

Genome Sciences DEI Committee Annual Report 2024-2025

The Department of Genome Sciences DEI committee consists of the following members: faculty members Doug Fowler, Hannah Jordt, Bill Noble, and Devin Schweppe; staff members Brian Giebel, Valerie Lynch, Serena Newhall, Laura Stump, Lara Muffley, and Skylar Thompson; postdocs Ryan Friedman, Anupama Jha, and Yizi Mao; and graduate students Abby McGee, Bria Metzger, Rachel Powell, Syd Sattler, Catherine Snizek and Faaiz Quaisar. Bill Noble chaired the committee. The committee met eleven times, on the second Tuesday of each month, August, 2024, through June 2025. Meeting [minutes](#) are linked from the departmental website.

The committee is organized into four subcommittees, and their activities are outlined below. To set priorities, 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

Consistently over the past several years, members of our department have indicated in polls that ensuring that all faculty in Genome Sciences undergo appropriate DEI-related training is a high priority. We have identified two types of relevant training. First, the Office of Health Care Equity (OHCE) provides the Foundational Equity, Diversity and Inclusion training series, which consists of five online modules. This training is required of all faculty and staff by state law. Second is the Research Mentor Education program. This series is organized jointly by UW Research & Graduate Education, the UW School of Medicine Office of Faculty Affairs, and the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Center Office of Education and Training. These are in-person trainings that will soon be required of all faculty listed on NIH training grants. The DEI Committee worked with the organizers of both of these trainings to put together a spreadsheet tracking which of our training faculty have completed these trainings. We also discussed these trainings during faculty meetings in January, March, and June, and we sent email reminders to the faculty asking them to sign up. Thus far, the number of faculty who have participated in these trainings is relatively low, in part because of logistical difficulties associated with tracking training faculty in our department whose primary appointments are elsewhere. OHCE is planning to revamp the EDI training series starting in July, which may also help make the trainings more appealing to faculty.

Hannah Jordt and Bill Noble co-facilitated a Research Mentor Education training session in March. They facilitated the morning half of a full-day session involving approximately 30 UW School of Medicine faculty.

In January, we held an EPIC training for graduate students, postdocs, and research scientists to complement the training provided for faculty. EPIC aims to provide peer-to-peer training that empowers our community to create safer workplaces and stop harassment. Roughly 8-10 people attended. Attendance could have been improved if there was more advance notice for scheduling; if there is enough interest from the community, we will schedule another EPIC training.

Last year the UW School of Medicine carried out a wellness survey, and the results were shared with each department. The DEI Committee organized a town hall in November to discuss these results and to gather feedback from the department.

An ongoing challenge in any department is keeping members of our community informed about important policies and procedures. Accordingly, we designed a series of memes, fashioned after commonly used tropes from social media, to communicate information about, for example, the “safe word” that everyone in the department should know in case of emergencies, the departmental suggestion box and incident reporting system, the locations of multi-use rooms in Foege, and the availability of emergency loans for graduate students.

After the departure of Atom Lesiak last spring, our department no longer has a staff member focused on outreach. The DEI Committee therefore put together a job description that could be potentially used in a posting for a replacement. We recognized that funding such a position is problematic, given the loss of the NIH award that funded the previous position, but we were hopeful that a partially funded position might be subsequently converted to full time. The document was completed, but the subsequent change in federal policies made it clear that the possibilities for funding such a position are currently quite constrained. Hence, we opted to table this item for the time being.

We continue to maintain an anonymous incident reporting system (GS AIR) for the department. In response to a suggestion from the retreat, we modified this system, as well as our departmental suggestion box, to allow users to specify one of three recipients for their submission: the chair of HR, the chair of the DEI Committee or the Department Chair.

Community

The DEI committee facilitated the 2024 retreat DEI activity led by Valerie Lynch and Dr. Pejman Mohammadi. The activity revolved around the concept of scientific identity and asked participants to reflect on what challenges and advantages they encountered that led them to their scientific field and how that has shaped their identity.

The COGS/DEI book club has met for three different books so far, which provides a way to build community outside of work and also discuss difficult topics like mental health and transphobia. While the first book was chosen by the organizers (Melinda and Skylar), the subsequent books have been chosen by book club members to give a wider variety of discussion topics.

Game night has continued during social hour, with a mix of board games and role-playing games, and provides a quieter venue for folks who would like to attend social hour but are more comfortable in a less busy environment.

The COGS/DEI Pride ice cream social had about 30 people attend, including a number of the REU summer students. We had both pre-made ice cream and also made some ice cream at the event using a small hamster ball-type maker, which was a fun combination of both science and teamwork.

We organized a Night Science activity during a social hour in November to facilitate creative thinking and help people build connections with others in the department. We created a sheet that people could use as a guide to opt-in to the activity during normal social hour.

We organized a departmental intramural sports team during fall quarter (volleyball), winter (basketball), and spring (ultimate Frisbee). Games were played at the IMA weekly, and seasons ran between five and seven weeks. Participants included graduate students, postdocs, staff, and faculty.

Education

An [FAQ document for international scholars](#) was posted on the GS website to provide more information to future and current international scholars. The document addresses areas such as visas, taxes, healthcare, credit reporting, finding an apartment, and more. This joins the [FAQ document for international students](#) posted last year on the GS website.

We revamped the GS website [resource page](#) for undergraduate students interested in research. The information includes advice on how to find a position in a lab and how to find research funding for those students already in labs.

Two in-house, annual workshops on inclusive teaching techniques were again offered at the beginning of the school year. All graduate students TAing Genome 361 and 371 during the 24/25 academic year were required to attend both workshops, but the sessions were open to all department members, and a total of 14 graduate students, 2 faculty, and 2 postdocs attended. The content in both workshops was data-focused. The first workshop covered current thinking in evidence-based pedagogy. 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.

Outreach

The DEI committee laid the groundwork to begin an outreach program between the UW Robinson Center and Genome Sciences to give pre-college students exposure to scientific research. This exposure program, planned to be held on Friday mornings over a 2-hour window for each cohort, will give students the chance to observe demonstrations by lab members as well as the opportunity to ask scientists about their work. Two classrooms of 30 students from grades 8-12 confirmed interest in participating in the lab tours. Participation of labs for lab tours was advertised through GS Slack, GS email list, and as an announcement during first year rotation talks. We received interest to participate from the Abitua and Beliveau labs, but GS participation was not enough to support 60 students. We decided to continue the project in the fall, hoping that more personnel will be available to stage the lab tours.