

UMass Plant Biology Graduate Program Action Items

The Plant Biology Graduate Program is committed to build an environment where all students, postdocs, and faculty can thrive, regardless of their race, sexuality, gender identity, or nationality. Most recently, institutional racism has been highlighted as an enduring problem in the US. Plant Biology is committed to working to dismantle this racism, and to working for systematic change. To this end, the newly-formed diversity, equity and inclusion committee (DEI) will work with Plant Biology leadership to institute the following in our program, starting immediately:

1. To make PB an environment where BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) students, postdocs, and faculty can thrive, we will:
 - *Improve mentorship in the program*: together with the newly instituted ‘Buddy system’, where students partner with a faculty mentor that is not on their dissertation committee, the DEI committee will serve as a resource for students to seek advice and support in difficult situations, including referring students to appropriate organizations on and off campus. Plant Biology will continue to require all faculty, and encourage all students and postdocs, to take the National Research Mentoring training.
 - *Diversify the Plant Biology seminar series*: In addition to ongoing efforts like participating in the BRiDGE program, we will also incentivize labs and students to dedicate time to finding a broad range of speakers for seminars. The Plant Biology seminar committee will also set aside one additional seminar each semester to be co-hosted with BRiDGE. All seminar speakers will be encouraged to discuss their career paths with students.
 - *Find out what worked and what didn’t*: we will poll students, faculty, and alumni, asking them what we can do to make Plant Biology a more inclusive community.
2. To help all Plant Biology community members learn about institutional racism and how to combat it, we will:
 - Include a module on diversity, equity and inclusion in the first semester Core I class for incoming students, starting in Fall 2020.
 - Source trainings that empower the Plant Biology community to recognize racism, and work to change it. Possible trainings include active bystander trainings, allyship trainings, NRMN Entering Mentoring training, and implicit bias trainings. The DEI committee will focus on mentoring trainings for Fall 2020, and actively work to identify others for the future.
 - Offer periodic activities for the Plant Biology community to do continuous work on inclusion and equity. Activities could include discussion and reading groups, and workshops on drafting values statements, codes of conduct, and lab expectations. The DEI committee will announce specific opportunities every year.
3. To recruit a diverse pool of students to our program, we will:
 - Send representatives to annual conferences of societies that support and promote underrepresented groups such as SACNAS and/or MANRRS. Plant Biology will support the travel for at least one student and one faculty member to one of these events every year.
 - PB will offer signing bonuses to BIPOC students, which could be used to cover moving costs.
 - Interview all qualified BIPOC applicants.

- Develop relationships with faculty teaching BIPOC students at PUIs and Historically Black Colleges and Universities – including funding faculty seminar visits

In the future, the DEI committee will expand on these efforts to create an environment where all students can thrive. Our future work (beyond Fall 2020) will include building a mentoring network of alumni and current students, and creating a paid Research Assistantship position for a Plant Biology DEI fellow that will help enhance and expand our efforts.