

DEPARTMENT OF PLANT SCIENCE AND LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Respect (DEIR)

Goals and Priorities

January 15, 2021 (Finalized Revision *May 6, 2021*)

The University of Maryland's Department of Plant Science and Landscape Architecture (PSLA) promotes the understanding, management and design of agricultural, urban and natural ecosystems and their interfaces with air, water, soil, and living organisms. Through education, research and extension, we strive to increase both the knowledge base and human capital necessary to 1) solve local and global issues around sustainable food production, food nutrition and food safety; 2) ameliorate the impacts of climate change on plant growth, crop production and plant communities; and 3) improve our environment in a changing world 4) provide solutions to regional, local, and site-specific issues influenced by rapid urbanization and the danger to fragile ecosystems, particularly PO in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Our research efforts include plant biology (plant physiology and development, plant pathology and microbiology and plant ecology/conservation biology); plant genomics (small grains and wheat); agronomy (grain and forage production); horticulture (postharvest fruit physiology, controlled environment agriculture, flowering and stress physiology); turf management; urban forestry and green infrastructure management; and landscape architecture research (urban agriculture, stormwater management, community engagement, landscape performance, therapeutic landscapes and mental and behavioral health).

PSLA is committed to the historical land grant mission the University of Maryland was founded upon, a mission addressing inequality in access to education and opportunity. Disparities in access and opportunity among communities have increased. We believe our department has a moral obligation to address these disparities. These concerns elevate our emphasis on issues around diversity, equity, inclusion, and respect (DEIR) and inform our operational beliefs: shared governance is the foundation for fair and equitable decision making; everyone has work to do around DEIR issues; diversity results in better decision making and more creative science and teaching; and the composition of our department's students, faculty, and staff should reflect the diversity of the residents of Maryland.

Land Acknowledgement

Every community owes its existence and strength to the generations before them, around the world, who contributed their hopes, dreams, and energy into making the history that led to this moment. Some were brought here against their will, some were drawn to migrate from their homes in hope of a better life, and some have lived on this land for more generations than can be counted. Truth and acknowledgment are critical in building mutual respect and connections across all barriers of heritage and difference.

Within PSLA, we believe it is important to create dialogue to honor those that have been historically and systemically disenfranchised. So, we acknowledge the truth that is often buried: We are on the ancestral lands of the Piscataway People, who were among the first in the Western Hemisphere. We are on indigenous land that was stolen from the Piscataway People by European colonists. We pay respects to Piscataway elders and ancestors. Please take a moment to consider

the many legacies of violence, displacement, migration, and settlement that bring us together here today. (<https://diversity.umd.edu/resources/land-acknowledgment/>)

Although our department has made efforts to address issues around inequity in the past, events in 2017 and 2020 underscore the need to aggressively address these issues now and more urgently such as uncovered health inequities revealed by the COVID-19 pandemic; the hate-based killing of Richard Collins, III; the killing of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor followed by a nationwide anti-racism movement. In 2012, PSLA established a diversity graduate research assistantship and postdoc to increase graduate student diversity and to provide a mechanism to increase faculty diversity. In June 2020, we revised our criteria in selection of Dean's Fellowships to prioritize students from underrepresented communities. Prior to the events in 2020, we reached out to the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in Maryland, as well as Howard University in Washington, DC, to further explore ways to increase collaboration. We also have 2+2 programs with students from Montgomery College majoring in Agriculture Technology (90% students from underrepresented communities). In June, 2020, PSLA established a voluntary DEIR Committee composed of faculty, staff, and graduate and undergraduate students. Goals and action items, collectively established by the DEI Committee, and discussed with faculty and staff at the November 2020 faculty meeting, are outlined below in order of priority. We emphasize that our priorities and efforts are dynamic. We will reassess and re-evaluate them in the DEI Committee on an ongoing basis and with all faculty and staff at the December faculty meeting annually. We seek to align with existing and forthcoming University of Maryland and College of Agricultural and Natural Resources' DEIR initiatives and activities. Therefore, a final draft of this document, after further editing to align with AGNR initiatives, will be presented to faculty and staff for a formal vote of approval in either May or September of 2021.

Goal #1: Create a safe, accessible, and inclusive space to work and learn

(AGNR Goal 1: Foster a College of Agriculture and Natural Resources that respects diversity and encourages equity and inclusion)

Develop a DEIR safety plan so everyone (students, staff, faculty) in the department knows who to contact, and what process to follow when they feel their diversity has not been included, respected, or treated with equity.

Infuse DEIR principles into the department strategic planning process, on-boarding of new students, faculty and staff, and on a yearly basis at departmental retreats.

- Assess current state of department (DEIR principles and climate) through the proposed AGNR survey, and/or by initiating our own survey.
- Integrate faculty and staff diversity/equity training (e.g., Terp Allies) into one semi-annual retreat as well as undergraduate and graduate student orientations.
- Ensure new faculty and staff receive DEIR training as part of their on-boarding process.

Establish DEIR principles as the departmental cultural norm by infusing DEIR principles into coursework.

- Dedicate a portion of the annual teaching retreat held at the end of August to integrating DEIR principles into course content and information presentation.
- PLSC608 or LARC671 is a required graduate course that focuses on research

methodology as well as safety and ethics presentations. We will add a section on DEIR principles to these courses.

- Integrate a framework for an introduction to DEIR principles in our introductory coursework (unconscious bias trainings, etc.; eg. LARC 160; PLSC101; LARC162)
- Include inclusive design and research approaches to existing coursework to reinforce these concepts through practice; this may include 'Design for Justice' curriculum content.
- Dedicate department funding to go to a certain number of BIPOC lecturers each year.

Increase accessibility to DEIR resources for students, staff and faculty.

- Add a page on our website that highlights DEIR resources within and outside of PSLA and the university to ensure students, staff and faculty have access to these resources. We are currently developing this page based on an existing page in the College of Architecture developed by graduate students.
- Ensure that links to the aforementioned page are added to all PSLA course syllabi to maximize access.

Evaluate facilities to ensure they are physically accessible to everyone regardless of ability.

Place 'suggestion boxes' at both entrances to our building to encourage communication (including anonymous communication) of any concerns or issues from students, staff and faculty. Implement a plan for who will read the suggestions and how they will be addressed.

Goal #2: Celebrate our diversity by learning from each other in an open and safe environment

(AGNR Goal 2: Recruit, retain, and develop a diverse community within the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources (Faculty, staff, and students))

Celebrate our difference in departmental gatherings and activities:

- Expand existing events, or develop new ones, to celebrate the diversity of cultures and experiences in our department (semester celebrations, new student BBQ, PSLA cookbooks).
- A minimum of one PLSC 619 seminar per semester, will be dedicated to DEIR issues. Assistant professors will collectively decide on the topic and speaker. We may expand this event to create a more interactive learning environment including organizations we would like to invite for group conversations such as the NAACP, Urban League, and other organizations representing underserved communities. Discussions would focus on how we could better serve all communities and recruit students from those communities.
- Explore whether personal story-telling by faculty, staff and/or students at department meetings around DEIR-related experiences could provide us with a better understanding of our cultures, experiences and beliefs.

Utilize the building as an educational tool:

- Use the building and landscape around it to educate ourselves and others about the contributions of all communities to Maryland agriculture and landscape architecture design.
- Explore a redesign of Hornbake Plaza to focus on celebrating all cultures that have enriched Maryland agriculture and landscape architecture design.

Develop and revise existing coursework that recognizes the contributions of all communities and peoples to American agriculture.

- Develop an iSeries course that celebrates the contributions of all communities to American agriculture and diet, and examines the effects of slavery on current agricultural economy.
- Support the iSeries course LARC 151 Urban Architecture: Designing and Assessing Edible Landscapes that highlights the work of diverse urban agriculture communities.

Goal #3: Become the most diverse plant science and landscape architecture department in the country

(AGNR Goal 2: Recruit, retain, and develop a diverse community within the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources (Faculty, staff, and students))

Establish DEIR metrics to evaluate changes in department composition over time. Either base these on the AGNR survey being conducted and/or by developing our own survey.

Increase the diversity of faculty, graduate students and staff the following ways:

- Increase diversity of faculty and instructors; specifically, from the African American community as we believe that this group is significantly underrepresented in our department. Actions include proactive recruiting of graduate students from underserved communities before graduation, reaching out to established faculty from underserved communities to develop relationships/collaborations with them, actively inviting exceptional faculty from underserved communities to conduct sabbaticals in our department.
- Increase the size (considering 8-10) of faculty/PTK candidate pools evaluated (at each stage) to ensure diversity in candidates is maximized.
- Increase collaboration with HBCU's in grant writing and submission to federal agencies. We have contacted every Maryland HBCU plus Howard and have identified that Morgan State (LARC), UME (AGST), Bowie State (Plant Biology) and Howard (Plant Biology) are open to such collaboration.
- Be aggressive in searching for future federal funding initiatives dedicated to increasing diversity of graduate students in the STEM fields.

Increase undergraduate recruiting efforts towards underrepresented communities and maximize the success of those students after they arrive.

- Promote activities that encourage current students from underrepresented communities recruit prospective students from underrepresented communities.
- Create a 2+2 transfer program with community colleges with a high proportion of students from underrepresented communities and HBCUs to facilitate seamless and successful transfer of students. We are completing one such program with Montgomery College with their Agriculture Technology Program (90% students from underrepresented communities). We are assessing doing the same with Anne Arundel, Chesapeake and Frederik Community Colleges.
- Increase scholarship and internship opportunities for students from underrepresented communities. Determining whether there is any issue with dedicating some existing scholarships to focus on students from underrepresented communities would be an issue. We are also considering approaching plant-based agriculture companies, landscape architecture firms, and plant-based biotechnology firms to increase scholarship opportunities specifically for students from underrepresented communities.
- Establish a student club focusing on students from underrepresented communities in agriculture. Empower the club to help facilitate change by making recommendations to departments or the college.
- Develop High School teaching modules (photosynthesis, molecular genetics, flowering, ripening, landscape design, etc.) that high school teachers can use for teaching course content that also serve as recruiting tools. We will focus marketing these modules to diverse communities in Maryland first.
- Work with the Academic Achievement Program and MANNRS to increase the number of 1st generation students in the department.

Increase visibility of DEIR initiatives on our website.

- Dedicate a page on our website to DEIR initiatives to emphasize the importance we place on this effort.

Goal #4: Improve the on-boarding experience and the success of international students

(AGNR Goal 2: Recruit, retain, and develop a diverse community within the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources (Faculty, staff, and students))

Create a seamless, streamlined and enjoyable on-boarding process for international students, postdocs and international visiting scientists.

- Identify a Department liaison to facilitate on-boarding international students during the first year of assistantships.
- Encourage ISSS to be more service oriented and responsive to our students

Dedicate a webpage on our website to recruit international students emphasizing efforts we are making to ensure their success.

Meet annually with international students to ensure communication of their concerns, their suggestions for improvement, and ensuring that they have a productive, enjoyable

experience while in the US.

**Goal #5: Work with underserved communities to enrich our experiences,
understanding and strengthen relationships**

(AGNR Goal 2: Recruit, retain, and develop a diverse community within the College of
Agriculture and Natural Resources (Faculty, staff, and students))

Establish opportunities for faculty, staff and students to mutually work with underserved communities on activities related to agriculture and landscape architecture.

- Create opportunities for volunteering (i.e. Greening of Detroit; teambuilding and physically serving our community)
- Creating course projects that serve the community that include students working directly with community members.
- Explore ways to increase food access in diverse communities where access is limited. Such efforts could include facilitating the formation of farmers markets, urban agriculture projects, etc.