

False Impostors

Identifying and overcoming impostor syndrome



An Equity, Inclusion, and Cookies Event
CU Physics Department
November 1, 2018

Slides available here:

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Equity, Inclusion, and Cookies (EIC)

EIC is a monthly event series open to all members of the CU physics community. Each event is a 90-minute guided discussion over coffee and cookies about issues relating to equity and inclusion in physics. You can find a schedule of this semester's events [here](#).

Next Event!



September 6, 2018 • DUAN G126, 2-3:30pm • The role of role models: Effective mentorship in the physics department

[Click here](#) to participate in continued discussions on the Slack channel. If you are not a member, email us at EIC@colorado.edu to be invited!

Mission & Principles

The Equity, Inclusion, and Cookies (EIC) event series serves as a mechanism for providing all

NIST-PREP

Trades Teaching Lab

Precision Instrument Shop

Women In Physics at CU Boulder

PhET

CU-Prime

Liquid Helium Facility

Equity, Inclusion, and Cookies (EIC)

EIC Events

physics.colorado.edu/eic

EIC

jhoehn

Jump to...

All Threads

Channels

event-discussion

general

grad-admissions

organizers

organizers-2

power-and-privilege

words-matter

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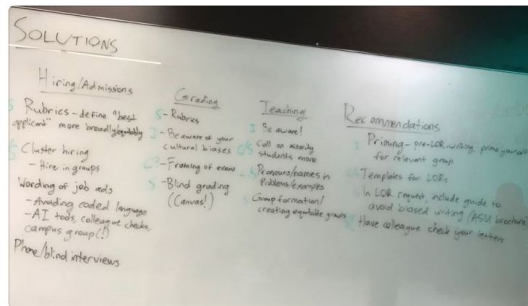
Travis Frazer

#event-discussion

10 | 0 | Add a topic

Sunday, March 25th

EICImplicitBias2.jpg



The issues raised and solutions suggested during the EIC event on implicit bias on 3/22/18.

cu-phys-eic.slack.com

Monday, March 26th



Brynn 2:24 PM

joined #event-discussion along with Amanda.

Tuesday, May 8th



stensokm 9:50 PM

I've been thinking about growth mindset in teaching. In the course I am teaching, I provide feedback on D2L for each assignment that gets turned in. Only about 20% of the students read it. Unsurprisingly, most students end up repeating their mistakes. Clearly we need to find a way to encourage a growth mindset in which students can improve their skills and abilities. I have heard of some good ideas that may be helpful in encouraging a growth mindset for students in classes.



Message #event-discussion



Ground Rules

- Seek first to understand, then to be understood
- If you're offended, please say so and why
- It is ok to disagree, but do not personalize it or launch an attack
- Speak for yourself, not for others – avoid generalizations
- Personal stories stay in the group unless we all agree that they are to be shared
- We all share responsibility for making the conversations productive – be prepared to work
- It is ok to be emotional – respect that these can be emotional or triggering subjects

Introductions

Impostor syndrome

Internal experience of believing that you are not as competent as others perceive you to be.

- Success is attributed to luck, timing, deception
- Creates anxiety over being exposed as a “fraud”
- Persists despite external evidence to the contrary.
- Positive feedback is discounted and the better the individual does, the greater the feeling in an escalating cycle

Impostor syndrome is widespread

- Albert Einstein: “The exaggerated esteem in which my life work is held makes me very ill at ease. I feel compelled to think of myself as an involuntary swindler.”
- John Steinbeck: “I am not a writer. I’ve been fooling myself and other people”
- Meryl Streep: “Why would anyone want to see me in a movie? I don’t know how to act, so why am I doing this?”
- Sonia Sotomayor: “I couldn’t shake the feeling of having been admitted [to Princeton] because of some clerical oversight.”

Individual reflection

Think of a time where you might have felt impostor syndrome.

For example, where you:

- felt like you didn't deserve to be in your position
- thought you weren't as well-prepared as your peers/colleagues
- believed you didn't have the natural aptitude that your peers/colleagues had
- thought your hiring/admission/award/etc was a mistake
- were afraid of being discovered as a fraud

Effects on underrepresented groups

Impostor syndrome may have greater impact on underrepresented groups:

- Among astronomers, more women (60%) than men (47%) reported feelings of being an impostor (Kaplan 2010)
- More generally, in fields with a gender imbalance, the underrepresented gender is more likely to feel impostor syndrome (Harvey & Katz 1985, Parkman 2016)
- First generation students may also be more at risk (Peteeet, Montgomery, and Weekes 2015)

Challenges for underrepresented groups

- Unfamiliarity with academic norms and culture can increase risk for impostor syndrome (Lindemann, Britton, & Zundl, 2016)
- Large classes mean one's impressions of how they measure up are largely internal (ibid.)
- Faculty members with impostor syndrome tend to be worse teachers/mentors (Brems et al. 1994)

More connections to equity/inclusion(/cookies)

In what ways might the system/culture/environment contribute to or instigate impostor syndrome?

How might a fixed mindset contribute to impostor syndrome?

How might impostor syndrome interact with sense of belonging?

Do I deserve the cookies or am I an imposter EIC attendee?

How can I feel impostor syndrome less?

- Recognize you are not alone. It is common. You may benefit by opening up about your feelings or using your experience to mentor others.
- Understand that nobody can claim to have achieved everything solely on their own and recognize that while you may have benefited from luck, charm, etc., this does not make you an impostor.
- Adopt a growth mindset. Use mistakes and failures as an opportunity to learn rather than a way to beat yourself up. Take on challenges and accept risks.
- Work on internalizing your successes. Keep a list of your accomplishments and understand that you earned them.

Can you come up with your own ways specific to your role in this department?

How can we address
impostor syndrome and
still acknowledge the
effects of privilege?

Considering the previous discussions...

- How can individuals help mitigate impostor syndrome in the department?
- What cultural or institutional changes can we work towards to make people feel impostor syndrome less?

Further reading

- [Parkman, A. \(2016\). The imposter phenomenon in higher education: Incidence and impact. Journal of Higher Education Theory and Practice, 16\(1\), 51.](#)
- Lindemann, D., Britton, D., & Zundl, E. (2016). “I Don’t Know Why They Make It So Hard Here”: Institutional Factors and Undergraduate Women’s STEM Participation. *International Journal of Gender, Science and Technology*, 8(2), 221-241.
- Kaplan, K. (2010). Self-doubt plagues female astronomers. *Nature*, 463(7280), 574.
- Peteet, B. J., Montgomery, L., & Weekes, J. C. (2015). Predictors of imposter phenomenon among talented ethnic minority undergraduate students. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 84(2), 175-186.
- Terenzini, P. T., Springer, L., Yaeger, P. M., Pascarella, E. T., & Nora, A. (1996). First-generation college students: Characteristics, experiences, and cognitive development. *Research in Higher education*, 37(1), 1-22.
- Martinez, J. A., Sher, K. J., Krull, J. L., & Wood, P. K. (2009). Blue-collar scholars?: Mediators and moderators of university attrition in first-generation college students. *Journal of College Student Development*, 50(1), 87.
- Brems, C., Baldwin, M. R., Davis, L., & Namyniuk, L. (1994). The imposter syndrome as related to teaching evaluations and advising relationships of university faculty members. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 65(2), 183-193.
- [<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2017/04/06/study-shows-impostor-syndromes-effect-minority-students-mental-health>](#)
- [<https://impostorsyndrome.com/do-you-dismiss-your-accomplishments-as-no-big-deal/>](#)
- [<https://impostorsyndrome.com/10-steps-overcome-impostor/>](#)
- [<https://www.themuse.com/advice/how-to-banish-imposter-syndrome-and-embrace-everything-you-deserve>](#)
- [<https://www.theopennotebook.com/2016/11/15/feeling-like-a-fraud-the-impostor-phenomenon-in-science-writing/>](#)

Thank you!

Feedback survey:
goo.gl/cS8uWc



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See you on November 29th!
