



7 October 2021

Response to the AOS Graduate Student Association Letter on Equity and Inclusion

Acknowledgement of GSA letter's key points

Faculty and staff of the Department of Atmospheric and Oceanic Sciences appreciate the Graduate Student Association's letter written in response to the violent murders, by police, of Black men, women, queer, non-binary, and transgender people. We condemn strongly violence and all forms of discrimination against Black communities. We affirm that ***Black Lives Matter***. We also recognize that, since the murder of George Floyd, many more racially-motivated tragedies have occurred in the United States, including the murder of six Asian women in Atlanta last March.

It is undeniable that systemic racism exists within our culture, communities, and public and private institutions. We acknowledge that systemic racism and implicit biases are so prevalent within the academy and our disciplinary communities that we can easily lose sight of how our policies, institutions, and systems disproportionately favor some individuals and groups while harming others. We recognize that it is our collective responsibility to change this entrenched system by acknowledging, embracing, and respecting the fundamental humanity of each individual, welcoming all to our program as they are, and fostering an anti-racist environment that is inclusive, nurturing, and equitable. While we have in the last few years taken actions to address this harmful historical reality, we frankly can do more to tackle this pernicious and vexing problem. Below we briefly note the recent steps taken by the Department and outline a plan for the future. We are grateful that the GSA has started this necessary conversation and we are eager and willing to engage with all in our Department, across campus, and within our disciplinary community in this important work. Our response was delayed as we sought to take a deliberative process, involve multiple voices, and focus on concrete actions, including documenting actions already taken.

What the department has already done

Last Fall, the Department convened an *ad hoc* committee to formulate a response to your letter and to begin identifying and executing on a set of actions to foster a diverse, inclusive, welcoming, and anti-racist environment in our Department. Anti-racism requires not only self-reflection on our beliefs and behaviors, but also the conception and execution of actions that confront, in a meaningful and effective manner, systemic racism on interpersonal, institutional, and structural levels. To that end the committee has

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sponsored a number of Department- and building-wide workshops and discussion groups including organizing the Unlearning Racism in the Geosciences (URGE) pods; sponsoring the viewing and discussion of the film “Picture a Scientist”; and partaking in the UW–Madison Women in Science & Engineering Leadership Institute (WISELI) implicit bias recognition training. The Colloquium Committee has amplified minoritized voices in the atmospheric and oceanic sciences through well-considered invitations to departmental seminars and colloquia as well as a broadening of the topics on which the colloquia focus. The Department has also moved to making our graduate admissions more centralized and the application review more holistic. We have removed the Graduate Record Exam (GRE) as a required part of a complete graduate application.

Prior to last year, in order to better identify and attract underrepresented students to our Department, we joined the inaugural class of the AGU Bridge Program that “offers underrepresented students the opportunity to attend institutions that are looking to help them continue their academic education in geoscience Master’s and Ph.D. programs.” The Department has also participated in the University’s Advanced Opportunity Fellowship to increase underrepresented student enrollment within our program.

At UW-Madison, the AOS Department was the first in the physical sciences to require contribution to diversity statements as a part of the faculty recruitment process. Further, AOS has actively participated in and benefited from the University’s commitment to the principles of diversity and inclusiveness through the Target of Opportunity Program (TOP) – an initiative designed to help recruit and retain faculty from underrepresented populations.

What we are committed to doing in the short and long term

Departmental culture and knowledge

In Fall 2020, the AOS Department launched a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee. A formal remit of the committee has not been drafted, but the initial focus of the committee will be in reviewing, synthesizing, and guiding implementation of URGE recommendations – including updating our Department website to include a ‘resources tab’ with links to wellness, professional development, outreach and reporting misconduct; and an ‘opportunity tab’ with links to scholarship, fellowship, and internship opportunities. The committee will meet at least once a month during the 2021-2022 academic year to have accountability in the implementation of these goals.

A formal charge to the committee will be developed and will include responsibilities such as: recommending trainings and opportunities that inform as well as encourage discussion and self-reflection on issues related to diversity, equity, inclusiveness, and justice; ensuring that equity is at heart of our on-going strategic planning; reporting of diversity goals and milestones to the community and college administration; and participating in reviewing departmental culture assessments to identify needed actions and establish milestones to gauge future progress.

Undergraduate Program

The Department is exploring supplements to existing awards to support summer REU-like pilot program with the ultimate goal of establishment of a formal REU program (or SOARS satellite program for Summer 2023). Additionally, the Department will lead state-wide/Midwest focused outreach to rural and urban middle/high schools to increase the enrollment of underrepresented communities in our undergraduate program.

Graduate Program

The Department will review its admissions process and make explicit the use of a rubric in our admissions decisions. Further, the use of prompts for application essays will become standard. Looking inward, the Department, with input from students will consider questions like: “what makes a good graduate program?” and “what defines success?” in our program at the various degree levels. Thanks to the leadership of our graduate students, a successful Inclusive Graduate Education Network (IGEN) Research Accelerator grant was funded to develop a “hidden curriculum” graduate orientation– a program to discuss graduate life/work that was piloted last summer and implemented in earnest next year.

Concluding remarks

The University of Wisconsin – Madison recognizes that “Diversity is a source of strength, creativity, and innovation for UW–Madison. We value the contributions of each person and respect the profound ways their identity, culture, background, experience, status, abilities, and opinion enrich the university community. We commit ourselves to the pursuit of excellence in teaching, research, outreach, and diversity as inextricably linked goals.” The Department of Atmospheric and Oceanic Sciences shares this University view and is committed to the establishment of programs, framed in an anti-racism context, that provide access to, and ultimately success in, the study of atmospheric and oceanic sciences for students in groups that are underrepresented in STEM. Our Department will actively challenge and change policies that perpetuate non-inclusive practices and actions. We commit ourselves to work to effect similar changes at the University and within our academic communities.

Approved unanimously by the faculty of AOS on 6 September 2021