

Ithaca College Department of Physics and Astronomy Anti-racism and Inclusion Action Plan

**Prepared by:
The Anti-racism and Inclusion Action Team**

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Introduction

During summer 2020 our nation erupted in outrage over the killing of George Floyd and in memory of too many other people of color murdered before him. The department faculty wrote a letter to our community in solidarity with our students of color during that difficult time. Following up on that letter, the Anti-racism and Inclusion Action Team was convened in October and charged with editing and prioritizing a list of suggested initiatives developed by the faculty to lead our department toward becoming anti-racist and fully inclusive of all members of the department. This action plan is the result of that charge.

Mission, Vision, and Values

Mission

To guide the Department of Physics and Astronomy in becoming an anti-racist and inclusive community.

Vision

For the Department of Physics and Astronomy to be a diverse and thriving community wherein all members feel a sense of belonging, understand and value each others experiences, and are supported to achieve success.

Values

We approach our work with a willingness to engage in uncomfortable conversations that test our beliefs. We are *all* in different places on the journey to learn about our biases and to understand the experiences of others. We recognize that no one has the right answers. We must listen to and support each other with kindness and empathy. We must take responsibility for our actions.

Executive Summary

The anti-racism and inclusion action team identified seven key areas for growth: *faculty and staff education, student education, representation, community, student support, curriculum and pedagogy, and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) leadership*. We then brainstormed and prioritized action items to encourage progress in each area. We also proudly noted that significant progress has already been made in many of these areas. The anti-racism and inclusion action team will coordinate implementation of the action plan by connecting with faculty, staff, and students to carry out prioritized facets according to a faculty-developed time-line. The plan is presented here as a prioritized list of action items organized under each of the seven key areas for growth. We consider this plan as a “living document” and intend for it to be revised and updated in response to feedback from the community and in light of current events occurring at the department, college, local, and national levels.

Action Plan

★ = Highest Priority ★ = High Priority

Faculty and Staff Education

Faculty and staff should educate themselves on issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and on the means to combat racism and become inclusive of all members of our department. This work should take place through both formal professional development and informal research and discussions at the department and college level.

Action Items

- ★ Faculty Representative coordinates periodic discussions of DEI at department faculty meetings
- ★ Faculty Representative assigns common read/listen/watch and discussion each semester
- ★ Faculty Representative convenes an ad-hoc faculty and student subcommittee to curate a list of media that is authentic to the BIPOC experience and can be used by faculty and staff to facilitate their informal education
- ★ Faculty members who attend professional development on DEI issues report back to the department what they learned
- Department Chair works with the faculty to set an expectation for participation in professional development in the area of DEI (e.g., workshops, webinars, conferences)
- Faculty Representative convenes an ad-hoc faculty subcommittee to review the department policies and procedures manual for bias

Notable Progress

- Luke Keller and Kelley Sullivan are facilitators for the White-Identifying Anti-Racist Workspaces organized by the Center for IDEAS and SACL

Ongoing Efforts

- Individual faculty members have been consuming media and attending webinars on issues of DEI

Student Education

Students should be educated about diversity, equity, and inclusion and be exposed to the experiences of their peers. Faculty and students can support student education both formally in the classroom and seminar series and informally through extra-curricular events and informative displays designed for our hallways and classrooms.

Action Items

- ★ Faculty Representative includes ways to incorporate discussions of DEI and mental health in the classroom as part of ongoing discussions in department faculty meetings
- ★ Faculty Representative convenes an ad-hoc faculty and student subcommittee to compose a list of often overlooked people who made significant contribution to the fields related to each PHYS/ASTR class and distributes it to faculty teaching those courses
- ★ Student Liaison convenes a standing student subcommittee to plan and implement ideas for extra-curricular events (e.g., day to celebrate hidden figures)
- ★ Faculty Representative coordinates an annual Inclusion in STEM public event and physics seminar
- ★ Student Liaison works with student organizations to create a hallway display of hidden figures and informative poster displays regarding DEI for our classrooms
- ★ Faculty Representative convenes an ad-hoc faculty/student subcommittee to research DEI online training modules and the feasibility of requiring one for our incoming students
- ★ Faculty Representative collaborates with Seminar Coordinator to organize seminars focused on DEI and mental health

Ongoing Efforts

- Many faculty address issues of DEI in the classroom as the need/opportunity arises
- Department Chair encourages faculty to integrate DEI discussion in the classroom by advertising professional development in this area

Representation

To promote a sense of belonging in the department and in the fields of physics and astronomy, our students must see themselves reflected in the faculty and staff and in invited guests to the department.

Action Items

- ★ Faculty Seminar Coordinator schedules speakers who are diverse in identity as well as in area of specialty and workplace (academia vs. industry)
- Department Chair urges faculty to consider alumni of color for the physics banquet speaker

Notable Progress

- Department faculty search procedures were completely overhauled in fall 2017 to be more inclusive and were further refined during searches in fall 2018 and fall 2019
- Recent seminar speakers have included female physicists and physicists of color
- Physics banquet speaker in 2019 was an alumnus of color

Ongoing Efforts

- Faculty Search Chairs for faculty/staff hires attend mandatory and voluntary inclusive search training
- Faculty Search Chairs for faculty/staff hires work with the search committee to maintain up-to-date and inclusive search practices and procedures

Student Support

Students will flourish when provided with a wealth of support that includes strong mentorship, academic support and enrichment, a clear path for reporting bias and other issues encountered in the department, and opportunities to relieve financial pressures.

Action Items

- ★ Faculty Representative and Department Chair work with administration to hire a professional student advocate in Student Financial Services to help students navigate financial aid opportunities if their financial situation changes
- ★ Faculty PLoG Coordinator and Lead LA work with staff in the Tutoring Center to consider alternative tutoring models for students who need extra support
- ★ Faculty Student Room Coordinator creates a display in the student room with information on campus services (e.g., CAPS, SAS, bias-reporting)
- ★ Faculty engage in pro-active mentoring for academic advising, which requires more frequent meetings to get to know students better and allows for early intervention
- ★ Faculty Representative works with department faculty to create mentoring guidelines (updated annually) for academic advisors
- ★ Department Chair works with the faculty to create and advertise a formal channel for department-level reporting of bias and other inclusion-related issues
- Faculty attend the S-STEM pro-active mentor training in Summer 2021
- Department Chair works with administration to get a scholarship endowed for the physics and astronomy department
- Faculty participate in grant opportunities as the opportunity arises to provide scholarships and support structures for minoritized students

Notable Progress

- Kelley Sullivan is lead PI on an NSF grant that provides scholarships and supports for high-performing low-income students majoring in physics, math, and computer science

Ongoing Efforts

- Weekly PLoG sessions provide free tutoring support for students in our intro-level physics courses
- Supplementary instructional homework help videos provide introductory students with new modalities of peer assistance, financially supported by the IC Tutoring Center
- Seligmann Award provides a modest scholarship to a physics/astro student annually
- Faculty consider cost when choosing textbooks and other instructional materials

Community

Students who feel a sense of belonging are more likely to stay at Ithaca College, graduate with a degree in physics/astronomy, and remain in the field post-graduation. Community should be fostered within the department, within the greater Ithaca College and city of Ithaca communities, and within the physics and astronomy communities at large.

Action Items

- ★ Faculty Representative keeps faculty informed about upcoming identity-based conferences and faculty encourage minoritized student to attend
- ★ Faculty Representative works with the faculty to develop and implement ideas to more strongly encourage students to engage in research (e.g., lab visit days or a shadowing program for new students to learn what research is like before they sign up)
- ★ Faculty Representative encourages faculty to foster strong relationships with students through periodic discussions of rapport-building strategies during department meetings
- Faculty Research Mentors organize periodic meetings of students in PHYS x99 research courses to discuss challenges and successes in the lab
- Faculty Learning Assistant (LA) Coordinator organizes periodic meetings of the department LAs to discuss challenges/successes in the classroom
- Department Chair advises incoming students to join the new STEM Residential Learning Community
- Astronomy Club Faculty Mentor works with Astronomy Club to re-instate observatory nights and prepare a plan to involve students in presentations
- Faculty Representative prepares a list of community volunteer opportunities for PHYS x14 instructors to share in class
- Engineering and Astronomy Club Faculty Advisors support the Engineering and Astronomy Clubs in securing funding for students to attend astronomy and engineering conferences

Notable Progress

- Kemi Odumosu, Cyerra Adams, and Ted Mburu are the first IC P&A students to attend the National Society of Black Physicists conference (in fall 2020)
- Faculty and students remained connected in the remote spring (2020) through mash-up video messages dedicated to each other

Ongoing Efforts

- Department hosts an annual welcome BBQ and year-end banquet
- SPS Faculty Mentor works with and encourages SPS to engage in outreach events
- Department supports 1-2 students annually to attend the Conference for Undergraduate Women in Physics
- SPS Faculty Advisor supports SPS in their efforts to secure funding to send students to the annual APS March Meeting and quadrennial Physics Conference
- Department Chair works with other department chairs in CNS to preserve our student room (as new conversations about space arise)
- Department faculty give presentations in PHYS 114 to encourage student participation in research
- Department faculty support approximately one dozen students in full-time research experiences each summer through the college's Summer Scholars program

Curriculum & Pedagogy

Our curriculum should meet the needs of our students by scaffolding the skills needed for success in the major and offering degree pathways that prepare students equally well for graduate work or the STEM workforce. Our pedagogy should remain on the cutting edge through implementation of research-based practices and must be inclusive of all students.

Action Items

- ★ Faculty Representative leads the faculty in redeveloping the first two years of our curriculum to provide easier entrance after the first year and to provide better scaffolding of mathematical and analytical reasoning skills
- ★ Faculty Representative convenes an ad-hoc committee of faculty to re-imagine the PHYS x14 series in light of the student learning outcomes of the new Physics and Applied Physics degrees and in consideration of the need for formal discussions of DEI
- ★ Faculty Representative keeps department abreast of current curricular and pedagogical practices in the field
- Faculty Representative encourages the development of inclusive teaching norms through discussion of inclusive teaching practices in department faculty meetings

Notable Progress

- Our Performance-based Physics Lab (CNS 206/208) received a technology upgrade in summer 2019 and provides a unique space to support active learning
- In fall 2020 the faculty unveiled a revised Physics and new Applied Physics degree with greater flexibility at the upper-level and more emphasis on workforce-related skills

Ongoing Efforts

- Department Chair encourages the use of inclusive practices by advertising professional development opportunities in this area
- Department Chair maintains open communication with the chairs of the mathematics and computer science departments regarding course offerings and availability
- Faculty offer individualized research experiences through credited (PHYS x99) research courses and advise unique Senior Projects and Senior Theses
- All faculty employ active-learning and other inclusive practices in the classroom

DEI Leadership

Making significant progress towards becoming an anti-racist and inclusive department will require the hard work of a majority of the members of the department. The anti-racism action team will remain an active body that works with the department community and develops connections on campus and in the greater physics/astronomy community to enact change.

Action Items

- ★ Anti-racism and Inclusion Action Team coordinates implementation of the action plan by working with faculty, staff, and students to carry out prioritized facets of the plan
- ★ Anti-racism and Inclusion Action Team remains a standing committee and assesses the department, local, and national climate and suggests means to further educate our community and address relevant current events
- Faculty Liaison leads department in participation in the SEA Change initiative, APS TEAM-UP webinars, APS IDEAS, or other national DEI initiatives

Notable Progress

- Anti-racism and Inclusion Action Team drafted an action plan to move our department towards becoming anti-racist and inclusive
- Anti-racism and Inclusion Action Team created mission, vision, and values statements to guide the work of the Anti-racism and Inclusion Action Team and others involved in implementing action plan initiatives
- Application submitted (12/04/20) to participate in the APS TEAM-UP webinars, which support the (national) goal of doubling the number of black students earning bachelor's degrees in physics and astronomy by 2030

Appendix I: Definitions

Faculty Representative Any member of the faculty

Faculty Liaison A faculty member on the anti-racism and inclusion action team

Student Representative Any member of the student body

Student Liaison A student member of the anti-racism and inclusion action team

ad-hoc committee A committee convened for the short-term to complete a specific task

standing committee A committee convened for the long-term to address an ongoing goal

Appendix II: Implementation Time-line

The implementation time-line includes action items that will be undertaken during the 2021 calendar year. Action items are organized by the term in which the effort will be undertaken. Many efforts will be ongoing and will continue indefinitely, for example, engaging in conversations around DEI and mental health during department meetings. Other action items, such as redesigning the first two years of our curriculum, will come to a conclusion after an appropriate amount of time. That being said, we recognize that no action item will ever truly be completed, and we will evaluate our programs and practices periodically and add, edit, or re-prioritize action items as needed.

Spring 2021

Faculty and Staff Education

- Faculty Representative coordinates periodic discussions of DEI at department faculty meetings
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Student Education

- Faculty Representative includes ways to incorporate discussions of DEI and mental health in the classroom as part of ongoing discussions in department faculty meetings
- Faculty Representative convenes an ad-hoc faculty and student subcommittee to compose a list of often overlooked people who made significant contribution to the fields related to each PHYS/ASTR class and distributes it to faculty teaching those courses
- Student Liaison convenes a standing student subcommittee to plan and implement ideas for extra-curricular events (e.g., day to celebrate hidden figures)
- Student Liaison works with student organizations to create a hallway display of hidden figures and informative poster displays regarding DEI for our classrooms

Student Support

- Faculty Representative and Department Chair work with administration to hire a professional student advocate in Student Financial Services to help students navigate financial aid opportunities if their financial situation changes
- Faculty PLuG Coordinator and Lead LA work with staff in the Tutoring Center to consider alternative tutoring models for students who need extra support
- Department Chair works with the faculty to create and advertise a formal channel for department-level reporting of bias and other inclusion-related issues

Community

- Faculty Representative keeps faculty informed about upcoming identity-based conferences and faculty encourage minoritized student to attend
- Astronomy Club Faculty Mentor works with Astronomy Club to re-instate observatory nights and prepare a plan to involve students in presentations
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Curriculum and Pedagogy

- Faculty Representative leads the faculty in redeveloping the first two years of our curriculum to provide easier entrance after the first year and to provide better scaffolding of mathematical and analytical reasoning skills

DEI Leadership

- Anti-racism and Inclusion Action Team coordinates implementation of the action plan by working with faculty, staff, and students to carry out prioritized facets of the plan
- Anti-racism and Inclusion Action Team remains a standing committee and assesses the department, local, and national climate and suggests means to further educate our community and address relevant current events
- Faculty Liaison leads department in participation in the APS TEAM-UP webinars

Summer 2021

Representation

- Faculty Seminar Coordinator schedules speakers who are diverse in identity as well as in area of specialty and workplace (academia vs. industry)

Student Support

- Faculty Student Room Coordinator creates a display in the student room with information on campus services (e.g., CAPS, SAS, bias-reporting)
- Faculty Representative works with department faculty to create mentoring guidelines (updated annually) for academic advisors
- Faculty attend the S-STEM pro-active mentor training

Community

- Department Chair advises incoming students to join the new STEM Residential Learning Community
- Faculty Representative prepares a list of community volunteer opportunities for PHYS x14 instructors to share in class

Curriculum and Pedagogy

- Faculty Representative convenes an ad-hoc committee of faculty to re-imagine the PHYS x14 series in light of the student learning outcomes of the new Physics and Applied Physics degrees and in consideration of the need for formal discussions of DEI

Fall 2021

Student Education

- Faculty Representative coordinates an annual Inclusion in STEM public event and physics seminar
- Faculty Representative collaborates with Seminar Coordinator to organize seminars focused on DEI and mental health

Student Support

- Faculty engage in pro-active mentoring for academic advising, which requires more frequent meetings to get to know students better and allows for early intervention