Postdoctoral Association
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN–MADISON

Postdoc Diversity & Inclusion Forum

A Diversity of Stories

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April 30, 2021

The UW-Madison Postdoctoral Association organized this unique virtual event to highlight diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice (DEIJ) issues and challenges faced by UW-Madison's postdocs from underrepresented groups. It brought together university leadership, subject matter experts, postdocs, and other campus members to listen to and engage with the experiences of postdocs.

The forum was structured by (1) reading select narratives and proposed solutions from postdocs and (2) response by panelists, who were tasked with recognizing the issues brought forth from the postdoc community, providing feedback from the University's perspective on the proposed solutions, and integrating the issues highlighted into their work.

Forum Agenda

2:30 Introduction

2:35 Discussions:

    2:35 Mentor-Mentee Dynamics

    3:00 Culture of Community

    3:15 D&I Training

    3:30 Benefits for Postdocs

Postdoc concerns + Proposed solutions

3:40 Next Steps

3:45 Open Q&A

Forum Committee

Co-Chairs

Anahid Ebrahimi, Research Associate, Mechanical Engineering
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Committee Members

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Ashley Ruba, Postdoctoral Trainee, Psychology
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Susanne Wiesner, Postdoctoral Fellow, Biological Systems Engineering

Booklet Creator

Ali Deatsch, Research Associate, Medical Physics

Forum Panelists

Moderator

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Panelists

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Cheryl Gittens
Interim Deputy Vice Chancellor for Diversity and Inclusion, Division of Diversity, Equity and Educational Achievement

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Gloria Mari-Beffa
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Associate Dean for Natural and Physical Sciences

Oliver Schmitz
Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Affairs, College of Engineering

Amy Wendt
Associate Vice Chancellor for Research in the Physical Sciences, OVCRGE

The Forum

The purpose of the Forum was to open a dialogue between postdocs and university leadership about the challenges faced by postdocs, particularly postdocs from underrepresented groups. Specifically, the panelists were asked foremost to listen to the issues and proposed solutions raised by postdocs, and also to provide feedback on these topics.

The panelists all began by thanking the committee for the invitation to participate and for putting together the event, and the storytellers for sharing their experiences. The panelists acknowledged that the postdoc voice is important and that everyone is a part of the university's strategic vision to improve diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice (DEIJ) on our campus. They also expressed optimism that the time is right to institute change that will benefit postdocs, as there are resources available, or under development, to better support DEIJ initiatives and training. They expressed their desire to continue this conversation, in particular at the annual UW-Madison Diversity Forum.

Theme #1: Mentor-Mentee Dynamics

General Issues
- Mentor's misuse of power on postdoc's future career
- Mentor's influence on postdoc's mental health/productivity
- Lack of mentorship training

D&I Issues
- Stigmas around people with disabilities
- COVID-19 and disability
- D&I training on mentorship & diverse communities

Proposed Solutions

1) Mentorship training
    a. Resources for mentoring diverse postdocs (include mental health resources)
2) Mentoring Development Plan for faculty
    a. Similar to IDP for students
    b. Should include benchmarks for evaluation of successful mentoring
3) Mentor-Mentee agreement
    a. Agreement signed with expectations
4) Anonymous exit survey of postdocs
    a. Exit survey pilot for SMPH

Discussion

The panelists acknowledged the postdoc-specific issues raised around mentor-mentee dynamics and re-emphasized their units' commitment to training, mentorship, and retention. They noted that UW-Madison is a nationally recognized leader in the science of effective mentoring, including being home to the Center for Improvement of Mentored Experiences in Research (CIMER) (https://cimerproject.org/). Although some evidence-based mentorship training is already available at UW-Madison, the panelists noted that this needs to be significantly expanded to address the types of issues raised at the Forum, and were optimistic that a mentorship training proposal recently submitted to the Provost could eventually lead to this change. They specifically referenced the American Association of Medical Colleges' postdoc-mentor compact (https://www.aamc.org/what-we-do/mission-areas/medical-research/post-doc-compact), a pilot exit survey for postdocs in the School of Medicine and Public Health, the use of multi-mentor committees, and the Hostile and Intimidating Behavior (HIB) policies and processes as possible mechanisms to address mentor-mentee conflicts. They also acknowledged the additional challenges faced by international mentors and mentees from countries where cultural norms may differ.

Theme #2: Culture of Community

General Issues
- Recruitment and retention failures
- Unreasonable work culture

D&I Issues
- UW and Madison inhospitable to URM postdocs
- Exclusion from university structures

Proposed Solutions

1) Critically examine recruitment efforts
2) Attrition of URM students and postdocs should be viewed as failures of the department and UW
   a. Causes should be investigated
3) Treat postdocs holistically
   a. Work to dignify complex life circumstances
4) Better integrate postdocs into department and campus structures

Discussion

- The panelists recognized the need to collectivize responsibility for developing a positive and mutually supportive community culture including addressing structural issues and incorporating postdocs in formal (e.g., shared governance) and informal (e.g., community/identity-based affinity groups) campus structures. The panelists again referenced the Hostile and Intimidating Behavior (HIB) policies (https://hr.wisc.edu/hib/) and processes as a corrective measure for problematic events or relationships, although there was recognition that upstream interventions are preferable and needed.

Theme #3: D&I Training

General Issues
- Department-level recalcitrance to change and implementing trainings
- Postdocs are often ignored in campus-wide discussions about D&I initiatives and training

D&I Issues
- Limited data on postdocs of color, no data on queer postdocs or postdocs with disabilities
- D&I efforts are expected to be fulfilled by minority individuals

Proposed Solutions

1) Postdocs should be intentionally included in campus-wide discussions of D&I issues
2) Trainings on a variety of D&I issues should be taken by leadership, faculty, and staff
3) D&I initiatives should include diverse groups of people

Discussion

The panelists discussed the appropriateness of instituting uniform D&I training across the broad university landscape and proposed that discussion-based training is better than presentation-based training sessions, although all campus personnel need a basic education in these issues. Some select programs exist (e.g., the required inclusion curriculum for undergraduates, a code of conduct under development by one department) to attempt to target the creation of inclusive, antiracist spaces. The panelists noted that a university committee is currently examining the provision of DEI training including training for university leadership.

Theme #4: Benefits for Postdocs

General Issues
- Postdocs do not receive basic benefits like other university employees
- Many postdocs are expected to work far beyond 40 hrs per week

D&I Issues
- No assistance for childcare for after-work/weekend hours
- No health care coverage to domestic partners
- PI/mentor's use visas as leverage for international postdocs to justify unreasonable requests

Proposed Solutions

1) Standardize postdoc benefits to include federal holidays, vacation, sick days, and paid leave benefits in alignment with standard university employees
2) Provide additional financial assistance for childcare services for postdocs
3) Mentor-Mentee agreement
   a. Revise expectations that postdocs work far beyond 40 hrs per week required for full time status
4) Allow anonymous reporting for international postdocs whose PI/mentor leverage the postdoc's visa status

Discussion

The panelists unanimously agreed that basic, standardized paid leave benefits for postdocs is a "no brainer" and noted that it is being actively discussed this year through efforts led by the Office of Postdoctoral Studies. However, the financial barriers of offering other benefits such as childcare for all university employees were also raised.

Open Question and Answer

The panelists acknowledged the concerns that were brought forth by postdocs and presented a clear desire for change on campus. Members of the Forum audience voiced concerns about the focus on HIB policies and processes as the standard remedy for mentor-mentee relationship issues across a range of severities. The panelists expressed their desire to solve problems upstream of the HIB process and emphasized that there are many offices available to work through such problems and protect whistleblowers (which includes protecting funding for training), including the Ombuds and Deans' offices (https://ombuds.wisc.edu/); unfortunately, due to time constraints, it was not possible to provide specific details of such approaches. The event highlighted that awareness of these resources for postdocs is currently extremely limited and needs to be addressed.

Next Steps

The Forum brought forth many potential solutions and courses of action to promote positive change.

In direct response to the event, the Forum committee submitted a proposal for a postdoc-specific session at the UW-Madison Diversity Forum in November 2021. The session aims to provide an opportunity for a more detailed discussion of the resources available to help postdocs, staff and faculty through challenging workplace situations including those involving mentor-mentee relationships and in support of postdocs from underrepresented groups in particular.

While there was a clear desire for change from all participants in the Forum, there was also an acknowledgement that lasting change will likely require multiple incremental improvements and interventions over time. By sharing their findings with university and school/college leadership, the Forum committee strives to support and promote these conversations and actions. The UW-Madison Postdoctoral Association will continue to advocate for change through this dialogue, and hopes that university leaders will view the event as a call to action to improve the postdoctoral training experience for all at UW-Madison.
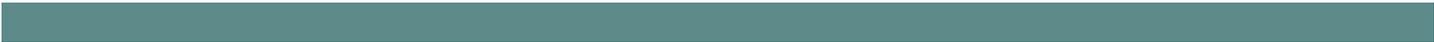
# Postdoc Narratives
Fall 2020

Postdoc Narrative #1

I am a post-doc with a disability that puts me at high-risk for COVID complications. I am frustrated that when I go in to work in a UW building, masking rules are not enforced and staff and faculty that do not want to wear masks put everyone else in the building at greater risk. Every student (undergraduate, graduate and professional) and post-doc in my building wears a mask. It is frustrating that there is anonymous reporting to report other students, but not for staff and faculty. I have reported mask violations to my supervisor but the same staff and faculty continue to not wear masks.

Postdoc Narrative #2

My most notable experience with DEIJ barriers at UW was before I was hired on campus. When I was exploring the idea of applying for a postdoc, I was interested in learning more about a similar department that I studied under throughout graduate school, but here at UW. I was excited to learn about what everyone studied, what the culture was like, etc. So I decided to chat with people who were currently a part of the department to get a sense of how I might fit in if I applied for a postdoc there. I'm so glad I chatted with people before I applied. A conversation with grad students suggested the department was not only promoting exclusionary practices within the department but were actually ACTIVELY pushing back AGAINST any changes, suggestions, or even just looking at relevant data to have a conversation about it. The department seemed to be a good-ole-boys club and they very much intended to keep it that way. I listened to horrific stories about how efforts to promote women and non-males in the community were undermined and how the leaders of these efforts were punished.

This particular department had graduate students take their qualifying exam BEFORE any of the students actually took any classes in their graduate program. This was of obvious concern because students come from all types of undergraduate programs with different offerings. I know this because my undergrad department didn't offer several of the main courses that are offered at other universities because it is assumed the material will be learned in grad school. Even for myself, I knew that if I was a grad student in this department, I could not pass the qualifying exam because I was never taught some of the material I'd be tested on. In the department that I did attend in grad school, I needed the first year to learn all those concepts for the first time to have a chance at passing the exam. I did hear that this rule was changed, so I was happy to learn this is not a current practice anymore. But it was an ugly fight to change it. Even still, the rankings of the exam results are posted and shared among professors, who have then used to determine which students get funded in their labs (or not). I hear this practice is still being done.

In addition, the department had no interest in ensuring the culture was a safe place for people of all backgrounds and identities on a social basis. Most of the events (including recruitment events) were focused on drinking at some of the male grad students' residents, much like a frat party. The grad students I mentioned previously saw this as a huge issue for non-male students, students who don't drink, and also students who lack transportation to get to and from these events (if everyone's drunk at the party, how is
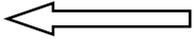
someone supposed to get home? Walk? Pay for an Uber? It's already a bad enough situation being drunk in a new place with new people as a non-male student in a stranger's home! If it were me, my physical safety would certainly be a concern...). When they looked at the demographic data for that department and tried to suggest at least having a conversation about how the culture was impacting the types of students who decided to stick around in the department, the conversations were met with hostility and shut down. So I decided not to even apply to any postdoc position in that department. Why would I? Clearly they don't care about grad students that don't look like them so why should I even bother to get them to care about me? My current department doesn't seem to have these particular issues to my knowledge.

I was happy to do a lot of research and chatting and interviews to find a department that is at least willing to have an open conversation, make changes, and take things seriously. In fact, it seems like they're starting up discussions to listen to students, faculty, and staff of all backgrounds and identities! I do have hope that it will go well, especially since my advisor is on the board and he's been excellent in thinking about these kinds of issues. But god, even though I don't deal with anything major or outstanding myself, I am sure aware of many people who are dealing with them in various places around campus.

From my perspective, it isn't about being perfect and instantly getting things right the first time. It's about having an open dialog where EVERYONE is listened to, taken seriously, considered, and brought into the decision-making process. So when I see departments that are willing to change and listen, I have a lot of hope. It's the departments and organizations that refuse to do so by asserting they "already have it all figured out and therefore there's nothing to change or even discussion" that are of major concern. LMAO can you imagine if they applied that same mindset to their own research? They'd get blasted! So why can't they make that connection?

Postdoc Narrative #3

*O*ne of the primary character traits that is correlated with success is resilience. I cannot think of any group of people that has this character trait in more abundance than people with disabilities. This group of people is used to overcoming huge obstacles just to do simple things that most people take for granted. If you can make it to UW-Madison, the most prestigious University in the state of Wisconsin, as a persons with a disability, you probably have an extremely high amount of resilience. This group of people also have perspective and life experiences that are far beyond that of most people, that makes them excellent students. They are used to failing many times at something and still sticking with it, so they are accustomed to delayed gratification. They would make amazing problem solvers and they usually have incredible amounts of empathy for others because of the hard times they have been through.*

At this University disabilities are very stigmatized and requesting accommodations is viewed by research professors as a personal threat or attack instead of someone that struggling and is trying to ask for help. Many of the other trainees also do not know how to treat others that need accommodations. When I told my professor that I wanted to request accommodations she thought that I was basically accusing her of discrimination against a persons with disabilities. There needs to be education so professors do not view accommodations as a personal attack. When I talked to my professor about my concerns, she basically dismissed them and blamed me for not working hard enough. I was told by the professor that she needed to get work done, so if I was not fast enough, I would have to sit on the side and watch the other person work the instrument. This is the very definition of discrimination against a person with disabilities. I am still not allowed to use the instrument. I did not have any follow up conversation with my professor about if I was still struggling or if the accommodations were helpful or how they will be implemented in the lab. Requesting accommodations is seen as the post-doctoral trainee being lazy and not wanting to work hard. Now that I am stigmatized by my professor, I continue to get e-mails about how I am not working hard.

Administrative intervention by human resources is extremely helpful. The staff is very knowledgeable and having HR speak with the professor takes some of the power dynamics away because the professor is dealing with the university administration, instead of just the trainee. A post-doctoral trainee needs to get a letter of recommendation from the post- doctoral advisor in order to apply for grants, so I am limited in how much I can advocate for myself because of the unequal power dynamics that impact trainees for many years if not decades of their career. If the major professor thinks that the post-doctoral trainee is lazy and does not want to work hard that is going to go in any letters of recommendation that are requested. I do not have any way to challenge the claims that are written in a letter of recommendation or defend myself in any way. There is no way for the granting agency to confirm allegations that the trainee is in fact lazy and
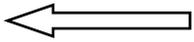
not hard working. This is systemic discrimination.

I also think it would be helpful to have some sort of mentor-mentee compact filed at the beginning of the training program that outlines the expectations for the trainee and the mentor that is filed with the department especially for trainees with disabilities. So things like 'I ,the trainee should have a least a week notice if I need to prepare an abstract for a talk' are written down and agreed upon in a document long before problems occur. You would think that this is an easy no brainer, but I am still fighting with my current advisor about this, and HR refused to write this officially in my current accommodations. The department and the disability office should have copies of this mentor-mentee compact. The time to work out details about expectations, is long before any conflicts ever happen. There also needs to be some sort of accountability for what professors state in letters of recommendations for granting agencies, because it impacts your career for years during a critical period when you are trying to establish yourself. This built in systematic discrimination really does ruin the careers of bright young scientists. At anytime anyone of my professors could write a poor letter of recommendation and describe me as lazy just because they are mad at me because I did not reply instantly to an e-mail that was sent late at night or during the middle of the weekend because I was resting because of my disabilities. There is nothing to stop that sort of abuse. There is nothing to stop my professor from just telling me tomorrow, that I can no longer work in their lab. It has happened to me.

What would help me more than some free software, is ending the systemic discrimination. Make professors accountable for the claims they make in their letters of recommendation to granting agencies. Educate professors on what it means to have disabilities and how to mentor trainees with disabilities. End the enabling culture that turns a blind eye when trainees with disabilities are abused. The truth is persons with disabilities have resilience so they can probably overcome their own disabilities, and more than likely daily discrimination and abuse, but there is no way that we can overcome a system where we can be denied funding for years during our early career because we had a mentor that equates disabilities with laziness. Don't you want people with incredible amounts of resilience working on problems? Out of all the groups of repressed minorities, persons with disabilities is the group you should automatically have the most empathy for and it is also the group with the most legal protections. I would like everyone in the room that is enraged by my story to raise their hand.

Systemic discrimination of persons with disabilities would not happen if the academic culture did not enable the abuse.

Postdoc Narrative #4

In the past as a graduate student at another university in the UW-System when I requested accommodations, they fell under the disability office for students. These offices did not really have any administrative power at the university, so after I had my disability counselor talk to my advisor my advisor treated me much worse. After a few weeks I was eventually told by my advisor that I could not get my PhD in her lab and I lost all of my research progress. Loosing years worth of research progress is of course much better than staying, because you cannot get a strong letter of recommendation from that advisor anyway. Even though I had strong yearly performance reviews from my professor that were filed with the department, had regular committee meetings that I passed, met my milestones for the university, had received numerous department and travel awards, and I was on a prestigious three year fellowship, and had I high GPA I was told I could not be a graduate student in that lab and lost all my research progress. It was just my advisor's opinion one day when she was mad at me. There were no formal documents that had to be filed with the department. This did not occur at UW-Madison, but it did happen in the UW system, of which you are a part of, so it is a problem that is found at many UW-Universities. There needs to be accountability and official paperwork with evidence filed with the department if a trainee is to be told they cannot work in the laboratory and there should be a formal committee meeting to discuss why the graduate student is being kicked out of the lab. Especially a student with disability paperwork. The alleged actions that were considered 'laziness' that was the grounds for telling me I could not get my degree was part of my accommodations. There needs to be a hearing if trainees with disabilities are going to be kicked out of the lab and loose years worth of research progress toward a graduate degree. There should be a support system for students with disabilities that they can turn to in the administration.

I wish there were some training that all faculty, staff, and students had to do to raise the awareness of what accommodations are and what they mean. If there could be succinct mandatory instructional training like there is for title IX or the chemical safety classes, I think that would help a lot. Because of the huge power imbalances between trainees and professors there needs to be a system of checks and balances from the administration to curb abuses of power. In addition to the education of what accommodations mean, there should also be education on how others can intervene when they see abuse is occurring. I took a short seminar on bullying and it was very helpful. We learned things like what to say and do if a drunk woman is being told by a guy that she should get into a car with him. None of my committee members stepped in to say that this was wrong and it was an abuse of power. They just quietly helped me transfer to another lab and I lost years worth of research progress. **If other faculty members and the culture of academia did not enable this discrimination and abuses of power, it would not be happening.**

Postdoc Narrative #5

*T*hese are the following key stories from my experience as a postdoc at UW Madison.

1.Work-life balance-vacation/self-help/childcare support.

I have been a postdoc for more than one year and I have changed two research groups in that time. While having the experience of working in two research groups, I found the following challenges to be constant, and getting worse with the onset of the pandemic:

a) There are no benefits in terms of paid-time off, sick leave, parental leave. This policy needs to change for postdocs to not be exploited and pressured into unreasonable work demands by PIs. Example: in my research group under PI AAA, I was told by my PI that I had no vacation and legal holidays as a postdoc. I worked during Christmas day and remembered to check in with Office of Postdoctoral studies (Imogen Hurley), she told me that I was allowed legal holidays. Every time I had an intuition that my PI was sharing an incorrect information and using it to pressure me that taking Christmas day off will be illegal, and so using that information to the point of harassment. UWPA and office of Postdoctoral studies has helped me out in the following ways:

1) Getting the right information to me about my benefits, legal holidays and vacation,

2) Linking me with other resources at the department level to inform about the challenges I was facing in my lab with my PI.

b) Being a parent, my productivity/work-hours/weekend-availability has been questioned and compared to single students and postdocs by my PIs.

Example1: my PI AAA asked me to ask my work-from-home husband to take care of my child while I can be in the lab on weekends/late-nights. Both my PIs AAA and BBB in each of the different research groups, told me that if I were sick or my child was sick and took sick days off, then I should make up for that time by working on weekends or late-night hours. Otherwise this will impact my funding and we will be embarrassed in front of our funding agency.

Example2: If I had a doctor's appointment and informed my PI AAA about it, then PI AAA emailed me back that I was not working the 40hrs/week required by my visa and appointment letter.

Example3: My PI BBB wants group meetings to be set up at 5-7pm. When I told my PI that time is difficult for me as I have to pick up my child from day care and feed him etc. PI BBB, said that he understands that but as group meetings can not be during the day time because they hinder people from finishing up their research for that day and this impacts the whole group's research. PI BBB did allow me to attend the meeting for 30 min for me to present my update and then leave the meeting. This was not an ideal solution for me as I will miss out on hearing what other lab members are working on, but I cannot fight all the battles and I agreed with the only choice I was given.
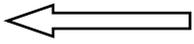
Example4: My PI BBB belittles me in our individual group meetings. I come out of those meetings feeling low on self-esteem and high on stress. He says things like " He thinks I am not interested enough or asks me if I am being lazy that I did not foresee the failure in an experiment." In one of the meetings I told him that his feedback sounds very judgmental and personal instead of being matter of fact. The astonishing thing that happened was

a. PI BBB listened to my side of things patiently.

b. PI BBB shared his frustrations and admitted that his frustration with a particular project was getting to him, which made him say things to me that were more about me than about the matter of fact or the project.

c. PI BBB also asked me for advice: that if he were to deliver a feedback as a matter of fact instead of a personal judgment, then how should he go about it. PI BBB said he has no training on how to give a feedback in a gentle and positive way. And he has to learn this in real-time, that was shocking to hear that a professor has no training from the university on how to be a good mentor. I am not sure if he was lying or if he doesn't know of the available resources.

What I would like to change for me: I would really like to change the workplace environment (never-enough work culture) I work in. I want flexibility in work hours/understanding that I am an essential worker at home/appreciation that I am doing the best that I can given the situation. If I could be making more money or have some form of child-care support on weekends, then I could be as productive as single postdocs and students, but that option is not available. I want the environment to be more inclusive of people that underrepresented, with illnesses, with kids, or with mental health issues. I do not how to make it more inclusive for all though, it will be impossible.

2. Job vs. career

Why am I doing a postdoc? There is a little financial benefit, endless work hours. What is at the end of the tunnel? I have no clue, and have had little help from my PI. His idea of career is to just keep doing experiments, publish in high impact papers and make your work famous. For other aspects like teaching, writing your research statements/teaching statements etc., my PI says you can learn it after you get a faculty position, or you can attend online seminars. I am not sure if that covers everything if I were to become a faculty. But who will tell me what is needed to be done to get me to the next level, I don't know?

What I would like to change for me: I would like to hear opinions and perspectives of different faculty in my and other departments on how to prepare myself to be a faculty. Towards that end, I am doing more networking with professors who I know of and at times paying consultants to advise me on preparing my faculty application.

Postdoc Narrative #6

*C*urrently, health insurance for postdocs only covers health insurance for spouses and not domestic partners. This heteronormative policy forced me and my partner to pay out of pocket for his health insurance. Because he has a pre-existing condition, we face large health bills and are paying a huge premiums; and because of the pandemic, he is unemployed. This policy has created a huge financial burden on us, and I'm sure we are not the only one facing an obstacle like this. I believe this heteronormative policy contributes to health disparities for LGBTQ+ postdocs and would like to advocate for it to change. I want to challenge policy makers to understand that offering the same health insurance coverage options for cisgendered heterosexual postdocs and LGBTQ+ postdocs does not address the health disparities between the groups.*

Relevant LGBTQ+ History/Background Info:

- *Same-sex marriage was legalized nationally in the US in 2015 (only 5 years ago)*

- *Same-sex marriage has been recently challenged and debated at the national level*

- *LGBTQ+ people can experience greater health disparities than heterosexual cisgendered individuals.*

- *LGBTQ+ people can experience unique health challenges.*

- *Finding a culturally-component health care provider can be more challenging for LGBTQ+ people.*

Postdoc Narrative #7

*D*iversity, equity, inclusion, and justice (DEIJ) is something that constantly comes up in conversations at UW-Madison and how do we improve at this institution when it comes to this particular topic. In recent months in response to the death of African Americans, particularly George Floyd and Breanna Taylor, there has been a number of initiatives at the university and department levels. However, I have been struggling in seeing how these things really help the Post-docs from under-represented groups here at UW-Madison.

During my long-tenure at UW-Madison as a grad student and post-doc, I have benefited from great programs, SciMed GRS, and grant support, NIH Diversity supplement, which have supported my training at this institution. The one common theme in all these initiative and programs is helping trainees form under-represented groups but specifically people of color (African American, Latinx, and indigenous people) which is the common theme for most DEIJ programs. Therefore, it solely focuses on one particular aspect of people from under-represented groups and that is race. For me that is one of many aspects of who I am as an individual, considering I am an openly gay, gender non-binary, Latino-American who is a first-generation PhD earner from a lower-middle-class mixed-race household (German/Russian and Mexican). So, my challenge is because of the focus on race, I feel pigeon-holed into a large group of people who are classified as Latino which is a struggle for me because of the various different parts of who I am. I solely speak English because I am mix race which ostracizes me from a lot of Latinos who are from Spanish speaking countries.

Also, being openly part of the LGBTQ+ community puts me at risk of discrimination from strongly religious members of the Latino community because they do not support same-sex marriage and relationships. Because of the large amount of intersectionality, I have when someone asks me about my experience as a minority at UW-Madison, it's really complicated because I have such a unique experience because I speak from many different backgrounds but a lot of the time the focus is on my experience from the perspective of race which is difficult for me since I feel like an outcast in the Latino community.

I think the academic community needs to think about what Diversity is and how can we be more welcoming to the whole individual and not just one small fraction of what that person maybe.

Postdoc Diversity Survey
June 2020

Postdoctoral Diversity Survey Digest

Introduction and Overview

In response to a prompt in the Postdoctoral Bulletin that postdoctoral students at the University of Wisconsin-Madison take a 2-minute survey to express their opinions about diversity on campus, postdoctoral students answered two open-ended questions. The questions asked respondents to comment on (1) their feelings about or experiences with diversity and inclusion at UW Madison and that they make (2) recommendations for action. Just over fifty respondents offered lengthy, multipart responses, which, though wide-ranging, shared many areas of commonality and overlap. This outline synthesizes the responses and recommendations for action made by postdoctoral survey respondents.

The degree to which postdocs considered diversity a problem on campus fell along a spectrum, ranging from two respondents who felt that there were no problems with diversity to a respondent who called for defunding the police. Aside from the two respondents who felt there to be no problems with diversity on campus, all declared diversity a significant problem at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. As with their assessments of the climate of diversity on campus, postdoctoral recommendations for action were wide-ranging, moving from asking for more social events to calls for change at the level of university policy. This digest therefore presents findings and recommendations as they relate to 1. Postdoctoral Social Isolation and Inclusion, II. University Policy, and III. UWPA D&I Committee programming.

I.   Postdoctoral Social Isolation and Inclusion

Several postdoctoral respondents noted the problem of social isolation felt by postdocs, noted a lack of diversity on campus, and felt that there were few opportunities for meeting other postdocs from diverse cultural backgrounds. They therefore called for more opportunities for social inclusion and interaction, including social events generically defined, happy hours, and social events such as museum trips, book clubs, sporting events, sport clubs, city exploration activities, and art nights (e.g., drawing or painting classes), cooking classes, events that do not expressly invite children and families, and events not featuring alcohol.

II.   University Policy

Postdoctoral students recommended that diversity measures be implemented throughout the university hierarchy. They placed their focus on faculty first, followed by university administration, then students.

A) Faculty

To alter the climate of diversity on campus, postdocs recommended that academic departments implement the following strategies at the faculty level:

- **Recruit more BIPOC faculty**
- **Implement faculty diversity training**
- **Create employee networks**
- **Implement mentorship arrangements**
- **Require diversity training for Faculty at orientation**

Groups requiring diversity training were cited in the following order:

- Faculty
- Tenured faculty
- Department heads
- Principal investigators
- Office staff

One astute observer noted that the hierarchies governing relations between tenured and non-tenured faculty significantly occlude dialogues about race and diversity.

Specific areas of content or training requested by postdocs for both faculty and administrators consisted of

- Sensitivity to cultural difference
- How to support BIPOCs (Black, Indigenous, or People of Color)
- Understanding the challenges of gender and maternity
- Diversity awareness
- Problems and challenges faced by faculty and students of color

B) Academic Administration

Several postdocs asked that '**University higher-ups**' acknowledge that **diversity is a problem on campus**. They recommended the following actions:

- **Presentation of a clear policy or action plan**
- **Open discussions of diversity issues on campus**
- **Bringing in experts on organizational development or cultural sensitivity**

- **Collecting and broadcasting data on diversity** so as to track change.

C) Students

Postdocs recommended that the university focus on the **recruitment and retention of BIPOC graduate and undergraduate students by**

- **Increasing financial aid**
- **Offering fellowships**
- **Scaling tuition**
- **Dropping the GRE**

Postdocs also asked for diversity training at **new student orientation sessions**.

III. UWPA D&I Programs

Recommendations for programming in areas that fall within the purview of UWPA D&I are listed in rough order of prominence. Most numerous were calls for UWPA D&I to offer **online resources**.

A) **Online Resource Development**
  - **Online data** that demonstrate changes in D&I metrics
  - Featuring diversity through **marketing collateral** (i.e., banners, imagery, etc).
  - **Training videos** or seminars that train or promote diversity
  - **A complaint registry** (an anonymous location where diversity concerns can be aired or which offer a pipeline for complaints)
  - **Recognition of faculty** who have made strides in D&I or showcasing **minority successes**

Content
Postdocs recommended that online training focus on the following topics, in order of prominence:

- Microaggressions
- Diversity training (broad-based)
- Intersectionality
- DEI
- Implicit bias
- Stereotypes

Postdocs also suggested the following additional forms of programming or action:

B) Issuing a Public Statement

- Issuing an anti-racist statement
- Articulating behavioral standards
- Presenting clearly articulated goals

C) Public Events/Forums (weekly, monthly, lunchtime)

- Book or journal club
- Safe discussion forum
- Speaker series
- Storytelling event in which groups who have suffered exclusion tell their stories
- Staging celebrations of diverse cultural contributions

V. Other

Postdocs suggested that UW work to improve town-gown relations and highlighted groups whose challenges may require greater recognition.

A) Town-Gown
- Possibilities for community interaction or volunteering
- Defund the police
- Prison Work

B) New groups
- Asian-Americans
- International students
- Singles
- Older students

This report was written by Dr. Justine Walden on behalf of the 2020 UWPA Diversity and Inclusion committee.

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