

Integrative Biology Climate and Inclusion Action Plan

Updated October 2024 by the iBio Climate, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee

Statement of Values: The Department of Integrative Biology is committed to fostering a welcoming community where students, faculty, and staff of all backgrounds, experiences, and abilities can thrive. All academic pursuits require the contributions of diverse individuals and perspectives and cannot flourish when those voices are excluded.

We acknowledge historical biases and discrimination that have plagued academia and the pursuit of science, and the role that academia has played in upholding systemic discrimination and harming minoritized communities. We condemn all forms of racism, harassment and discrimination. We act with the intention to increase transparency and accountability as we expand our diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts.

Purpose of the Action Plan: The mission of the UW iBio Climate, Diversity and Inclusivity (CDI) Committee, is to develop and implement specific plans to foster an inclusive working and learning environment for the UW iBio community. The purpose of this document is to articulate a strategic plan with specific actions that enhance the climate and **belonging** in the iBio department. ***Belonging is an L&S DEI Committee priority area.***

Action Plan Process: In spring 2021 the CDI committee held a series of listening sessions with groups in the department. Feedback from these conversations was compiled by the committee and shared. The CDI and department leadership took steps to address the concerns raised during the listening sessions. In 2023-2024, the CDI Committee revisited the listening session feedback, combined with our own experience in the department for the last three years, and developed this action plan.

The action plan is organized around three major goals aimed at overcoming or significantly reducing the barriers to inclusion, equity, and belonging in our community. Steps that have been taken towards the goal are noted along with ideas for future initiatives. The 'ongoing actions' section beneath each goal is a description of the purpose and process for initiatives. We used the concept of "SMART" goals (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and timebound) to develop the actions. For all action items, the intended outcome(s) should be specific, measurable, and achievable. Actions should be relevant to addressing the barriers identified by the iBio community. The timeline should be developed with achievable, timebound milestones.

Overall Assessment: Every 'ongoing action' has a timeline and specific outcomes that should be assessed for completion and updated annually by the committee. Additionally, feedback from the department on the action plan should be solicited annually (at minimum) through discussion at staff and faculty meetings and meetings with iBioGO. We also recommend a 5-year cycle for holding listening sessions and overhauling the strategic plan. This effort should be augmented by more frequent informal surveys and feedback mechanisms and progress tracking through university-level climate surveys that allow for interdepartmental comparisons.

Strengths in Belonging and Inclusion in the iBio Community

During the 2021 listening sessions, participants were asked to identify ways in which the department welcoming and inclusive. The top responses during the listening sessions were:

- Initiation of a new employee onboarding process (top response)
- Supportive and helpful staff in the department
- Approachable and supportive faculty
- A collegial and friendly atmosphere that allows for opinion sharing and giving feedback
- Input in decision making and leadership receptive to feedback
- Graduate student support and community through professional development opportunities, iBioGO, and the graduate student mentorship program
- Progress on gender diversity within the department
- Development and publishing of a departmental statement of values on diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging

There was also a campus-wide Staff Climate Survey in 2022. Overall, the well-being at work and satisfaction working at UW-Madison was higher for the iBio staff than the university-wide average. iBio staff reported that we were excelling in remote work policies and flexibility to balance life and work responsibilities.

*The listening session responses and survey results reflect the dimensions of inclusion and belonging that are currently strengths in the iBio department. **We are committed to maintaining and strengthening these aspects of our department.***

GOAL #1: Improved sense of inclusion and belonging for staff, faculty, and students. The most common response from the listening sessions focused on barriers to establishing an inclusive environment and a lack of community in the department. Barriers and needs identified in the listening sessions:

- Difficulty meeting others in the department, understanding who is the 'iBio community'
- Lack of interaction opportunities and community building events
- Department members siloed within position, work area, job type
- Lack of common rooms or gathering locations within physical building
- Work towards greater inclusivity of BIPOC and other non-majority groups
- Need new employee onboarding (e.g., welcoming, startup manual, mentors)

Accomplishments since 2021 towards Goal #1

- Enhancement of employee onboarding protocols including
 - development of onboarding checklists for new employees
 - assignment of Peer Partners for new staff
 - Regular meetings of junior faculty with the chair
- BREWS Seminar Series for postdoctoral scholars in biology developed and launched

- Designation of one new all gender restroom in the iBio Research Building, progress on additional facility in Birge Hall

Ongoing Actions towards Goal #1

Action: Designate and furnish common rooms in all iBio buildings	
Intended Outcomes	Designated space in Birge Hall, Noland Hall, and iBio Research for communal gathering and community building. Furnished rooms to facilitate accessible common use.
Participants	Noland Committee – James Vandenberg and subcommittee Birge Committee – Cathy Auger and subcommittee iBio Research Committee – David Ehrlich and subcommittee
Timeline Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spring 2023: Identification of space in each building • Fall 2023: Budget for renovations and furnishing, as needed • Fall 2024: Execute renovations of space (Noland, IBR)

Ideas for Future Initiatives for Goal #1

- Request funding to host informal gatherings on a regular basis in common rooms
- Create mechanism encouraging faculty and student attendance to Biology Colloquium
- Develop more formal recognition of undergraduate research excellence in the department

GOAL #2: Enhanced support and equitable treatment of department members.

Another major theme from the listening sessions was the need for policies and practice that supported department members' unique attributes, traits, skills, experience, and background. Barriers and needs identified included:

- Clear problem resolution and grievance process
- Open and timely communication (transparency) from leadership
- Recognition for accomplishments and new grants/awards
- Respect for the demands of family care responsibilities
- Field research safety, training, and protocols
- Create opportunities to hear postdoc and graduate student needs, provide mentoring
- Understand financial concerns of department members (specifically students)
- Increased physical and digital accessibility

Accomplishments since 2021 towards Goal #2

- BREWS postdoc seminar series (see description above)
- Initiation of milestone, award, and grant recognition at monthly department meetings
- Creation of staff awards committee
- Development of DEI resources hub on department website, monthly DEI newsletter

Ongoing Actions

Action: Development of grievance reporting process for the department	
Intended Outcomes	Clear process for reporting concerns in the department and transparent mechanisms for how those reports will be handled
Participants	James Vandenberg, CDI subcommittee
Timeline Goals	Fall 2023 – subcommittee formation, researching other dept examples Spring 2024 – begin drafting policy, loop in department leadership Fall 2024 - share draft policy with relevant departmental groups for comment, develop reporting portal Spring 2024 - beta test reporting portal, begin advertising to department

Action: Exploration of adopting higher wages for undergraduate technicians	
Intended Outcomes	Remove barriers to pursuing research careers for students by providing a living wage for student hourly and graduate student positions
Participants	Arielle Link, David Ehrlich, CDI subcommittee
Timeline Goals	April 2023 – iBio department discussion of wages Fall 2023 – subcommittee formation, development of draft policy

Action: Improve accessibility in process, events, and communication	
Intended Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved signage in Birge and Noland Halls • Teleconferencing infrastructure in departmental buildings • Write up accessibility guidelines/needs document for planned Biology building • Working with other committees in department to enhance accessibility (e.g., seminar committee and live streaming)
Participants	Christopher Warneke, Grace Wilkinson
Timeline Goals	Spring 2022 - department survey on accessibility needs Fall 2022 - sub-committee evaluation of survey results, dissemination to relevant committees and groups for action Spring 2023 - new maps in Birge, development for Noland Hall

Ideas for Future Initiatives

- Development assessment mechanisms to track progress on CDI committee actions such as regular meetings with iBioGO, student progress reports, faculty annual reports.
- Host workshops/opportunities to improve people’s understanding and implementation of universal design in research and teaching
- Physical accessibility issues in buildings need to be addressed - bathroom access in particular an immediate issue, work on finding solutions

GOAL #3: Recruit and retain diverse department members at all levels and job types. This goal was a top inclusion priority for the department. Needs identified during the listening sessions included:

- More opportunities for training, particularly inclusive teaching and mentoring
- More leadership from faculty on DEI efforts
- Strategic plan for the department with concrete actions for achieving goal
- Adoption of best practices for recruiting diverse applicants

Accomplishments since 2021 towards Goal #3

- Development of Simons Family Fellowship program supporting cohorts of undergraduate scholars with diverse identities and backgrounds in research experiences early in their undergraduate studies
- Improved the graduate admissions process to be more equitable and inclusive including the ASAP Initiative – peer-advising team for graduate student applicants
- Require all faculty training students in the Integrative Biology graduate program to participate in 8 hours of mentorship training every 5 years
- Modified faculty annual activities reporting form to encourage action and reporting in major categories (inclusive climate and values, admissions, recruitment, hiring, retention, teaching and advising, campus and community partnerships, and events)

Ongoing Actions

Action: Development of a DEI Strategic Plan	
Intended Outcomes	Generate a road map to guide department and committee actions that create a more inclusive, equitable, and welcoming environment in iBio
Participants	CDI Committee
Timeline Goals	Fall 2023 – Review listening session outcomes, collate accomplishments, current initiatives, and ideas for the future Jan 2024 – Draft action plan, iterate with committee Spring 2024 – Share action plan with department, incorporate feedback Spring 2026 – Perform new listening sessions

Action: Undergraduate tutoring in the MMSD Upward Bound program	
Intended Outcomes	Establish an institutional iBio commitment to facilitate UW undergraduates who tutor in the Madison Metropolitan School District Upward Bound program.
Participants	Tony Ives
Timeline Goals	The pilot program is currently underway with four undergraduates and Tony tutoring after school once a week. The hope is to institutionalize this program within the next year so that it becomes an established part of iBio activities.

Ideas for Future Initiatives

- Collate demographic data for current employees to inform more specific goals for advertising positions, recruiting applicants, and retaining department members
- Develop and/or collate best practices documentation for recruiting and hiring for all major job types in the department (includes PVL development, advertising, application review, interviewing, offer development); offer training for supervisors/hiring managers in the department to orient to these practices
- Develop a peer partner program for postdoctoral scientists
- Initiate mentoring collective for first generation students and scientists; more guidance/preparation and mentorship on navigating academic culture, unveiling the 'hidden curriculum' and overcoming these barriers
- Expand Learning Center for other intro bio courses