Taking Action: Intentional Inclusivity

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Many now recognize that creating inclusive and equitable environments is necessary. People are finally willing to dedicate significant resources and time to this cause.
To be inclusive means to constantly challenge stereotypes and assumptions, listen to others, speak up when you witness discrimination, be open-minded, initiate uncomfortable conversations, think about why certain issues make you feel uncomfortable, recognize your privilege, and work to educate yourself.
For those of you running labs with students or postdoctoral fellows from underrepresented backgrounds, you have a huge opportunity to make a difference by creating a supportive environment that ensures their success and encourages them to persist toward careers in chemistry.

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who look like them. It is such an excluding experience and the reason why the act of inclusion is critical for our persistence.

In the introductory chemistry laboratory courses at Smith College, we spend the first lab discussing group norms and usually learn that many students dislike working in groups. We ask the students to share 1) the strengths they bring to the group and 2) what they hope to get from the group. From these discussions, it becomes apparent why students dislike working in groups. Almost all of the students say they want a group that respects, values, and supports them. They want groups that communicate well, do not dwell on their weaknesses, check in on them, are open-minded, collaborative, reliable, welcoming, and promote positivity. We try to establish group norms early in students’ scientific careers and keep checking in with students during the semester to remind them of how they want to be treated. However, while we try to instill these values within our students early on in their scientific training, we, the educators and scientists, need to practice what we preach. It is time that group norms are discussed and implemented in the workplace to set the tone and encourage a greater sense of belonging. To learn more about inclusion, please read references 6–8. These simple acts of kindness make people feel appreciated and valued and will help recruit and retain all students. Because at the end of the day, we all want to feel respected and valued.

LITERATURE CITED


3 Arnaud, C. H. Freshman chemistry is an exit point for many underrepresented STEM students study shows. Chem Eng News, 2020, 98, 23.


8 Terry, K., Powell, R., Chen, S. How LGBT+ scientists would like to be included and welcomed in STEM workplaces. Nature, 2020, 586, 813–816.