



Commitment to Racial Justice

Cox Lab | University of California, Berkeley

OUR COMMITMENT

The Cox Lab believes in the power of equity, justice, and individual expression. We stand with Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and actively voice our support in their demands for justice. We acknowledge that institutions of science and academic research are not immune to racism, where whiteness and BIPOC exclusion is pervasive, and we are committed to countering it.

Likewise, we welcome scientists of all identities and are committed to creating a collaborative lab environment inclusive to BIPOC, queer, trans, and non-binary individuals. We understand the necessity of amplifying the voices of those at the intersection of marginalized communities and identities, especially those from BIPOC and LGBTQ+ individuals. **We commit to the ongoing critical assessment of our role in perpetuating the inaccessibility of academia to BIPOC, and to taking actionable steps to bring about justice in the academic landscape.**

THE LANGUAGE OF DIVERSITY vs EQUITY

Why do we emphasize equity rather than “diversity and inclusion”? In short, **diversity prioritizes optics while equity prioritizes actions to achieve equal access.** *Diversity* invites people of different identities to the table but does not create an environment that they want to invest or remain in. “*Equity* recognizes that advantages and barriers exist, and that, as a result, we all don’t all start from the same place. Equity is a process that begins by acknowledging that unequal starting place and makes a commitment to correct and address the imbalance” ([GA](#)).

“Diversity celebrates increases in numbers that still reflect minoritized status on campus and incremental growth. Equity celebrates reductions in harm, revisions to abusive systems, and increases in support for people’s life chances as reported by those who have been targeted.”

- [Dr. D.L. Stewart](#)

At its most basic, the terms “diversity and inclusion” are the language of appeasement. An organization’s “commitment to diversity” necessitates no structural change and usually results in bringing on a BIPOC employee into an unchanged work environment, where they’re still not heard and policies toward equity are not implemented. Changes that are focused on diversity rather than equity factor more into creating environments of tokenization than true change.

“By substituting diversity and inclusion rhetoric for transformative efforts to promote equity and justice, colleges have avoided recognizable institutional change.”

- [Dr. D.L. Stewart](#)

For further reading, try [this article](#) that explores the distinction between equity, inclusion, and diversity or [this essay](#) that expands on the concept of the ‘language of appeasement’.

LAB SUGGESTIONS

- **Evaluate hiring pools as potential sources of “diversity bottleneck”.** Black students comprise [less than 2%](#) of UC Berkeley’s undergraduate population. Further, BIPOC and students with disabilities are

[represented at significantly lower levels](#) on campus than they are in the state of California. While many talented undergraduate students exist within our university, we must uplift and include underrepresented minorities (URM) on campus, in outreach programs, and via collaborations.

- **Invest in and require in-person bystander training.** Actions define our anti-racism response, and taking steps to fundamentally commit to equity and racial justice costs money. We must source these trainings and speakers from the BIPOC community and *pay them for their work*. These trainings and/or lectures may be done as a lab, a cohort of labs, or a department.
- **Pay reparations for medical research's history of harming BIPOC.** A good start is a recurring personal or lab donation to the [Henrietta Lacks Foundation](#), an organization that provides financial assistance to individuals and families who have contributed to medical research without their knowledge or consent, like Henrietta Lacks. A recurring donation is an easy way to maintain momentum and keep ourselves accountable over time with minimal effort.
- **Be involved in lab-level decisions and commitments.** Take initiative in organizing actions, writing equity protocols, and continuing to educate the lab and department on racial injustices in science and beyond. This is unpaid labor that too often falls predominantly on BIPOC, who are already marginalized yet still expected to do the emotional and intellectual work of educating their white counterparts while fighting for themselves.

LAB + SELF CHECK-IN PROMPTS

- Am I paying attention and making intentional, informed language choices? Am I choosing to phrase things in a way that aligns myself with the oppressed and purposefully distances me from white supremacy to avoid taking responsibility for my role in it? I.e. how am I using “you” vs “we” when sharing information? *
- Am I thinking critically about the points being presented by the people I disagree with? Or do I dismiss those points, creating more work for people who can't navigate conversations with the same safety my whiteness gives me? *
- Am I more willing to put in the effort to justify my actions/purchases than I am willing to do the necessary work to change those actions or make more ethical purchases? *

* Generated by artist Marisa Andrea

- What can we do as individuals to educate ourselves about the systemic racism and anti-blackness that is present in both STEM as well as our communities?
- How will we evaluate the progress that we are making and ensure that this is a continuous process of supporting BIPOC?
- What are individual ways that we can actively engage in supporting BIPOC both in academia and in our communities more generally? What actions can we take as a lab?
- **Importantly, how can we de-center ourselves during the ongoing process of self-education?** Remember, the purpose of our learning process is to bring about justice and fundamental change in the university/government/society at large—not for us to feel better about ourselves.

RESOURCES + FURTHER READING

- [ShutDownSTEM](#) - resources by category, such as [racism in academia](#), [organizations to support](#), and more.
- [Ten simple rules for building an anti-racist lab](#) - article under review in the journal PLOS Comp Bio. Read an interview with the authors [here](#) via KQED.
- [UC Berkeley-specific resources](#) - compiled by the department of Plant & Microbial Biology (PMB)
- [NYT antiracism reading list](#) - resources by category such as biology, ethnicity, class, and more.

- Intersection of race and health care -
 - [Race & Public Health](#) (Harvard School of Public Health)
 - [Bias in Medicine](#) (John Oliver)
 - [The US medical system is still haunted by slavery](#) (Vox)
 - [Racial disparities in health care](#) (American Bar Association)
- [Anti-racism resources](#) - living document with links to articles, books, films, and other resources
- [Black revolutionary texts](#) - compilation of free PDF copies of works by black writers & activists ([part 2 here](#)).
- [Critical Thinking Assessments for Higher Education](#) - equity-focused assessments designed to evaluate undergraduate and graduate students' in a variety of disciplines

GETTING INVOLVED

- [UCB Outreach](#) - compilation of outreach programs already in place at UC Berkeley
- [SURJ Bay Area](#) - Standing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ) uses community organizing and education to mobilize white and non-Black Bay Area community members to advocate for racial justice.
- [PMB book club](#) - a department of plant & microbial biology (PMB)-organized diversity, equity, & inclusion book club to read/discuss articles, books, and other texts re: racism in STEM/America. If interested, let Christine know and I'll add you to the PMB slack channel for it!
- [Bridges to Baccalaureate](#) - Bridges to Baccalaureate is a summer program in which labs at UC Berkeley can host transfer students from five local colleges.
- [YWCA Berkeley/Oakland](#) - local nonprofit offering resources and programs to empower girls and achieve racial justice.
- [California Black Women's Health Project](#) - CA nonprofit advocating for policies and practices that promote the wellness of California's 1.2 million Black women and girls
- [Black-owned businesses in California](#)