

Proposal for diversity training requirement, Department of Chemistry

The Department of Chemistry is committed to the development and perpetuation of an open, inclusive, equitable, and diverse community of engaged scientists. Our commitment is reaffirmed through our inclusion and diversity requirements for all graduate students. The requirements encourage students to explore their biases, understand their role as an active bystander, reflect on how words and actions influence our community, and reiterates the Principles of Community. Further, we strive to prepare our students to thrive beyond their academic pursuits, through our focus on intentional and well-rounded experiences and training opportunities.

These opportunities begin with clear policy statements on diversity on page-1 our graduate student handbook. Most importantly, every student becomes engaged in training on a personal level through required participation in fall workshops. Finally, the department undergoes an honest and open self-assessment of our progress toward developing a diverse, equitable, and inclusive environment through a regular climate survey, the results of which are used to facilitate discussions with the student body and to catalyze positive change. Each of these three components are described in more detail below.

I. Departmental Policy Statements

The Department of Chemistry's published *Graduate Policies and Procedures* handbook is required reading for all graduate students: (see link at <https://chem.vt.edu/academics/graduate/current-students.html>). Diversity training begins the day students are accepted into our program through reading this document. Importantly, the document contains the following statements:

Non-Discrimination Statement

Virginia Tech does not discriminate against employees, students, or applicants on the basis of race, color, sex, sexual orientation or identity, disability, age, veteran status, national origin, religion, or political affiliation. The university is subject to Title VI and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, Sections 503 and 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Age Discrimination in Employment Act, the Vietnam Era Veteran Readjustment Assistance Act of 1974, Federal Executive Order 11246, Governor Allen's State Executive Order Number Two, and all other rules and regulations that are applicable. Anyone having questions concerning any of those regulations should contact the Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Office (<http://www.hr.vt.edu/>).

Diversity Statement – The Virginia Tech Principles of Community

- We affirm the inherent dignity and value of every person and strive to maintain a climate for work and learning based on mutual respect and understanding.
- We affirm the right of each person to express thoughts and opinions freely. We encourage open expression within a climate of civility, sensitivity, and mutual respect.

- We affirm the value of human diversity because it enriches our lives, scientific pursuits, and the University. We acknowledge and respect our differences while affirming our common humanity.
- We reject all forms of prejudice and discrimination, including those based on age, color, disability, gender, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, and veteran status. We take individual and collective responsibility for helping to eliminate bias and discrimination and for increasing our own understanding of these issues through education, training, and interaction with others.
- We pledge our collective commitment to these principles in the spirit of the Virginia Tech motto of *Ut Prosim* (That I May Serve).
-

II. Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Workshops

The Chemistry Department aims to fulfill the key diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) training requirements by incorporating them into an existing required one-credit course taken by our first-year graduate students, CHEM 5004. Specifically, within this course, two workshops are conducted each semester by a subject expert at Virginia Tech. For the past four years, Alicia Cohen (Director of Diversity Programs and the Intercultural Engagement Center) has led these workshops in the fall semester. Alicia has expressed a commitment to return each semester to conduct the workshops for the foreseeable future.

The DEI training workshops consist of a series of slides that introduce the students to a particular topic (we have covered topics that include: micro-aggressions, unconscious bias in the workplace, inclusion, and the harmful effects of stereotypes). Following the presentations, the students are typically provided with hypothetical scenarios that ask them to place themselves within a particular situation. Small group discussions are then established within which students share their reactions, develop responses, and discuss the impact of the scenario on everyone involved. Each small group is invited to provide feedback to the larger group. During the open discussion, the facilitator (currently Alicia Cohen) moderates group exchanges and leads everyone to a deeper understanding for how one's actions can be constructive, help feed a more inclusive culture, and knock down harmful stereotypes.

Following each workshop, the Graduate Program Director (GPD) meets with the facilitator to review the course content, student responses, and areas where the Department may need to dedicate some effort toward improving. Areas of particular concern are shared with the Department's DEI Committee, where further action may be pursued.

Part of the training for each new GPD is to attend and actively participate in workshops. Further, the GPD is encouraged to engage in diversity training opportunities throughout the year as they are offered across campus. In this way, the GPD becomes equipped to lead the workshops (Alicia Cohen freely shares her slides and facilitator information with instructors) when needed and the GPD becomes equipped to discuss DEI concerns with students on a small-group or one-on-one bases as needed throughout the year.

III. Climate Survey Results and Discussion

Beyond the DEI workshops, the Department conducts our own Climate Survey every two years. The results of the survey are shared, by the Chair of the DEI Committee (or by Alicia Cohen, who has assisted in these efforts over the past year), with every graduate student. This is accomplished within an open forum and within the required CHEM 5004 course. The students are encouraged to ask questions during the open discussion sessions associated with these forums. In addition, the students are asked to provide suggestions for areas where improvement is needed. Student suggestions can be made in person during the forum, on-line via an anonymous bulletin-board site developed for this purpose, or via personal communications to the GPD (or any other authority with whom the student feels safe and comfortable approaching).

Following the open forum presentations and discussions sessions, the DEI Committee works with resources on campus to address areas of concern. Action items developed by the DEI Committee are then shared with the students. In this way, the students learn how constructive feedback and honest discussion can affect systemic change.