 semester. Add to EDI calendar

EDI discussed observatory all-sky camera status and LaunchUMD funding promise to deploy two cameras at GRAD-MAP MSI partner institutions. Geoff Ryan, Ramsey Karim, Milena Crnogorcevic, and Teal are looking into what is needed for automatic uploading of images and time-lapse movies on to web page. They are working on software and pipeline to push data to a web site from where ever a camera is to some kind of central source. Could be hosted on Observatory web site.

Accessibility

Improving signage giving directions to visitors in the department was discussed but nothing implemented.