

AJED Meeting April 29, 2024

In attendance:

Nina Sherwood
Natalie Kerr
Mar Martinez Pastor
Rossie Clark-Cotton
Jessica Harrell
David Su
Blythe Boquist
Alison Hill
Paul Magwene
Steve Nowicki
Ze-Yi Han
Jill Foster
Carl Manner III
Lotus Lofgren

Agenda:

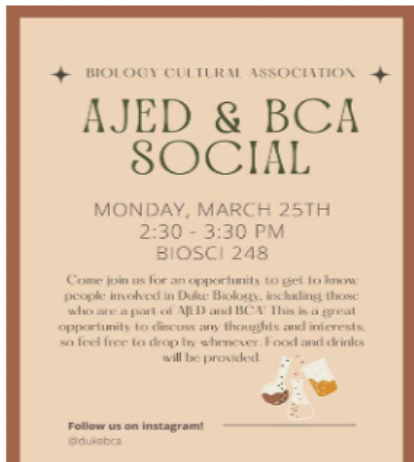
- 1) BCA – BCA-AJED Mixer, other plans for next year, additions to leadership (?)
- 2) IDEA Committee – Wilderness Training and Mutual Aid Closet proposals
- 3) Ze-Yi, Jessica: Graduate Student Mentor/Mentee Workshops are happening!
- 4) Steve – GNB update
- 5) International Scholars Committee – Survey creation and results update
- 6) Let's wrap up our meeting by envisioning our goals for next year.

- What do you see as AJED's mission or role in the Biology department?
- What do you see as AJED's most significant contributions to the department in the last year?
- What would you like to see as AJED'S priorities for 2024-2025?
- How can we improve what we do?

1) BCA – BCA-AJED Mixer, other plans for next year, additions to leadership

David Su and Colby Cheshire (in absentia) expressed that strengthening the BCA is a great way of supporting undergrads who are interested in the department. The AJED & BCA mixer was held on

Monday, March 25th in the afternoon. Several AJED members were in attendance as well as three undergraduates. The suggestion was made that this gathering be moved next year to sometime in the first two weeks of September when fewer events are taking place on campus and student groups are just forming.



2) IDEA Committee – Mutual Aid Closet and Wilderness Training proposals

Carl Manner III reported that the IDEA group is working on obtaining funding for two initiatives and is hoping AJED or departmental funds could serve as a source of funding.

Initiative 1: Mutual Aid Closet

Carl reported that IDEA has obtained a closet, at an undisclosed location in the department, that is currently being painted. The goal is to have it as a source of items to be made freely available to graduate students lacking resources. The closet will be managed by a team of four IDEA graduate students with a management plan to operate the closet and to seek funding and donations. The objective is to stock it with field work clothing, professional attire, clothing for transitioning folks, toiletries etc.

It was discussed that the Graduate and Professional Student Government (GPSG) organization currently runs a [community pantry](#) with the following mission statement: "We aim to provide Graduate and Professional students and their families with reliable access to nutritious food, ensuring that they have secure sources of sustenance and can focus on their academic pursuits without worrying about their

“next meal.” Carl reported that the GPSG pantry has limited toiletries and limited accessibility. It is a considerable walk from the Biology building (located in Smith Warehouse) and is only open on Saturday mornings. The GPSG pantry does not aim to address the need for fieldwork clothing, which is more specific to the needs of students in the department than to graduate students broadly. IDEA envisions its mutual aid closet to be targeted more narrowly to the needs of Biology students, and does not aim to duplicate effort. Additionally, it was discussed that there is no graduate school funding for clothing for folks in gender transition and that the mission of AJED is consistent with making funding available. IDEA believes its mutual aid closet can provide an avenue to efficiently meet this unmet need. The suggestion was made to contact Angel at [the Center for Sexual and Gender Diversity at Duke](#) to see what resources they might already provide so that we don't duplicate efforts.

Please be aware that the GPSG pantry website advertises that it needs volunteers to help staff the pantry and to contribute to fundraising. This seems like a great opportunity for any IDEA or AJED members looking to support this community effort. GPSG benefits from donations from the entire community, and donations toiletries are particularly valuable.

Initiative 2: Wilderness Training proposal

IDEA is proposing that the department fund wilderness safety training for graduate students and possibly others, particularly those doing field work. Many different types of wilderness training and skills exist and the needs will differ depending upon the field work opportunities and the environment. Natalie pointed out that she received wilderness training in safety around snakes for field work in Australia but has not had training in how to contend with bears. One possibility is to offer a basic safety and preparedness training which would be shorter and cheaper than a more comprehensive training. IDEA members Richard and Tristan are looking into quotes on different types of training. Emily B. (in absentia) also suggests that costs could be reduced by coordinating with NSOE and Global Health: “Nicki Cagle would be a great point of contact for this in NSOE and perhaps Joe Eggers (global health DGS) would be good contact there.”

It was discussed how mentors or PIs of field projects should be responsible for ensuring that their students and staff receive the appropriate training for field work. It was also discussed that appropriate clothing (i.e. waders for working in streams or marshes) should be funded by grants and made available to graduate students and appropriate staff. Nonetheless, IDEA has identified the purchase of fieldwork clothing and differing ‘starting points’ with respect to wilderness training as priority areas for its work. Graduate students report significant spending on fieldwork clothing, and believe that additional safety training beyond that offered by their labs would be appropriate. Steve noted that ensuring adequate training can be tricky when a student works on a project far from the main focus of their advisor’s lab.

Carl sent the following [commentary](#) including many actionable suggestions for advancing DEI efforts in fieldwork: Safe fieldwork strategies for at-risk individuals, their supervisors and institutions

3) Ze-Yi, Jessica, Lotus and Rossie: Graduate Student and Postdoc Mentor/Mentee Workshops are happening!

Ze-yi surveyed graduate students regarding mentorship training and 19 students expressed interest. The focus will be on Mentoring and building community and possibly an additional topic on “How do you boost your confidence”–Jessica Harrell will facilitate the sessions. Post-meeting note: To accommodate all interested graduate students a second session will also be held this summer. Rossie also surveyed post docs and other non-faculty Ph.D. department members about mentorship training and reported there is a broad interest and is hoping to arrange this training for sometime in May. Rossie also reported that the Listservs she has been working with are not complete. This seems to be a general problem, keeping the listservs updated and making sure that everyone gets on them. Z had a similar problem with the international scholar survey not reaching all the internationals. Suggested solutions were to get updated listings from Katherine Trinajstich (who set up/owns most of the listservs), but also to add clickable links to the newsletter (or maybe the departmental webpage) through which people could request access to listservs they are interested in (this would still need to be approved by the listserv moderator). Additionally, it will be good to advertise opportunities such as the mentor training broadly, in the newsletter or via the entire Biology listserv, in addition to the targeted sends.

After the conclusion of the AJED meeting, Lotus, Rossie and Jessica sent an email announcing the mentorship certificate program for postdocs, instructors, lab managers, and staff/research scientists as part of a broader effort to offer career development and engagement opportunities across the Biology Department. This training will be divided into two sessions offered in person on Wednesday May 15th and Wednesday May 22th from 11:30am – 4:30pm (location on campus TBD). Lunch will be provided!

4) Steve – GNB/ AGB (All gender bathroom) update

Steve shared that he had received a commitment from FMD (Facilities management) to pay for the construction of the bathroom! At the conclusion of the meeting Steve received an update from Bobbi Wienberg that also committed to a location: the bathroom will be located on the 1st level of FFSC, and will involve converting the shower in bathroom 1119T to a single stall bathroom that opens to the main FFSC hallway. Steve commented that this location is in the most visible and easily found place to have an AGB.

Congratulations and many thanks to Steve for the doggedness and effort it took to achieve this!

5) International Scholars Committee – Natalie, Mar, Ze-yi, and Jean Phi — Survey creation and results update

Ze-Yi reported they had 21 responses to the international scholar's survey.

Many of the responses were quite comprehensive. More faculty than graduate students filled out the survey. One of the survey questions was what would you want to know when you start your work at Duke?

Some of the responses were related to:

- Taxes and procedures
- How to navigate the medical system
- What resources are available?

Lotus reported that DUPA (the Duke Univ Postdoc Assoc) has an international committee that is on top of international situations. Would it be possible to join forces with their post doc group?

An additional discussion ensued about the continued financial hardships that graduate students and postdocs face when establishing their living situation in Durham. Natalie reported that the FTC (Federal Trade Commission) has reported that landlords and property managers are colluding on rental pricing by using an algorithm for price fixing. Consequently rental prices have gone up nearly 20% since 2020 causing renters to pay more than 30% of their income on rent and utilities. The article is here:

<https://www.ftc.gov/business-guidance/blog/2024/03/price-fixing-algorithm-still-price-fixing>

6) Discussion of what AJED members would like to see as AJED'S priorities for the coming 2024-2025 academic year.

AJED will pursue the possibility of setting up a system for allocation of funds for small projects consistent with AJED's mission.

Carl said he would like to have a plan in place to proactively identify graduate students who are housing insecure and to be able to extend help before situations decline.

Steve suggested that AJED could take the lead to spearhead the development of a statement to the administration, signed by all faculty across the university, that the university should provide subsidized housing for those in need. Such a statement would be a largely symbolic effort but would be significant if it was endorsed by all STEM departments and additional schools. Ultimately, the availability of subsidized housing will save the university money. The concern is that the income for trainees needs to go up or they will stop coming to campus. National funding (e.g. NSF and NIH) needs to catch up; the current standards for salaries are not working. Paul Magwene reported that F31 grants (predoctoral training for PhD students) and F32 grants (postdoctoral training) are going up 4% in the next year.