

# ECo Anti-Racism Action Plan

November 16, 2020

## **BACKGROUND**

On July 31<sup>st</sup> 2020, the Department of Environmental Conservation (ECo) held a forum to discuss issues relating to diversity, equity, inclusion, and racial justice within our department. The forum was motivated by increased national attention on systemic racism in the United States precipitated by recent police killings of black, indigenous, and people of color. The topics covered in the forum were inspired by a petition to Chancellor Kumble Subbaswamy and Provost John McCarthy to “Implement Structural Changes to Support the UMass Black and Brown Community” ([link to petition](#)). The forum was an opportunity for ECo to come together as a community to discuss issues of racial injustice and inequity within our department and identify specific actions to build a more diverse, open, and equitable community for everyone. This action plan was put together by Paige Warren and the ECo Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee and is a result of the conversations, ideas, and concerns expressed by community members during the ECo forum.

Specific action items were discussed under four broad objectives: 1) *dismantling structural elements that maintain the status quo*; 2) *combating complacency*; 3) *embedding learning about social justice*; 4) *increasing accountability and transparency*. The last of these categories was a major theme within the ECo forum discussions. In particular, discussions addressed ways to hold ECo community members accountable to take meaningful action to address institutional racism and inequality within the department. Further, many discussions called for increased transparency in the processes of hiring, recruiting, committee dynamics, and undergraduate/graduate curriculums to ensure equitable opportunities for everyone. Ultimately, the goal is to create a culture that focuses on diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice for all.<sup>1,2,3,4</sup>

This action plan defines proposed steps/activities under three timeframes: 1) short-term (weeks to months); 2) medium-term (academic year); 3) long-term (five-year plan). Action items are further assigned to specific ECo committees or senior personnel. The DEI Committee will be revisiting each action item to ensure the successful completion of each step over the proposed time frames and will send updates to the ECo community at the end of each semester. For reference, a detailed description of ECo senior personnel and committee roles related to DEI issues has been developed. It can be found [here](#), along with detailed notes from the ECo forum.

Actions already taken within our community in recent months include:

- The ECo Grad Council solicited feedback on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice from the graduate student community, receiving strong support for increased emphasis of these issues in ECo seminars and courses. In response to this support, the ECo Seminar Series will host Karena Mahung of Indufor North America on October 9<sup>th</sup>, who will give a talk titled: “An organization-wide approach to diversity, equity, inclusion and justice (DEIJ) for conservation organizations.”
- A survey on the current climate of equity and social justice within ECo is currently in review by the Dean of the College of Natural Science and will be released later this fall.

- ECo and the School of Earth and Sustainability (SES) committed to three years of funding for the BRIDGE scholars program.
- This fall, SES will: 1) fund interdisciplinary research on DEIJ issues 2) launch a new Equity and Justice in Sustainability task force; and, 3) fund an ally workshop co-organized by Michele Cooke and Raquel Bryant (Geosciences).

**OBJECTIVES** (adapted from [UMass for Black Lives petition](#))

*Action items are related to individual or overlapping objectives using the following numbers.*

1. Dismantle structural elements that maintain the status quo
2. Combat complacency
3. Embed learning about social justice
4. Increase accountability and transparency

**TO DOs** (superscript numbers indicate which above objective is addressed)

- **Short-Term:**
  - *Department Head/DEI Committee:* Send email to suggest faculty put up a DEIJ statement on their faculty pages/websites<sup>1</sup>
    - Assemble resources on/examples of DEIJ statements/mission statements for websites<sup>1</sup>
    - Transparency about how a faculty search team is selected<sup>4</sup>
  - *Graduate Program Directors and Concentration Coordinators meet with graduate student representatives to discuss program requirements and opportunities for guidance and/or mentorship programs*<sup>1,3</sup>
  - *DEI Committee:*
    - Help form *OEB/ECO recruitment/retention task force*
    - Review draft guidance document for faculty job candidates (including requiring a DEIJ presentation segment in the interview process - CNS already requires an application statement) to share with department<sup>1</sup>
    - Coordinate/encourage UMass<sup>1</sup> (e.g., the Office of Professional Development, the CNS Career Center, Office of Inclusion and Equity, Center for Multicultural Advancement and Student Success) to
      - offer more trainings for graduate students on crafting DEIJ statements (and working on DEIJ issues)<sup>1</sup>
      - offer training for faculty on mentoring graduate students; consider making it a requirement of faculty before they can accept new students
      - offer additional guidance for undergraduate students (especially first gen, etc.) applying to graduate school
    - Research Concepts include significant DEIJ conversation/training<sup>1,2,3,4</sup>
    - Continue to share DEI resources with faculty and students, and encourage participation in Diversity/Inclusivity/Pedagogy reading group<sup>3</sup>
    - Revise draft list of what committees exist, primary objectives and contacts, and identify opportunities where non-faculty (e.g. staff, postdocs, students) can be involved<sup>4</sup>

- Review of the action plan and send to graduate students/faculty/staff. Provide a Google Form to solicit comments or feedback on this action plan<sup>4</sup>
  - Discuss how to improve Eco Grad Council liaising to faculty meetings & DEI committee progress<sup>4</sup>
  - In Collaboration with *the Seminar Series Committee(s) and Graduate Council*:
    - Fully implement MOU with BRiDGE Scholars Program<sup>4</sup>
    - Identify and invite at least one DEI speaker per semester (with complementary discussion opportunities for students and staff)<sup>3</sup>
    - Record the virtual seminars and make available to the broader ECo community to make them more accessible and inclusive<sup>3</sup>
    - Encourage live subtitles for all Department-sponsored online events
  - Discuss with Administrative staff to understand which kinds of purchases/expenditures can be modified to try to reduce the reimbursement culture<sup>1</sup>
  - Include DEIJ explicitly as part of the ECO visioning documents/process<sup>1</sup>
  - In Collaboration with *Department Chair*:
    - Create awards committee to address both creation of new awards and processes for nominations/review<sup>2</sup>
    - Collect/share information on DEIJ awards opportunities and deadlines for nominations<sup>2</sup>
    - Discuss funds available for RA position to take on more significant role in the department (e.g. assessing curriculum, evaluate effectiveness of DEIJ initiatives, find synergies with existing campus initiatives) for Spring/Summer 2021<sup>2</sup>
- **Medium-Term:**
  - DEI Committee/Department Head
    - Provide updates to goals on website and/or emails to the department
  - *Personnel Committee*:
    - Discuss including DEIJ work in faculty promotion reviews and annual review process (AFRs) at Fall Meeting - e.g., accepting letters of support related to DEIJ work<sup>1,2</sup>
    - Discuss merit pay for faculty and staff at Fall meeting (check with Administrative Staff on how staff merit pay operates)<sup>2</sup>
    - Discuss how 'Multiculturalism' (currently in the AFR) is considered<sup>2</sup>
    - Discuss credit for DEIJ work in exchange for other 'Service' activities<sup>2,3</sup>
    - Also discuss potential disincentives and reporting measures for egregious offenders<sup>2</sup>
  - *OEB/ECO recruitment/retention task force (Proposed)*:
    - Conduct a survey on the issue of retention for faculty, staff, and students in our departments<sup>1,4</sup>
    - Discuss requiring full funding for graduate students<sup>1</sup>

- Spotlight ways we are working to make our space more equitable, including making changes to the ECo/OEB website, e.g., starting a DEI tab that includes the DEI committee's mission statement<sup>1</sup>
  - *Seminar Series Committee*: Seminar committee review policies/practices and increase transparency in speaker choices and nominations<sup>3</sup>
  - *Curriculum Committee (PDs)*:
    - Meet to identify key points of intervention including decolonizing curricula; acquiring resources to incorporate DEIJ into all the courses (Diversity/Inclusivity/Pedagogy reading group is one resource)<sup>3</sup>
    - Incorporate DEIJ courses in the curriculum; propose changes to requirements in graduate programs to ECo faculty & then Faculty Senate (consider opt-out options for BIPOC students)<sup>1</sup>
- **Long-Term:**
  - *Graduate Program Directors and Concentration Coordinators*:
    - Consider a centralized annual review process/self-reflection form in ECo for graduate students which would establish norms for DEIJ engagement and solicit feedback<sup>2</sup>
  - *OEB/ECO recruitment/retention task force (to be formed)*:
    - Consider an outside review/equity audit regarding funding model, and/or look for models from other institutions, in order to move toward requiring full funding for graduate students<sup>1</sup>
    - Improve recruitment and retention of BIPOC students - what options are being underutilized?<sup>1</sup>
      - Spotlight ways we are working to make our space more equitable
    - Use a community-generated list of places to post positions<sup>4</sup>
    - Transparency about where feedback goes in the hiring process<sup>4</sup>
    - Transparency about where decisions are made in ECo, and involvement of all folks at the decision-making table (staff, student, postdoc, faculty) as CNS, HR, and the Unions allow<sup>4</sup>
      - Allow two grad students and postdocs on every committee where there is interest