

Diversity and Inclusion

Introduction

In making the statement “I would found an institution where any person could find instruction in any study” Ezra Cornell laid a foundation for diversity and inclusion that Cornell University takes pride in to this day. The fact is, however, that reality does not always live up to this ideal. There are still many barriers to equitable access to a Cornell graduate or professional education that disproportionately affect students from certain social identity groups that have been marginalized in our society and institutions of higher education.

The 2013 GPCI summarized how the graduate and professional student body was the most diverse of Cornell’s student bodies, with 46.1% international students and 18.9% of domestic students self-identifying as members of a minority group in the most recent report from the Office of Institutional Research and Planning¹. Strategic planning is crucial to meeting the diverse needs of this community. It was made clear in the 2013 GPCI and is still clear today that the GPSA should aim to increase the diversity of its membership, engage in more outreach, and give additional consideration and resources to support international students, students of color, students with disabilities, gender minorities, and low income and first generation graduate and professional students. We recognize the establishment of the Diversity and International Students Committee (DISC) as a standing committee of the GPSA as a major accomplishment of the 2013 GPCI process. DISC has been an active and productive group, leveraging collaborations with students, faculty, staff, and administration to provide advocacy and support for students from historically marginalized groups, and to develop educational and community-building programs for allies.

Since 2013, the Graduate School has also taken measures to improve support for graduate and professional students from underrepresented minority groups through the creation of the Office of Inclusion and Student Engagement (OISE) and increased programming to aid student success and create a culture of inclusion. Furthermore, seven additional graduate and professional student groups have been formed (CLASS, DISC, GWiS, MAC, QGrads (formerly oSTEM), GPSI, and FiGLI) and joined BGPSA, IGSA, LGSC, and SAAGA to form the Graduate and Professional Student Diversity Council (GPSDC). The GPSDC continues to work closely with OISE to advocate for students from underrepresented backgrounds and build community through joint initiatives and signature programming including the annual Renaissance Ball and the Spring Recognition Banquet.

While we appreciate the progress that has been made over the past five years, there are also several issues raised in the 2013 GPCI that have yet to be fully addressed. We note here that for many of the following issues the GPSA or Graduate School has taken some form of action; however, for many we are unable to quantify any progress due to a lack of data on measurable outcomes. We have attempted to include several of these items in this updated document with more specific and measurable goals so that progress can be evaluated in the future. Specifically we have identified the following issues from the 2013 GPCI that require our continued attention:

- Increased representation of a diversity of student perspectives in the GPSA membership
- Increased transparency and coordination of GPSA initiatives within and between officers and members through monthly Operations Committee meetings
- Increased communication with graduate and professional student Registered Student Organizations, particularly those that serve underrepresented or historically marginalized communities
- Expanded professional development and career resources for international students
- Increased support focused on the unique mental health needs of international students and students from underrepresented backgrounds
- Increased access to resources related to language barriers affecting coursework, teaching, and research
- Additional support programming for international students, focusing on financial literacy, international job search challenges, and advisor-advisee relationships
- Establishment of localized diversity and inclusion initiatives, including structured leadership and accountability mechanisms, at the department level across the university
- Increased resources for existing resource centers (i.e. Women's Resource Center, Asian and Asian-American Center, and LGBT Resource Center) to provide services and programming specific to graduate and professional students
- Creation of resource centers or similar units or mechanisms to provide community and support for groups that are currently lacking them (i.e. students with disabilities and Black, Latinx, indigenous, and first generation/low income students)
- Identifying and addressing cultural and social adjustments faced by first-gen students.
- Efforts to improve communication about the bias reporting systems and other venues for recourse when students are experience bias or are harassed based on their identity

Objective 1: Recruitment and retention of graduate and professional students from a diversity of backgrounds

Rationale: Cornell has made great efforts to increase diversity and representation within doctoral programs and professional schools. However, there are still populations that are historically underrepresented in these fields. Across Doctoral, Professional Master's and Research Master's programs, US underrepresented minority and US other minority admissions and enrollment have not increased significantly between 2013-2017 when viewed as a percentage of the total; absolute numbers are increasing by a small amount each year. When viewing makeup of the graduate school and professional students since Fall 2010, in both categories there are about 10% more male students enrolled although this gap has been closing in recent years. The percentage of US underrepresented minority students has decreased slightly in the professional schools and remained steady in the graduate school. Attrition percent between 2004-2012 is higher for underrepresented minority doctoral students compared to the average of all doctoral attrition percents.

While we acknowledge the large effort Cornell has put into recruitment of diverse graduate students, such as the Graduate School Ambassador program, we believe that these efforts could still be expanded. Additionally, we believe that increasing inclusive areas of support for underrepresented students at Cornell may improve retention rates and student

success, which could also help increase recruitment rates of students from diverse backgrounds. We acknowledge the Office of Inclusion and Student engagement for the support of many identity organizations on campus for graduate and professional students that serve these communities; however, some organizations could also benefit from additional and specific institutionalized support.

Actions:

- a. Continued support to the Ambassador program within the Graduate School to recruit students from underrepresented and diverse backgrounds.
- b. Expand, with necessary institutional funding and support, the Diversity Preview Weekend or similar programs to improve recruitment of students from underrepresented and diverse backgrounds to all Graduate Fields.
- c. Standardize graduate student admissions committee operations across all fields by:
 - i. Requiring admissions committee members to participate in training on holistic review of applications and implicit bias
 - ii. Including current graduate students on admissions committees
 - iii. Providing all admissions committees with standardised criteria/rubrics for student selection designed to prevent implicit bias or other biasing factors
- d. Work with members of the Black, LatinX, Indigenous, and first generation/low income graduate and professional student communities to create resource centers or otherwise leverage existing programs (e.g. Latino Studies and American Indian and Indigenous Studies Programs) to provide community and other forms of support specific to their communities' needs.
- e. Expand funding and staff support for Graduate and Professional Student-specific programming, spaces and resources within the current Resource Centers.
- f. Increase support to Student Disability Services to allow for programs specific to Graduate & Professional Students such as inclusive TA accommodation trainings, research accommodations, and training for advisors.
- g. Hire mental health professionals trained specifically to support the needs of graduate and professional students and ensure there is representation of racial, ethnic, and cultural minorities among these new hires
- h. Provide career services and support specific to graduate and professional students including:
 - i. Dedicated career services staff to support graduate and professional students interested in academic, private, and public sector careers
 - ii. Career fairs comprised of employers that are looking to hire recent graduates with graduate and professional degrees
 - iii. Career fairs that take into account the additional employment requirements, such as visa restrictions, for international students looking for careers in the United States.

Objective 2: Improvement of Campus Climate for Diversity and Inclusion

Rationale: Cornell has been taking steps to analyze and improve the campus climate throughout the university, including the Presidential Task Force on Campus Climate during the Spring 2018 semester. Racially charged incidents on campus, and the administration's response, indicate the need for further improvement with more direct action to combat such incidents. This has already been echoed by the list of demands presented to President Pollack by representatives of underrepresented graduate and professional students.

We advocate for resources to improve campus climate across all axes of diversity, including but not limited to: race; ethnicity; nationality; religion or creed; sexual orientation; gender identity; age; physical, mental and psychological ability; and socioeconomic status and/or background. We believe that increased awareness of the challenges faced by underrepresented/marginalized identity groups, as well as improved institutionalized support for such groups, will lead to a more inclusive campus and Cornell community. We acknowledge the work of the Graduate School Office of Inclusion and Student Engagement, Diversity Programs in Engineering, and the Intergroup Dialogue Project for their ongoing efforts to improve campus climate and suggest expanding and replicating their models for educational and social programming to reach more of the graduate and professional student body..

Actions:

- a. Development of Diversity and Inclusion committees comprised of faculty, staff, and graduate students within every Graduate Field, tasked with identifying and addressing barriers to inclusion with that field at the local level.
- b. Action 2. Create training programs on creating inclusive teaching and research environments to be offered to Teaching Assistants, Research Assistants, Postdoctoral Associates, Faculty Advisors, and Directors of Graduate Studies. These programs should.
 - i. Tie these programs into the Belonging at Cornell initiative
 - ii. Utilize tools from the Intergroup Dialogue Project and OISE's My Voice, My Story program to engage participants in diverse, face-to-face group settings.
 - iii. Be supplemented by online, asynchronous training resources, such as the Center for Teaching Innovation's successful Teaching and Learning in the Diverse Classroom course, to support community members that are unable to attend trainings in person.
 - iv. Increase funding and staff support for the Graduate School Office of Inclusion and Student Engagement and the Intergroup Dialogue Project for increased capacity to provide these services.
- c. Uphold the Title IX policy guidance of 2011 and 2014.
- d. Action 4. Develop and implement clear avenues of recourse to any policies written to address bias, harassment, and oppression on campus, taking into account potential power dynamics between students, faculty, and staff.

Objective 3: Accessibility

Rationale: (Dis)ability is diversity, and without acknowledging this fact, increasing awareness of the diversity in ability that exists among graduate and professional students, and striving to make our campus seamlessly accessible to all of those students we are failing in our efforts to

make Cornell an inclusive space. Approximately 1 billion people around the world, or about 15% of the global population, live with disabilities every day. This makes people with disabilities the largest minority group in the world, and it is also one of the few marginalized identities that any person can become a part of at any time. There is evidence that people with disabilities, particularly those suffering from mental health issues, are subject to significant stigma and bias in higher education and the broader workforce. In higher education the potential for stigmatization and students' knowledge and perception of available services are known to be barriers to students taking advantage of services and accommodations⁹. The Student Disabilities Services (SDS) office is a phenomenal resource to Cornell students that identify as having a disability but it does not have the resources to tackle many issues that exist around ability and accessibility on its own. We believe that there is enormous potential for collaboration between the GPSA, SDS, the Graduate School and Professional Schools, and other campus stakeholders to increase awareness of disability and improve access for graduate and professional students at Cornell.

Actions:

- a. Perform physical accessibility audits to identify facilities used by graduate or professional students in need of renovation including buildings, classrooms, libraries, office spaces, lab spaces, shared/common spaces, and field stations.
- b. Perform web accessibility audits to identify gaps in ADA compliance for all online resources – this is already fairly good
- c. Increase messaging to graduate and professional students during orientation and other first year programming regarding services and accommodations available through SDS.
- d. Work with SDS to develop systems to gather data, identify stress points, and develop solutions to improve the processes by which graduate and professional students request and receive accommodations.
- e. Partner with the Graduate School, the Law School, the College of Veterinary Medicine, and the SC Johnson College of Business, to assure that appropriate mechanisms for feedback and accountability are in place to ensure that accommodations are provided and that faculty & staff are educated on what is available and how to facilitate access.
- f. Collaborate with SDS and others to provide messaging and programming intended to increase awareness of ability as a social identity and promote knowledge of how to facilitate accessibility among the graduate and professional student populations

Objective 4: Affordability

Rationale: One of the most greatest barriers to higher education is affordability. At all levels enrollment and completion rates are significantly lower for individuals from lower family income brackets, and these gaps widen at highly selective institutions such as Cornell. Students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds not only face a greater challenge than their more affluent peers in paying for tuition, course materials, and living expenses, but may also need to overcome additional, cumulative disadvantages related to financial inequality such as less time to dedicate to schoolwork due to the need to work for supplemental income, or the inability to

take advantage of opportunities to attend conferences, participate in internships, or enroll at more expensive private schools.

Data from internal surveys conducted by the Cornell Graduate School and the Office of Institutional Research & Planning show that there are areas where students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may be underserved. While across all disciplines doctoral students from low-income and working class backgrounds report equal or higher ratings of academic, student life, and overall experiences than their wealthier peers, this relationship is flipped for students in humanities and social sciences disciplines that typically have less access to funding.

Actions:

- a. Increase the number of recruitment and completion fellowships in support of diversity for PhD students.
- b. Add fellowships in support of diversity for research master's and professional degree students.
- c. Increase the number and dollar amount of conference travel grants graduate students can receive and remove the requirement of an oral or poster presentation to receive funding.
- d. Expand messaging regarding financial aid and affordability to prospective students, specifically targeting first generation students, URM students, and students indicating financial barriers to attendance.
- e. Create mechanisms to financially support professional degree students in their professional development (e.g. conference or workshop attendance, internship support, job fairs/networking events) to the same extent as research degree students.
- f. Evaluate the affordability of housing for graduate and professional students on campus and develop plans to both ensure that on-campus housing is affordable for students on graduate assistantships and to increase housing supply to meet demand.
- g. Create an emergency / unexpected expense fund using student activity fee money similar to the undergraduate Student Assembly's "Students Helping Students" fund.
- h. Provide support for the Graduate School to raise funds for these initiatives through Alumni Affairs and Development.