

Guidance on Area Graduate Inclusion¹ Improvement Plans
Department of Psychological Sciences, University of Missouri, Columbia

Departmental Climate Surveys conducted in 2016 (racial and ethnic issues) and 2019 (gender and sex identity issues), as well as informal feedback, clearly reveal that purposeful effort is needed to better provide an inclusive and equitable environment for learning and scholarship within the department.

“Inclusion is an organizational effort and practices in which different groups or individuals having different backgrounds are culturally and socially accepted and welcomed, and equally treated. These differences could be self-evident, such as national origin, age, race and ethnicity, religion/belief, gender, marital status and socioeconomic status or they could be more inherent, such as educational background, training, sector experience, organizational tenure, even personality, such as introverts and extroverts.

Inclusion is a sense of belonging. Inclusive cultures make people feel respected and valued for who they are as an individual or group. People feel a level of supportive energy and commitment from others so that they can do their best at work. Inclusion often means a shift in an organization’s mind-set and culture that has visible effects, such as participation in meetings, how offices are physically organized or access to particular facilities or information.

The process of inclusion engages each individual and makes people feel valued as being essential to the success of the organization. Evidence shows that when people feel valued, they function at full capacity and feel part of the organization’s mission. This culture shift creates higher performing organizations where motivation and morale soar.”

From: <https://globaldiversitypractice.com/what-is-diversity-inclusion/>

It is important that we improve our inclusive culture for our current students and before we bring in new graduate students. Progress entails learning about the historical problems that have threatened inclusiveness and equity within our Department; educating ourselves so that we understand how to minimize harmful behaviors that threaten inclusion and seed discrimination; and establishing tangible behavioral and procedural changes that promote inclusion and reduce inequity within the Department. Achieving this goal is our collective responsibility as educators and scholars. It is a critical step toward strengthening our respective laboratory and classroom environments, and the Department as a whole.

Because (1) a major emphasis of the Department’s mission involves training graduate students as rising scholars in the psychological sciences and (2) such training largely occurs within the five departmental training areas and by faculty members within each area, each training area is asked to develop a written training-area inclusion improvement plan before areas accept new graduate students for Fall2021.

These area inclusion improvement plans are due to the Departmental Chair by October 15th. They will be reviewed by the Chair (Jamie Arndt), the Associate Chair for Diversity and Inclusion (Ann Bettencourt), A&S Associate Dean (Stephanie Shonekan), and A&S Faculty Fellow for Inclusion and Diversity (Sheri-Marie Harrison). Constructive feedback regarding the plans will be provided. To avoid delays in decision

¹ We use the term *inclusion* to be consistent with broader dialogues on the topic, but encourage people to explore Dr. John Powell’s distinction between *inclusion* and *belonging* (see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7RTQxPfi5qg&feature=youtu.be>)

making about graduate student admittance, the goal is to have high-quality inclusion improvement plans in place by November 15th

Areas are encouraged to candidly consider their current strengths and weaknesses regarding inclusion when developing their improvement plans. Quality improvement plans may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Articulation of each faculty member's individual efforts to meet the responsibility of continuing education in understanding diversity and inclusion (i.e., purposeful and authentic efforts to be aware of past and current biases that introduce inequitable challenges toward students thriving in their scholarship and learning).
- How the area's brownbag/weekly seminars will explore issues of *isms, diversity, inclusion, equity, and/or marginalization and discrimination within their field—both in terms of professional development and the scholarship in their content areas.
- How the area will endeavor to create a more inclusive climate for all current graduate students and faculty during the seminar meetings. For example, graduate students and faculty should not be segregated and the language and Q&A practices used should not preference one group of students over others.
- How faculty members in the area will identify diversity or multicultural topics to substantively introduce into their graduate classes and/or programs of research. Faculty members are invited to be creative in this process.
- Identifying and engaging in outreach opportunities with students and/or community members who are historically under-served and under-represented in the psychological sciences. This can include sharing our science with community members around the mid-Missouri area (e.g., individuals, families, business owners) who may not routinely learn about the connections between psychological science and their daily lives. This effort may also include making research opportunities accessible for undergraduate students who are historically under-represented within the field of psychology (i.e., first-generation students, ethnic minority students) and providing opportunities for engagement in multiple aspects of the scientific process.
- In drafting inclusion improvement plans, faculty are strongly encouraged to seek feedback and engagement from area graduate students to incorporate a shared understanding of needed areas of improvement, promising steps for improvement, and ideal language for articulating inclusion and equity goals.
- As part of each improvement plan, each area is strongly encouraged to describe how the outcomes of its improvement efforts will be evaluated. The area's outcomes evaluation will be useful in guiding adjustments to the area's inclusion practices over time.
- Area plans will be shared with other areas to foster creative consideration of avenues to further enhance inclusion across each area and the department as a whole.