

Action for Justice, Equity and Diversity (AJED) Committee
Department of Biology
Duke University
Annual report for the 2022-2023 academic year.
October 2023

2022-2023 Members:

Nina Sherwood (Chair of AJED), Associate Professor of the Practice
François Lutzoni, Professor
Jill Foster, Assistant to the Director of Undergraduate Studies
Amber Brooks, undergraduate
Yochebed Woldeyohannes, undergraduate
Paul Magwene, Professor
Steve Nowicki, Professor, Associate Chair
Kathleen Miglia, Lab Administrator
Rossie Clark-Cotton, Postdoctoral Fellow
Lucia Strader, Professor
Alison Hill (Assistant Chair of AJED), Senior Lecturer
Mar Martinez-Pastor, Senior Research Scientist
Scott La Greca, Data Manager
Kathleen Miglia, Lab Administrator
Ranjay Jayadev, Research Scientist

Natalie Kerr, Assistant Research Professor of Biology
Lotus Lofgren, Postdoctoral fellow
Carl Manner III, Graduate Student
Nadeesha Perera, Instructor B
Shania Appadoo, Research Technician III
Dan McShea, Professor
Jessica Harrell, Director, Undergraduate Research Support Office
Alyssa Perz, Director of the Health Professions Advising Office
Aeran Coughlin, Graduate Student, IDEA Co-Chair

Ex officio members:

Emily Bernhardt, Professor and Chair of the Department of Biology
Amy Schmid, Director of Graduate Studies
Mai Nguyen, Business Manager
Donnyell Batts, Assistant to the Director of Graduate Studies
Nelia Viveiros, Kardia Group

This report is a summary of the major ongoing discussions, activities, and projects of the Duke Biology AJED committee for the 2022-2023 academic year under the leadership of Committee Chair Nina Sherwood. During the 2022-2023 academic year, the AJED committee met 3 times (October, November, December) in the fall semester and 4 times in the spring semester (Jan, Feb, March, April).

An important part of AJED's work for the 2022-2023 academic year was to interface with the Kardia Group (Diana Kardia and Nelia Viveiros) who were hired for the year to consult with us on departmental climate which, as indicated by the Duke Biology Self Study needed improvement on several fronts. We worked with the Kardia Group to further understand points of concern across the department (e.g., via listening circles and surveys, as well as direct input from AJED members) and develop short- and long-term strategies to address these challenges. Major lessons were the **need for cultural change and community building within the department**. Accordingly, this was the predominant theme underlying this year's projects and subcommittees, summarized below. Looking ahead, AJED aims to continue to serve as 1) a sounding board, to identify problems relating to equity, diversity, and

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inclusion in the department, and 2) an accountability board, to make sure that these issues are followed up on and addressed to the best possible extent.

Food insecurity at Duke: surveying, brainstorming, and working on local (departmental) solutions

This issue was spearheaded by Carl Manner, who worked on coding a pay-as-you-can, QR code-scannable pantry open to all (even for a quick get-you-through-the-day snack) and surveyed existing Duke resources for food insecure members of our community.

Establishing identity group-based social listservs with designated AJED liaison(s)

While we already had departmental listservs enabling targeted communication for and among undergraduate Biology majors, Biograds, lab managers, and faculty, this still left many in our community without this valuable means of connecting with people in similar positions. With the help of Katherine Trinajstich, we set up new social listservs for **administrative staff, research staff, international members of the community, postdoctoral scholars, and research scientists**. Invitations to join the appropriate listserv were sent to current folks and will continue to be sent to new hires; each listserv can be viewed or posted to exclusively by their members. Liasons for each respective group act as listserv managers and point persons to initiate Department-sponsored gatherings, listening circles, etc., towards building community within that group (see also reports from Ranjay, Rossie and Lotus, and Kathleen, below). Liasons are currently AJED members (but do not need to be).

Mentor Training

The importance of good mentorship/what to look for in a mentor, and lack of formal training for these skills, was a frequent topic of discussion and determined to be of high interest to graduate students, research scientists, postdocs, and faculty. Fortuitously, AJED member Jessica Harrell is a trained facilitator for the Entering Mentoring (for faculty) and Entering Research (for trainees) curriculum from the Center for Improved Mentoring Experience in Research. These trainings assist with strengthening the mentor-mentee relationship by covering topics such as effective communication, aligning expectations, and professional development. With the support of our Chair, Jessica facilitated a post-doc specific training for the post-docs in the department (see post-doc section below) and is in ongoing conversations with Amy Schmid and Donnyell Batts about offering training opportunities to other students and trainees in the department.

Departmental Gathering Opportunities to Enhance Social and Community Building

- Weekly lunches were organized by Shania and Francois in the department Cognitron for the AJED community
- AJED members Natalie, Kathleen, Mar, Shania, Nadeesha, and Nina participated in planning and hosting the Departmental Holiday party

Departmental Culture and Training

- AJED, with the help and sponsorship of Nicki Cagle (NSOE) organized a Professional Accountability Program (PACT) training session through the medical school. PACT trains faculty and staff to become Peer Messengers to help counteract unprofessional behavior in their colleagues and uphold [Duke's core values](#). In total, ~20 members of the Duke Biology community attended this first training, and we would like to continue to offer this to the department in the coming year.

Recruitment

- AJED members participated in graduate student recruitment in early January. This included AJED members: Nina, Steve, Francois, Natalie, Rossie, Shania

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- AJED members organized and attended eight lunches with faculty candidates during the spring faculty recruiting effort, to learn about their interests in EDI and talk about our efforts in this regard. Many AJED members contributed to this effort, including undergraduates Amber and Yochebed, who also recruited other BCA members to help, and Jill Foster, who brought in several undergraduates who serve as Biology Ambassadors.

Sub-Group Reports

1) Sub-Group for Undergrad Belonging and Mentorship: Biology Cultural Association (BCA)

Members: Yochebed Woldejohannes, Jill Foster, Francois Lutzoni

Report submitted by: Yochebed Woldejohannes

Year in review for BCA: We had two successful book bagging events, each with 20+ people in attendance. We had a BCA/AJED mixer in April and a meet-the-professors event, which was not as successful as the book bagging events.

General Updates: We are finally an approved Duke Group, and we recently got our fund code! We were able to participate at the group fair this year, so we were able to engage with underclassmen who would want to participate in the mentorship program. We have a lot of people in groupme at the moment (116), and a good amount of people following the instagram @dukebca (47). We have had an issue with having people actually attend events though, so we are trying to brainstorm ways to engage students and increase attendance.

Goals: For this year, our main goals are maintaining member retention with our events and establishing the mentorship program. Some of the activities that we hope to hold are a meet-the-professors, how to get involved with research panel, and social mixers.

2) Sub-Group for Gender Neutral Bathroom (GNB)

Members: Scott LaGreca, Rossie Clark-Cotton, and Steve Nowicki

Report submitted by Steve Nowicki

This group worked with the Center for Sexual and Gender Diversity, the Office of Institutional Equity, and the Facilities Management Department (FMD) to explore options for adding gender-neutral bathrooms (GNBs) to the French Family Science Center/Biological Sciences Building complex or converting existing bathrooms to become gender neutral. A key issue for converting bathrooms (which is a far more affordable approach than building new GNBs in existing buildings) concerns whether there are sufficient existing facilities to convert one or more gendered restrooms to GNBs. This issue is complicated by the fact that that current code only mandates numbers for gendered facilities; that is, there is a minimum required number of men's and women's fixtures, with no mention of gender-neutral fixtures, meaning that – from a legal building code perspective – adding a GNB by converting a current gendered facility only reduces the total number because the GNB literally doesn't count.

The GNB subgroup worked with Bobbi Weinberg in FMD to (1) identify a space in BioSci where a new GNB could be added and (2) conduct an analysis of existing facilities in both BioSci and French to determine if converting one or more existing restrooms in BioSci and/or French would keep those building in compliance with code. The latter effort involved hiring an architect with knowledge of relevant building codes to conduct a formal analysis, which was paid for by the Biology department.

A location was found in BioSci (near the new Klopfer Reading Room) where a relatively unused lounge space could be used to construct a new GNB and FMD was asked to provide an estimate of the cost of adding this facility. This

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plan was put on hold, however, when it became clear that BioSci will begin undergoing comprehensive renovations in about two years, at which time many (perhaps all?) restrooms will be reconfigured to become single-user GNBs.

The analysis of existing restroom facility numbers revealed that there are more gendered restrooms in the French Science Center than required by code, which means that two of these existing facilities can be converted to GNBs. As a first step towards adding GNBs to the French/BioSci complex, a simple, rapid and very low-cost solution will be to add a locking mechanism to two existing restrooms that, when locked from the inside display an “in use” message on the outside, and to change signage on these facilities to clearly identify them as “Gender Neutral.” The GNB subgroup is now working with FMD to develop a concrete timetable for making these conversions and will also be discussing with building stakeholders which existing facilities should be converted this way to maximize accessibility and visibility. This conversion is very simple and very low cost, so we are pushing to have this done by the end of the fall '23 semester at the latest.

In addition to pushing forward this conversion, the GNB subgroup will also develop plans for adding signage at building entrances (both French and BioSci) to help individuals locate GNBs (such as is done in the entry way of the Math/Physics building). As an interim measure, a draft sign was designed by Emily Bernhardt to notify community members of the status of work on creating GNBs in the French/BioSci complex. The GNB subgroup will update this sign as appropriate depending on current progress and will plan to deploy this sign this semester.

3) Sub-Group: Research Scientist Identity Group/Wage Equity

Members: Ranjay Jayadev
Report submitted by Ranjay Jayadev

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.**

4) Sub-group: Initiatives to Support Postdoctoral Researchers in the Department

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Members: Rossie Clark-Cotton and Lotus Lofgren
Report submitted by Lotus Lofgren and Rossie Clark-Cotton

Lotus Lofgren and Rossie Clark-Cotton worked on initiatives to support postdoctoral researchers in the Biology Department. First, we worked with the department to set up a postdoc-only mailing list, biopostdocsocial@duke.edu. Unlike the biopostdoc@duke.edu mailing list, which faculty can access, the new list's members are exclusively postdocs (plus a single non-faculty administrator who owns the list). This allows postdocs to communicate directly with one another with messages that are not available to faculty mentors. With the generous support of the Chair, we also organized a postdoc discussion of the faculty search process and a mentoring workshop. The discussion took place over dinner at Juju, with seven postdocs attending. In May, nine postdocs participated in an eight-hour mentoring workshop facilitated by Dr. Jessica Harrell. The discussion-based format allowed postdocs to generate and share their own solutions to problems common in mentoring relationships, including maintaining communication, fostering independence, and building self-efficacy. Both programs were well-received by postdocs and highlighted in the department newsletter! To build on this success in the coming year, we would like to: 1) sponsor a postdoc-focused social/networking event each semester and 2) continue to offer the mentoring workshop each spring as an annual postdoc training event.

5) Sub-group for Biology Staff

Members: Jill Foster, Scott LaGreca, and Kathleen Miglia
Report submitted by Kathleen Miglia

The Staff sub-group was formed in response to concerns expressed by various staff members that were feeling forgotten and out of the departmental communication loop. The Kardia Group organized a listening circle for staff in the fall of 2022 with Nelia as facilitator but, due to communication issues, this initial meeting was not well attended. In June of 2023 Diana Kardia met with the staff sub-group to discuss next steps; it was decided to hold a future discussion roundtable with staff by zoom in hopes of increasing the attendance. Additionally, it was decided to invite Mai to be a part of the staff sub-group and to send out a survey authored by Diana Kardia prior to the upcoming roundtable.

The virtual roundtable took place on August 30, 2023. Twenty-seven staff members responded to the survey (17 admin, 9 research and 1 other).

Diana Kardia facilitated the roundtable and provided a summary of themes that were discussed.

Liked the most by Staff about the biology department:

- community/relationships with colleagues, sense of unity and mission-driven work.

Liked the least by Staff about the biology department:

- Silos and lack of collaboration
- Old school hierarchy (faculty/staff relations)
- Climate concerns (concerns with graduate students; concerns with female faculty)
- Low wages; lack of career progression

Suggestions going forward:

- Increase interactions
- Include staff more
- Invest in post-pandemic cohesion
- Increase staff-focused time at retreats and other meetings
- Staff wages are an ongoing stress and concern

In summary, staff need a stronger voice to ensure their concerns and perspectives are understood. The departmental communication channels need improving. In response to these efforts a Bio-Staff retreat has been organized by Mai for October 30 in Penn Pavilion. Emily Bernhardt is a featured guest.

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Report submitted by Nina Sherwood and Alison Hill 10/9/2023