

Notes from the December 11, 2023 AJED Meeting
248 Cogitron and on Zoom, 11A-1P

The following agenda was sent to AJED members in advance of today's meeting:

1. Discussion with Kelly Hogan about impressions of biology curriculum; future steps (Alison)
2. Review of AJED'S current committees (Nina)
3. AJED visioning (if time)

In attendance:

Nina Sherwood
Mar Martinez Pastor
Rossie Clark-Cotton
Jessica Harrell
Steve Nowicki
David Su
Alison Hill
Yochebed Woldeyohannes
Dan McShea
Kathleen Miglia
Ze-Yi Han
Paul Magwene
Jessica Harrell

Updates and announcements

The discussion with Kelly Hogan was canceled due to illness and will take place in the spring semester.

It was decided at the conclusion of our meeting to reduce the AJED meeting length from two to one hour. This change will take place in our January 8 meeting.

DGS announcements

1. Faculty are working on written expectations of prelim exams (goal is to have those posted by end of spring semester).
2. Mentorship training for faculty has been scheduled for April (base training). Dec 12 is second-level training.
 - Faculty voted last year to make it a requirement of anyone that wants to take graduate students to complete mentorship training.

Update from Mar about the possibility of expanding the availability of the workshop on neurodiverse students to AJED members

Since our meeting in November Mar pursued this topic with Amy Schmid and shared the following outcome:

1. the possibility of including the AJED committee in the workshop: Amy has a meeting with the school of medicine in January and will ask about the possibility of including AJED.
2. the possibility of having another workshop for postdoc and staff: in case option (a) is rejected, Amy will ask about the possibility of having an extra workshop for postdocs and staff
3. other resources:
share the following link for whomever might be interested:
<https://sites.duke.edu/neurodiversityatduke/>

Review of committees with Nina ([link to spreadsheet](#))

Blue boxes on spreadsheet = finished projects. Green are ongoing. Red are waiting for someone to take the lead on them. Depending on the nature of the project, ideally we will have a progression of blue (or green, if long term) boxes on this spreadsheet from left to right (with x-axis = time, roughly), as we get things done each semester. Everyone should have access to this spreadsheet as editors, so please feel free to modify as appropriate, and/or add to empty boxes with new ideas/needs. (Also, yellow boxes are things a Communications/PR hire could work on.) -NTS.

BCA committee

This committee was commended for arranging bookbagging fairs and good attendance at these events.

Grunching, which is an opportunity for biology undergraduates to invite graduate students for lunch, was reviewed. Grunching declined during the pandemic and has not been revived partially due to an unclear funding source and administrative challenges. **Should Grunching be prioritized by the Biology department?**

Wage/Benefits Equity committee

The 22-23 Annual report notes submitted by Ranjay et al was read:

This past year, with the help of Katherine Trinajstich and Emily Bernhardt, we set up a listserv for the department's research scientist (~24 members). I sent out emails soliciting concerns from this segment and met with several research scientists to discuss challenges they face. The following are the main issues that were raised that should be followed up on, if relevant AJEDers are willing and able to:

- There are two categories of research scientists. One category contains postdocs who have exceeded their postdoc tenure limit and have had a title change to finish up their projects as they move on. The other category contains career research scientists. These are scientists who are operating at the assistant PI level, helping drive projects to completion, writing papers, being heavily involved in mentoring, etc. Some research scientists are in fact PIs with significant independent funding (e.g., NIH R21).
- There needs to be a distinction between these categories. **Specifically, there should be career progression guidelines for career research scientists**, just as faculty have advancement options from their initial hire. Lack of career progression prospects (in the

form of salary raises, title changes/promotions etc) significantly affects the morale of this valuable segment of researchers that helps professors, who are stretched thin with faculty duties, run their research programs.

- There is a lack of transparency on HR's policies pertaining to compensation. **A research scientist should have access to clear information on % annual raises, and salary ranges and limits.**
- There is a clear disparity in wages between research scientists here in Trinity and the Medical school. This adds to Kardia's own assessment that workers across Biology are paid lower than their counterparts in the University. **Town halls should be held for transparent discussions on this issue and to brainstorm solutions.**

Mar, who worked with Ranjay on this committee before he left the department, was able to elaborate on some of the details of the committee's discussions and emphasized the importance of providing the research scientists with the following:

- future career trajectory (stability)
- better salary
- other kind of incentives

The discussion on this topic led to the following:

- stability comes from funding and Biology has no money to support this job position. That only depends on the individual lab's funding. CONCLUSION: There is nothing that AJED can do to help.
- better salaries also depend on the lab funding. (It was discovered during the meetings Ranjay organized, that the salary of research scientists is constrained by university rules that stipulate a maximum of a 5% salary increase. This is true even if the PI is willing to offer a better salary.
- other promotions and incentives: AJED agreed on trying to get the Research Scientists other incentives such as being considered for mentoring workshops, etc. Mar is currently working with Jessica Harrell to arrange courses for Research Scientists and hoping to be included on the workshop about neurodiverse students. She will also work on a survey for the Research Scientists to get more clarity on pain points and suggestions for what types of things (within our control — e.g. professional development workshops, life coaching, recognition) would be helpful. (Steve suggests that OFA, PDA, or OPS might already have such surveys; Rossie notes that OPS just sent one out to postdocs.)

In general, it was concluded that there should be more transparency and communication in the department regarding future career trajectories and funding sources. This could reduce the frustration of research scientists, postdocs and graduate students who often have insufficient information or understanding about research funding in an academic system. In an ideal world the expectations of a PI should align with the ambition of the person being hired. A conversation between the PI and the hiree about expectations and goals should take place before hiring to ensure the expectations of both parties agree. Similarly, for positions where a "next step" is unclear or doesn't exist (e.g., Research Scientists, Instructor B's), transparency and opportunities for development and recognition could be helpful.

Paul Magwene and Steve Nowicki agreed to join forces to produce a document that explains how research funding works at the university and to follow this with a workshop.

Gathering/Inclusive space committee

Steve Nowicki provided an update on Gender Neutral Bathroom

Suggestion was made that the GNB should be referred to as an All Gender Bathroom; this more accurately represents the goals of the project

Steve continues to communicate with Bobbi Weinberg (Project Manager at Duke) and has communicated that there could be pushback from interested parties if the decision is not to support this measure.

International Scholar Support committee

Z discussed the need for more explicit resources to help guide international graduate students..

[The international house](#) (ihouse) is geared more towards undergraduates and should be expanded to include information for graduate students. During this discussion, we were made aware that Duke Student Affairs has a site called "[Learning Essentials](#)" that highlights the Duke International Student Center and provides information on relevant topics including information on taxes for nonresidents.

In conclusion, Nina emphasized the need for a departmental PR person that could help with developing a live wiki site that would present updated curated information and resources making it easier and more accessible. AJED currently works with Matt Hartman who is the Director of Communications Strategy to post information (e.g., these minutes) to the Biology Department's website. However, helping with building or maintaining a new website or wiki is outside of Matt's purview. Marie Claire Chelini who worked with AJED as a communications and PR person in the first two years of AJED's inception is listed in Duke Scholars@Duke as: **Dir, Communications, A&S**

Paul is on the ECGF (Exec Committee of Grad Faculty) and notes that we should anticipate/plan on departmental conversations in Fall 2024 about unionization and what it means. Perhaps IDEA could lead at least one of these conversations? We could discuss this at a later date with IDEA committee members, or in our IDEA/AJED meeting next semester.

Submitted by:

Alison Hill, Nina Sherwood and helpful input from Mar Martinez Pastor