

Diversity and Inclusion training Department of Biological Sciences

The Department of Biological Sciences in the College of Science at Virginia Tech is dedicated to advancing issues of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) as they apply to our missions of research, teaching, and service as a Land Grant Institution in the Commonwealth of Virginia. As such, we propose to implement the following plan to meet the Graduate School's Inclusion and Diversity requirement as stipulated by the Commission on Graduate Studies and Policies Resolution 2017-18A. This plan will provide our graduate students with the education and experience to be leaders in advancing issues of DEI at VT and going forward in their professional lives. We will utilize expertise within the department, the broader VT community, and elsewhere to ensure our educational goals are met and continue to be current and effective going into the future. Our proposal includes four parts.

Part 1: Syllabus enhancement

We will request that the Virginia Tech Principles of Community be included in all syllabi for courses (both undergraduate and graduate) offered by the Department of Biological Sciences. The most recent statement will be provided to all faculty prior to each semester, along with additional campus resources. Further, as a department we will strongly encourage faculty to diversify their courses (i.e., include the works and perspectives of biologists who have been historically excluded) and provide them the resources to do so through workshops and discussions.

Part 2: Graduate course

In the Department of Biological Sciences, every graduate student is currently required to enroll in BIOL 5174: Intro to Grad Studies during the fall semester of their first year as part of our graduate program. This course is currently one credit and only one semester. We will expand this course to two credits. Currently, topics covered in the course include ethical conduct of science, intro to the library, laboratory safety, successful communication across different backgrounds between advisors and graduate students, etc. We currently also include three sessions on DEI with topics such as 'why DEI is important', 'how to teach/mentor diverse students', and 'how to increase diversity in science'. Going forward into a two-credit model, we will expand the DEI content to 4-6 sessions and include the topics listed below. These topics will be addressed using the following approaches: presentations by both faculty and/or outside experts, small break-out discussion sessions, as well as larger group discussions led by faculty and/or outside facilitators, and practical examples from personal experience followed by discussions.

As a central part of this course, and all courses taught in our department, we will maintain a code of conduct that includes civility, courtesy, and inclusiveness. **Civility** requires focus on understanding differences in background and sensitivity to how our communication style aides or interferes with our interactions. Civility should include avoidance of coercion, harassment, intimidation, and exploitation, as these inhibit professional accomplishment and individual well-being. One maintains academic civility

by maintaining courtesy and inclusiveness. **Courtesy** requires that our communication with others is respectful to all, despite differences in background and position. It can include positives such as gestures of appreciation toward colleagues and avoiding negatives such as calling uninformed attention to nonprofessional aspects of colleagues' activities. **Inclusiveness** can include equal courtesy toward all colleagues and avoids treating personal differences and preferences as bases for professional decisions. It will be the responsibility of the instructor to see that this code of conduct is followed.

New topics for the BIOL 5174: Intro to Grad Studies course

Virginia Tech Principles of Community – valuing human diversity and inclusion.

The Principles of Community will be presented and discussed.

Learning Goals:

- Recognize the inherent dignity and value of every person
- Appreciate the value of diversity in enriching our lives and the university community
- Understand our individual and collective commitments to Virginia Tech's Principles of Community
- Discuss active steps students can take to promote diversity and inclusion in support of the Principles of Community

Redress and Shared Responsibilities– the role of the active bystander.

Information will be provided on departmental policies and appropriate conduct among students, faculty, advisors, and Teaching and Research Assistant supervisors.

Additionally, students will be introduced to channels for redress and made further aware of their responsibilities as active bystanders by directing students to webpages and resources provided by (but not limited to): the "Title IX and Violence Against Women Act" at the Office for Equity and Accessibility, Dean of Students' "Student Code of Conduct," Graduate School's "Graduate Honor System" and "Disrupting Academic Bullying," Cook Counseling Center, Women's Center, and InclusiveVT.

Learning Goals:

- Know where to seek resources to effectively navigate conflicts
- Recognize the right of fairness to all humans
- Realize the responsibility we have to advocate for fairness for all.

Impact of Personal Actions and Words–the effects on the community in which we work and live.

These impacts will be addressed in a session dedicated to the subject as well as discussion of critical components of the topic.

Learning Goals:

- Understand how our actions and words manifest in academic and societal consequences
- Examine the impacts of actions and words on different communities
- Reflect and think critically on the impacts of actions and words and what has been learned for the future.

Individual Introspection – Explore your Biases.

Individual introspection and biases will be addressed in a session dedicated to the subject as well as a discussion of critical components of the topic. This includes the topic of implicit bias and we will include examples of famous studies and videos illustrating various biases

Learning Goals:

- Understand key terms and concepts related to individual and institutional biases.
- Examine the impacts of individual and institutional biases.
- Reflect and think critically on the impacts of individual biases and how they can be dismantled.

Part 3: Additions to the graduate training handbook

The following will be added to the Department of Biological Sciences Graduate Handbook: Complaints about professional misconduct (integrity and civility) are concerns of the targets of those complaints, of the department, and of the university. As such, they are not appropriate topics of informal discussion alone. Students giving voice to complaints of misconduct should, in a timely fashion, initiate processes in which the department and the targets of the complaints would have opportunities to respond. Students can initiate such processes by sharing complaints with departmental or university authorities, as listed below. Students will be protected from retaliation. The department is currently establishing a mentoring review process to ensure that graduate student rights are not compromised.

The Department of Biological Sciences and Virginia Tech have resources to address complaints of misconduct. Relevant offices include:

Graduate Program Director- for discussion of concerns about professional misconduct that affects graduate students within the department. All such discussion remains in confidence other than sexual harassment/assault, mention of which must result in contact with the Human Resources Title IX coordinator.

Department Head- for discussion of concerns about faculty conduct, all of which remain in confidence other than sexual harassment/assault, mention of which must result in contact with the Human Resources Title IX coordinator.

Graduate School Ombudsperson- for discussion of concerns about faculty conduct and general concerns about other dynamics within graduate training, all of which remain in confidence other than sexual harassment/assault, mention of which must result in contact with the Human Resources Title IX coordinator.

Part 4: Continuing DEI Education

The required graduate course incorporating DEI topics (BIOL 5174: Intro to Grad Studies) discussed in Part 2 is for students to take during their first year in the graduate program. It is important to give graduate students, as well as faculty and staff, opportunities beyond their first year to continue to learn about DEI topics and apply them to all aspects of their work. Thus, the Department of Biological Sciences is committed to continue hosting workshops/training/reading groups/discussion going forward on DEI related topics (e.g., microaggressions, inclusive pedagogy, diversity statements, etc.).