

## EDITORIAL

# Revisiting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Commitments and Instituting Lasting Actionable Changes in the Faculty for Undergraduate Neuroscience

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In spring 2020 the Faculty for Undergraduate Neuroscience (FUN) made a statement in the wake of the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis and in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic (Bayline et al., 2020) committing to actions that would advance the ideals of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in our society's programming. Given the ongoing nature of the social justice themes of the Black Lives Matter movement, the challenges posed and exposed by COVID-19 (for review, see Bushana et al., 2020; Esposito & King, 2020) for both research (Gibson et al., 2020) and teaching (Neuwirth et al., 2020), and the increase in targeted hate crimes towards Black and Asian Americans, we reiterate our position opposing all acts of hate and injustices towards others, especially against Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC).

Therefore, FUN unequivocally joins its voice with the many individuals and groups who have mobilized in peaceful protests in condemnation of police brutality, institutionalized racism, and all forms of hate and associated violence against targeted communities. We stand together with individuals who exercise their constitutionally-protected freedom of speech and right to assemble to create and achieve a level playing field for BIPOC, LGBTQ+, and other oppressed groups. We take this position to inform our practice and to ensure equity for the next generation of leaders in neuroscience and allied fields. As a scientific community, FUN embraces individuals of all cultures, ethnicities, and religions, valuing the diversity that unique perspectives bring to neuroscience, and understands the importance of intentional DEI efforts to achieve an anti-racist culture (for review, see Rollins, 2021). Likewise, in order for our society to move forward, we must acknowledge that our own past as a neuroscientific community is filled with examples that brought violence upon/against BIPOC communities, and that daily acts of racism still occur within institutions where our members work and where the next generation of neuroscientists encounter the field.

Recent reports have emerged to guide faculty, pre-faculty, and students on how they can better address racism and disparities in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields (Payne-Sturges et al., 2021;

Penner et al., 2021; Rollins, 2021; Buchanan et al., 2020; Chaudhary, 2020; Clark & Hurd, 2020; Linkova et al., 2020). Unfortunately, we still have much work to do to create and actualize true equality within the neuroscience professions. The systemic inequities that surfaced once again in the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis in 2020, continue to be laid bare in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, where a lack of access to quality healthcare resources disproportionately affects BIPOC communities despite the rollout of vaccines. The recent increase in anti-Asian hate crimes further illustrates the additional compounding negative impacts on minority groups by a misinformed public, mixed with implicit bias and fueled by inflammatory, racially charged rhetoric. Individuals and groups across the United States continue to mobilize to advance social justice in positive and meaningful ways. It is incumbent on all people to work towards reducing these invisible, but often fatal, barriers in our communities. Through our renewed and sustained commitment to ensure our programming is aligned with anti-racism efforts, FUN is taking that very stance within our neuroscientific community of members and friends, to create a community aligned with this vision.

As a community principally composed of neuroscience faculty, we hold the tools for a robust participation in the work of transitioning into an anti-racist and inclusive society that fully embraces the range of definitions under DEI. What we do with students in our classrooms and in our labs is not separate from the work of racial and social justice that informs and furthers the advancements of the neuroscience profession. Therefore, we have a responsibility to educate and transform the lives of our students today, who come from a wide range of cultures and ethnic backgrounds, to help them become the anti-racist caretakers of society tomorrow. This is consistent with national funding priorities for increasing diversity and ensuring retention of underrepresented minority (URM) and female students within the STEM fields. Moreover, the concept and definition of URMs have been redefined and substantially changed since its inception, and now refers to a much larger BIPOC community that extends beyond the traditional Black and Hispanic populations (for review, see Mukherji et al., 2017).

Indeed, we as neuroscientists must use our skills, compassion, and commitment to achieve an anti-racist society that supports the entry, continuation, and perseverance of URM and female students, thereby creating a more welcoming and inclusive future for all (Asai, 2020). These very students will be key change-makers across all fields in shaping the next generation's ability to establish a more equitable world. As dedicated scholar-teachers, FUN members and friends must ensure that we use our position to create and sustain an inclusive space for all, and especially for our minority students. Therefore, we reiterate our commitment to taking action to further educate and equip our members and their communities with resources to overcome our racial divisions as we move forward.

Here, FUN reiterates and expands the four action items being implemented to improve our organizational structure and future programming to achieve the ideals of a supportive, inclusive society:

**(1) Reflection toward action:** FUN commits to engaging in a fully transparent and intentional reflection on the ways in which we participate in systems of oppression, both in our own activities and in how we participate with other organizations in the field. We believe that critical reflection is key for FUN to begin to identify and dismantle these systems. We have established a DEI committee to ensure that FUN programming, committee membership, and leadership opportunities are accessible, transparent, and inclusive. We take this step together as a unified community that recognizes the reality and pain of racial inequality, lack of inclusivity, and failure to embrace the diversity of all members of our society. To this end, the FUN organization is working to compile voluntary member demographics to assess and reassess annually how we are doing in serving our BIPOC/URM members and friends to ensure that our organization is representing fairly and equitably across all its members. Additionally, FUN is working to make sure that program opportunities, committee minutes, and newsletters are available to all members. Such record-keeping will permit routine evaluation of our organization to ensure we work towards being transparent and inclusive in our policies and procedures.

**(2) Science as healing:** FUN recognizes the need for creating safe spaces where BIPOC/URM members and friends can share stories, struggles, and strategies for healing. We commit to creating this space, in part by a formal faculty mentoring program. In this program, we will match faculty with trained mentors who can provide long-term relationships outside of members' home institutions. We hope that this mentoring program will offer our members opportunities for career consultation, professional guidance, and personal support, and will provide BIPOC/URM members a resource for healing as equal members of our community.

**(3) Research as resistance:** FUN commits to highlighting research (especially from faculty and students who identify as BIPOC/URM) that informs the biological, psychological, behavioral, and biomedical consequences of chronic

institutional and systemic oppression and its neurobiological correlates, by inviting and publishing articles and special issues in the Journal of Undergraduate Neuroscience Education (JUNE) on these issues. Giving light to these intersections will help to inform our students and the scientific community of the societal toll of systematic prejudice and oppression.

**(4) Pedagogy of the oppressed:** FUN commits to supporting members and friends with programming to develop, establish, and maintain anti-racism work through workshops and sessions on inclusive excellence in STEM. These workshops and sessions will recognize the full humanity and full potential of all BIPOC/URM students and the range of their perspectives, whereby neuroscience pedagogy can be used as a conduit for restorative social justice through the FUN organization. It is our hope that members will utilize this pedagogy to advance DEI efforts within their home institutions.

Growing out of the FUN statement offered last year (Bayline et al., 2020) which provided the first critical step in beginning a restorative social justice and inclusivity model of neuroscience pedagogy and research, we commit to this action plan as part of our fundamental responsibility to our members to ensure that everyone is treated fairly, and to do our part to become an anti-racist organization. As the leading supporter of undergraduate neuroscience education and research, FUN makes these commitments to empower and support our faculty members, students and friends, by advancing pedagogy and research in the integrated neurosciences. We will actively work to ensure that all our proceedings are transparent, fair, and equitable, and to advance the ideals of diversity, equity, and inclusion in our society's selection of officers and committee members as we carry out the business of supporting faculty and students in neuroscience.

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