

Genome Sciences DEI Committee Annual Report 2023-2024

The Department of Genome Sciences DEI committee consists of the following members: faculty members Doug Fowler, Kelley Harris, Hannah Jordt, Atom Lesiak, Pejman Mohammadi, Bill Noble, and Devin Schweppe; staff members Brian Giebel, Valerie Lynch, Serena Newhall, Laura Stump, Melinda Wheelock, and Skylar Thompson; postdocs Annabel Beichman, Ryan Friedman, Anupama Jha, and Yizi Mao; and graduate students Abby McGee, Syd Sattler, and Malvika Tejura. Bill Noble chaired during fall quarter, and Devin Schweppe chaired the committee during winter and spring quarters. The committee met nine times, on the second Tuesday of each month, September, 2023, through June 2024. Meeting [minutes](#) are linked from the departmental website.

To set priorities for the 2023-2024 academic year, the committee solicited suggestions from department members at the annual retreat in September. The resulting suggestions were then shared with the full department by email, and additional suggestions were elicited. The full set of suggestions were segregated into categories, as outlined below, and committee members volunteered to spearhead each activity.

Administrative

The DEI committee planned to survey other peer departments to understand their DEI work and get ideas/insights into what we might do. This effort has been rolled into a larger initiative to survey peer graduate programs. Doug Fowler, Christine Queitsch and Brian Giebel are involved in this survey initiative, and the goal is to gather information that can be used to reimagine and improve the GS graduate program. As a part of this initiative, we will ask questions about how peer programs handle DEI issues.

The DEI committee explored a proposal to hire a full-time staff member to focus on DEI work and community building within the department. The committee acknowledged that such a person would add considerable value to the department, but also determined that there was insufficient work to occupy a full-time staff member. Moreover, discussions with department leadership clarified that resources did not exist to create such a position. Therefore, the committee recommended that the chair discuss pooling resources with other chairs to hire a staff member to do DEI and community-building work across departments. There does appear to be progress on the School of Medicine hiring people to help coordinate DEI activities across departments, including new positions for Director of Mentor Education (Elia Tait Wojno) and Assistant Dean for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (Andres Barria).

Ryan revised the [GS DEI website](#) to show public support for LGBTQ+ people and reproductive healthcare, including additions to the home page, organizations, and resources pages.

The DEI committee received a suggestion to create a wellness lounge and more inclusive spaces. This information is already available on the [conference room webpage](#) under the section “Multi-use Rooms”. Ryan sent a message to GS Slack reminding people that rooms S250D, S340C, and S443C are available for remote medical appointments, meetings, phone calls, lactation space, and other wellness purposes. Sign-up sheets are posted outside the doors. We explored making those rooms reservable online but found that we are unable to add new rooms to that system.

Ryan and Hannah worked with representatives from COGS (Iris Jia, Georgia Tsambos, and Kumara Mastorosa) to create an FAQ document for international students and postdocs. The document addresses areas such as visas, taxes, healthcare, credit reporting, finding an apartment, and more. We have received feedback from International Student Services and are about to post an FAQ for international students to the website. An FAQ for international postdocs is coming soon.

Bill and Serena improved the process for including undergrads in the GS listservs, Slack, and community activities. Serena incorporated an introduction to the GS DEI community activities and resources into new hire information and onboarding for staff and undergrads.

Community

The community sub-committee recognized that some of the social activities could be off-putting to people not comfortable in loud environments with alcohol. One of our ideas was to run board gaming sessions in conjunction with some of the Friday social hours, to provide an alternate venue for socializing. Skylar helped run three sessions over the course of winter and spring quarters, where the games were all open-ended, choose-your-own-adventure games without a lot of rules to learn, which allowed us to focus both on the story and also getting to know each other, rather than on mechanics. The people who attended were enthusiastic about continuing it, so the hope is to have at least one session a month over summer and into the fall and winter quarters.

The community sub-committee also identified the need to foster interdisciplinary collaboration and strengthen departmental bonds through engaging and inclusive activities. To achieve this, we started preparing some initiatives. We laid the groundwork for future “Night Science” discussions and randomized 1:1 meetings. These sessions are intended to pair up different labs for informal scientific conversations, encouraging the sharing of ongoing projects, innovative ideas, and challenges in a relaxed environment. Over the winter and spring quarters, Yizi researched potential activities, topics to introduce, and studied the flow of similar events to ensure the success of our future sessions. The goal is to initiate these discussions with at least one meeting each month through the summer and into the fall and winter quarters.

GS members participated in UW’s BIPOC Staff Development program, and affinity groups through SOM’s Office of Healthcare Equity and SOM’s [Basic Sciences affinity groups](#).

The Community sub-committee submitted a [Diversity and Inclusion Seed Grant](#) proposal for funds to seed new interest or affinity groups. Although this was not selected for funding, the [list of funded awards](#) may provide inspiration for future activities.

The chair's Community Coffee events, organized by Josh Malamy, continued to provide an inclusive social space for GS members with afternoon childcare duties or those who prefer not to attend social events with alcohol. The GS Book Club (fiction and nonfiction) and Garden Club continue to meet.

Education

The Education sub-committee sought to provide advice on the hidden curriculum of applying to graduate school and encourage applications to the GS program from more diverse candidates. The committee created a [general guide to applying to PhD programs](#), which has been accessed over 1000 times.

The Education sub-committee previously expanded the scope of the advice for applicants that is available on the [GS website](#). This year, this advice page was augmented with the addition of sample excerpts from real applicants admitted in previous years, as well as more prescriptive advice about the information content and structure of the personal statement. Working with the GS graduate student admissions committee, the Education sub-committee determined that the most effective personal statements contain four subsections: "Personal background," "Research experience," "Leadership/DEI/broader impacts" and "Why Genome Sciences?" The committee identified excerpts from real essays that are good examples of each of these sections and reproduced anonymized versions of these excerpts on the webpage for prospective applicants to learn from. By excerpting example essays in this way rather than posting the essays in their entirety, the admissions committee hopes to teach prospective applicants how to learn from the most effective elements of admitted students' essays without being led astray by elements of admitted students' essays that may be difficult to reproduce or elements that may not have helped these students make their cases for admission.

Two in-house, annual workshops on inclusive teaching techniques were again offered at the beginning of the year. All graduate students TAing Genome 361 and 371 during the 23/24 academic year were required to attend both workshops, but they were open to all department members and a total of 15 graduate students and three postdocs attended. The content in both workshops was data-focused. The first workshop covered current thinking in evidence-based pedagogy, highlighting studies demonstrating how students learn best through active engagement with course material, including via retrieval practice, peer instruction, and high-structured courses. The second workshop focused on inclusive teaching practices, featuring data on how different groups of students (e.g. first generation college students, students from different cultural backgrounds, and students from minoritized groups) experience the classroom differently, and highlighting various classroom interventions that disproportionately benefit non-majority students, and therefore reduce academic performance gaps caused by traditional classroom practices.

Strengthening support for international students and postdocs in our department was one of the most voted on priorities in our last DEI survey. To facilitate better awareness and education amongst the faculty we invited two members of the International Student Services Office (ISS), Justin Mellish and Alisa Sweet, to a faculty meeting to speak directly to all faculty members about international student regulations and issues and answer questions relevant to the department. They spearheaded a 40 minute presentation/conversation including topics such as 1) what faculty should know before they recruit international students, especially with respect to unique challenges they may face during their transition to the department, 2) the main types of visas for international students and how they differed, 3) traveling abroad and/or working overseas as an international student, and 4) issues international students face as they approach graduation. This discussion also facilitated a connection between ISS and Genome Sciences, in that several weeks after this meeting Justin and Alisa generously agreed to review and edit the FAQ document for international students and scholars that was mentioned in the Administration section of this report. They are happy to continue to support the department should new questions arise.

We combined data from the registrar, from payroll, and from Brian Giebel's faculty polls to gain a better understanding of the proportion of undergraduates in GS labs that get paid (versus receiving 499 research credit or volunteering). We determined that approximately $\frac{2}{3}$ of undergraduates who work in GS labs get paid.

Outreach

The Outreach sub-committee activities were primarily driven by work with Community Organizers in Genome Sciences and Genome Sciences Education Outreach. The Careers in Genomics Symposium (<https://sites.google.com/uw.edu/careers-in-genomics-2024/home>) was led by Stephen Gonzalez with support from GSEO and COGS, with 20-plus attendees in-person and many joining the symposium online or watching videos afterwards.

Additionally, GSEO led outreach activities using the Bacteremon Battles game in Ballard High School classrooms with support from Borislov Hristov. The Outreach group with GSEO also supported a collaboration with UW Comms Newslab to promote Xavi Guitart's Science Bungalow.