

DEI DISPATCH

Summer KickOff

Congratulations Graduates!

Congratulations to all the Plant Biology undergraduates and graduate students who graduated this year!

DEI Committee Updates

BPS is doing a wide variety of outreach efforts and the BPS DEI committee is hoping to compile these efforts to connect individuals with similar outreach interests. If you are currently involved in DEI efforts, would be interested in joining existing efforts, or are interested in starting something new, please fill out this [quick survey](#).

Scientist Highlight- Professor Susan Wessler



Dr. Sue Wessler is a renowned geneticist, and her research focuses on understanding the contribution of transposable elements to gene and genome evolution. She is equally passionate about advancing undergraduate education. As an HHMI award recipient she created the [Dynamic Genome](#), a course open to first year undergraduates to give them hands-on research experience. This early exposure to research can strongly impact a student's future trajectory as a biology major and their overall self-efficacy in science. She continues her efforts to change the status quo in the academe as the Home Secretary of the National Academy of Sciences (NAS). This year she helped usher one of the most diverse cohorts of NAS members. We reached out to Sue to learn more about this effort. Read more about it [here!](#)

DEI Publications Highlight

In this issue we spotlight two pieces (one of which was co-authored by a BPSC grad student alum- **Alex Rajewski!**) that frame the challenges experienced by members of the LGBTQ+ community and provide recommendations on how to create a more inclusive environment for members of that community ([Cooper et al., 2020](#); [Field and Rajewski, 2021](#)). These papers highlight some issues faced by LGBTQ+ including discrimination, diminished opportunities and harassment that contribute to attrition in the STEM pipeline and force many to abandon their careers or educational opportunities. The papers outline steps to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for LGBTQ+ individuals around 5 core areas: 1) Being thoughtful about the language used regarding the LGBTQ+ Community 2) Creating opportunities for people to describe who they are while avoiding assumptions of people's Identities, names, and pronouns 3) Meaningfully advocating for the LGBTQ+ Community 4) Creating an inclusive Biology classroom and 5) Conducting Biology education research in a way that is inclusive of the LGBTQ+ Community. Field and Rajewski, in particular, call attention to the admissions process, basic needs and PIs' awareness of campus resources to support LGBTQ+ individuals. They also provide a list of several organizations that are working to improve the LGBTQ+ science and greater STEM community are acknowledged: LGBTQ+ Plant Scientist Network (twitter: [@LGBTQPlantSci](#)), [500 Queer Scientists](#), [Black Queer Town Hall in STEM](#), [Pride in STEM](#), [Out in STEM \(oSTEM\)](#), and the [National Organization of Gay and Lesbian Scientists and Technical Professionals \(NOGLSTP\)](#) but please check out [UCR's LGBT Resource Center](#) for events and resources.

Departmental DEI Highlights

Chancellor's Making Excellence Inclusive (MEI) Diversity Certificate Program

The UCR Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion offers a [quarter-long program](#) to graduate students to learn about diversity and inclusion. The program is a good opportunity to learn basic DEI concepts as they pertain to academia and our campus, including resources for syllabus construction. It was a unique and rewarding experience to interact with graduate students and learn from speakers outside of CNAS, specifically Brittnee Meitzenheimer and Dr. Covadonga Lamar who gave amazing talks.

The program culminates in a final project. BPSC graduate students **Clarissa Rodriguez** and **Stuart Schwab** proposed the implementation of Course-based Undergraduate Research Experiences (CUREs), which are courses designed to expose students early on in their undergraduate careers to research and to help develop transferable skills that can be used to acquire a job after graduation, or to continue onto graduate studies. **Elizabeth Hann** worked with a group to make an adaptable curriculum aimed at orienting first year graduated students to DEI concepts.

Please reach out to recent graduates of the program Clarissa, Stuart, and Elizabeth if you would like to know more. There is also an eight-month-long [program](#) available for faculty and staff.

Celebration of Diversity in Botany Symposium

Thank you and congratulations to the student organizers of the recent symposium, and to the industry sponsor [Corteva](#). For the first time in our department an [all-day symposium](#) was hosted by graduate students, and completely over zoom. Notably we had guest speakers who previously worked here at UCR including Dr. Morgan Halane and Dr. Anna Locke and Dr. Sonia Zárate who participated in the career panel. Also, for the first time, our Yermanos and Gómez-Pompa speakers spoke on the same day! Dr. Rishi Masalia from [LeafWorks](#) (Yermanos) spoke about Cannabis labeling and Richard Bugbee, a professor at [Kumeyaay Community College](#), spoke of the indigenous practices of cyclic mosaic burns.

DEI LISTENING

Beyond the Bench is a podcast hosted by UCR graduate students in the [UCR SciComm](#) group highlighting scientists' journeys and what drives their curiosity. This episode stars Dr. Noah Whiteman, an Evolution Professor at UC-Berkeley, who shares his story of growing up in northern Minnesota, being a 1st-generation college student, navigating starting his lab while being the first out LGBTQIA+ faculty member in his departments at the University of Arizona and UC-Berkeley, and finding joy and unexpected discoveries through his research on various organisms.



Campus Resources

UCR Collections has put together a guide to materials in Special Collections that pertain to both BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color) and LGBTQ+ . Selected works were created by individuals who identify with both of these communities.



SGN (Some Good News)

Well done to all the student lightning talk presenters at the Celebration of Diversity in Botany Symposium! Congratulations to winners **Aimee Uyehara**, **Meg Kargul**, and **Claire Mauss**!

Congratulations to **Alex Borowsky** who was awarded a USDA NIFA predoctoral fellowship!

If you have any exciting news you would be open to sharing to the department or if you would like to share some DEI related activities please [email us](#).

WEBINARS

June is Pride Month and UC ANR is sponsoring different events so that we can learn more about how we can support the LGBTQ+ community. The final event on June 30th is a discussion on the book, *A Year Without a Name* by Cyrus Grace Dunham. Please register [here](#).



If you any information or resources that you would like to contribute to the newsletter, please email [Loralee](#)