

# Talking About Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Science: A Guide for Graduate Students and Postdoctoral Scholars

This guide was developed by Drs. Stephanie Haddad and Cassandra Nuñez, Co-chairs of the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee of the Department of Biological Science's Center for Biodiversity Research. It is meant to provide guidance to graduate students and postdoctoral scholars who are interested in initiating conversations with their PIs on the topics of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in science.

This document is based on the work and ideas of Dr. D'Anne Duncan, the Assistant Dean for Diversity and Learner Success, Nicole Foti, a PhD candidate in Sociology, and Dr. Isaac JT Strong, the Director of Graduate Faculty Development all at the University of California, San Francisco. If you would like additional information, please consult their webpage at: <https://graduate.ucsf.edu/student-racism-dialogue>

## Considerations prior to talking about DEI in science

- Reflect on and recognize your own implicit biases and how these may impact your approach and viewpoints in forthcoming discussions.
- Recognize that other people with backgrounds dissimilar to yours likely have very different experiences. It is important to acknowledge the experiences of others even if they differ from your own personal experiences.
- Understand that DEI topics may be very painful and difficult for some people. As such, expect some people to express strong emotions during discussions on these topics and maintain your willingness to listen and continue the conversation.

## Preparing for the discussion

- Decide if you want to have this discussion with your PI one-on-one. If you find this to be a daunting task, you may consider inviting other members of your research group to take part in the conversation. Another option would be to invite a trusted faculty member to be there for support.
- Check for any resources that may help facilitate your discussion. These may include published papers on DEI issues, departmental resources, or university services. Send these resources to your PI (and anyone else who will be participating) ahead of the discussion.

## Initiating and maintaining the conversation

- Start by stating why you think this discussion is important and by outlining your goals and intentions for having it. Acknowledge that these conversations can be difficult and uncomfortable, and affirm your commitment to engaging in open dialogue to better understand these topics and to make progress as a research team. Remind all participants that everyone has had their own personal experiences and is fully entitled to their unique viewpoints. Thank everyone for their willingness to engage in this discussion.
- During the conversation, continue to remind all participants that it is okay if they do not feel ready to share their viewpoints on a certain topic.
- If it is difficult for your PI or other participating lab members to engage with you in conversation, use

the resources you found (e.g., DEI publications) to facilitate dialogue.

- Consider whether you would like your research group to have DEI discussions on a more regular basis. Propose a plan to keep the conversation going moving forward. For example, you may propose to discuss a publication on DEI issues once a month during a special lab meeting. You might also propose that the lab attend DEI campus training events as a team. Don't hesitate to contact any member of the CBio DEI Committee for suggestions on relevant publications or campus training events.

### **Dealing with conflict**

- If a situation arises where something is said (possibly inadvertently) that harms or offends one of the participants in the discussion, it is important to acknowledge that this happened in the moment, even if you are not sure how to rectify the damage that was done. You may consider asking the speaker to clarify intentions behind their comment and ask other participants to share how the comment impacted them. This may help disarm the situation.

- In some instances, an impasse may be reached in the middle of a discussion. In such cases, consider whether the conversation may benefit from a short 5-minute pause during which participants can leave the room to self-reflect and to critically examine why they may be reacting personally to the issue being discussed. Once the conversation resumes after this short cooling-off period, everyone can share their perspectives regarding the conflicting issue, and participants can work together to diffuse and resolve the situation. If it becomes apparent that constructive dialogue is no longer possible, consider asking your PI and other participants whether it would be useful to ask an objective third party to facilitate discussion regarding the conflict. The third party could be the graduate student coordinator or a trusted faculty member.

- In some instances, your PI may be reluctant to address and discuss microaggressions or conflict among members of your research group. In this case, you may consider contacting the graduate student coordinator or another trusted faculty member to initiate this conversation with your PI. This objective third party will ideally schedule and facilitate a meeting with your PI and any relevant lab members to discuss the conflict in question. During the meeting, perspectives regarding the conflict should be shared and everyone should discuss how the group can work together to undo any harm that was done and to rectify the situation.