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Taking Action: Managing Inclusive Excellence in Academia

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Taking Action: Managing Inclusive Excellence in Academia

By Lesley-Ann Giddings, PhD and Christine Salomon, PhD

On Thursday, March 3, 2022 the American Society of Pharmacognosy (ASP) Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) committee invited Dr. Rigoberto Hernandez to give a webinar on “**Managing Inclusive Excellence in Academia.**” Hernandez is the Gompf Family Professor of Chemistry in the Department of Chemistry at Johns Hopkins University and the director of the [Open Chemistry Collaborative in Diversity Equity](#) (OXIDE) program. The recording is freely available for ASP members under the events tab once logged into the ASP website. Hernandez’s presentation focused on implementing institutional reform to lower inequitable barriers faced by faculty from underrepresented groups. He discussed taking a “top-down” approach to addressing inequities in academia, specifically holding department heads and chairs accountable for improving faculty representation and climate within their departments.

Drs. Christine Salomon, associate professor, University of Minnesota, and Lesley-Ann Giddings, assistant professor of chemistry, Smith College, moderated the discussion, which began with Hernandez giving an hour-long presentation on his work with OXIDE. This program engages the chairs of chemistry departments to examine their professional culture to implement policies designed to create equity and inclusion within departments. These practices may encompass different solutions as there is no one size that fits all departments and institutions. Department chairs and institutions should take all risks (e.g., financial and professional) to identify barriers to inclusivity and equity and create solutions. He then went on to define diversity as being the “inclusion of the other,” eliminating out-and-in-groups. Outgroups were defined as any “other,” based on gender, race, ethnicity, disability, or sexuality.

OXIDE has focused on diversity and equity for underrepresented individuals in outgroups. Importantly, Hernandez emphasized that working towards lowering barriers for one group will ultimately lower barriers for everyone and decrease inequities between groups.



Dr Rigoberto Hernandez

PHOTO: ROB FELT, GEORGIA TECH

Hernandez provided clear recommendations for chairs (for a full list presented during several past OXIDE sponsored National Diversity and Equity Workshops, please visit the [OXIDE Diversity Solutions website](#)):

- Form a departmental diversity committee; develop and post a vision statement.
- Do not overburden URM faculty!
- Create mentoring programs for students and faculty.
- Conduct faculty searches broadly to attract the most diverse pool of candidates.
- Conduct regular lunch meetings to discuss departmental climate.
- Implement diversity surveys and assess programs through partnerships with OXIDE.

Although these recommendations and the presentation were geared toward departmental chairs in academia
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demia, it is clear that these processes can also be used by managers and leaders in industry and other non-academic institutions. Faculty and students can also advocate for these initiatives to their department chairs and deans.

After his presentation, the webinar concluded with Hernandez answering questions from the audience. The following are questions asked by audience members and Hernandez's responses:

Based on faculty demographics, how can we increase the number of underrepresented faculty at the associate level?

Are the low numbers due to faculty not getting tenure or are they leaving the academy?

Once you become an associate professor, there are unwritten rules for being promoted to full professor. Faculty may be promoted after 2–5 years or 10 years. These numbers have declined because associate professors were likely promoted to full professors.

Can you give an example of gender harassment as opposed to sexual harassment?

There can be inequitable outcomes if you disproportionately assign specific tasks to one gender. For example, female students are assigned to clean and organize the lab, but the male students manage the computers, etc. When writing letters of recommendation, female students are described using words such as “reliable” and “organized,” based on having these roles in the

lab, whereas male students are described with adjectives associated with their research progress, widening gender inequities.

Bias trainings do not seem to help enough. Do bias trainings have a place in addressing diversity, equity, and inclusion, or should we move past that?

Bias is one of many barriers. Many people start and stop at bias when it is not the only topic to be discussed. So how can we make diversity training effective? We can recognize that part of the professional culture of chemistry is to attend a conference where experts give talks on select topics. Therefore, we can invite experts on social issues as well as those who are affected by these issues to meet with us in a workshop dedicated to finding solutions. Social science is hard, but social scientists know what they are doing. We need them to be part of the room to find solutions for everyone. Sometimes individuals may make uncomfortable comments during these DEI discussions, but we can address these issues with experts as they arise so everyone understands why the comment was wrong.

How can we start conversations in departments with huge lagoons in diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives?

We have lagoons because the representation within

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We need them to be part of the room to find solutions for everyone. Sometimes individuals may make uncomfortable comments during these DEI discussions, but we can address these issues with experts as they arise so everyone understands why the comment was wrong.

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the department is not diverse. However, there are ways in which we can increase diversity in small steps that will help make a difference. Underrepresented faculty should not be overburdened. Departments should invite and pay people from the outside to be the voice that represents underrepresented groups to broaden the conversation.

Mentoring is such an important part of faculty retention. What can departments do to assess fair mentorship?

Universities should develop an intentional mentoring plan that includes faculty mentors at different levels, across different departments, as well as beyond the institution, recognizing that no one person will be a perfect fit. Faculty who are coming from top schools are

already networked, accelerating their success. However, individuals outside of top schools are not networked, creating a barrier. Therefore, the solution is to create a national network across different institutions to level the playing field.

We should not overburden underrepresented faculty with diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, but we want them to be part of the process. How can we involve them?

Departments should pay underrepresented faculty to unburden them to participate. There are different ways of paying faculty. Departments can provide underrepresented faculty with additional research assistants and support staff or recognize the value of these activities when giving raises.

We have organized a lunch session dedicated to inclusive mentoring on July 26, 2022.

Thank you to everyone who took the time to participate in the webinar. We appreciate having all our ASP members continue this journey with us. The ASP DEI committee will be continuing these discussions at the annual ASP meeting in Charleston, South Carolina. We have organized a lunch session dedicated to inclusive mentoring on July 26, 2022 sponsored by Proctor & Gamble. Our speakers are Dr. Shanina Sanders-Johnson, an assistant professor of organic chemistry at Spelman College, and Dr. Marvella Ford, a professor of public health sciences at the Medical University of South Carolina. Sanders-Johnson and Ford will share with us their research findings and personal experiences as they relate to the mentorship of students and faculty. After their presentations, there will be a question-and-answer session, so please bring your questions. We look forward to seeing you there! ■

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