

Annual report of the BSA Committee on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI Committee)  
July 2021

**Committee members 2020-2021**

Chelsea Specht (2022), chair  
Adriana Hernandez, *Student Representative* (2022)  
Maya Allen, *Student Representative* (2022)  
James Cohen (2021)  
Muriel Poston (2021)  
Roland Roberts (2021)  
Anna Monfils (2021)  
Janelle Burke (2023)  
Kadeem Gilbert (2023)  
Keri Maricle (2023)  
Madhav Nepal (2023)  
Ann Sakai, PI PLANTS II and past chair  
Melanie Link-Perez (2023), Program Director  
Cindi Jones (2021), President  
Heather Cacanindin, Executive Director  
Catrina Adams, BSA Director of Education

**Incoming Members:**

Manya Singh (2023), *Student Representative*  
Charles Bush (2023), *Undergrad Student Representative*  
Shawn Abrahams (2024)  
Ana Almeida (2024)  
Rocio Deanna (2024)  
Gretchen North (2024)  
Adam Ramsey (2024)

**Ex Officio members 2021-22**

Anna Monfils, PI PLANTS III  
Melanie Link-Perez (2023), Program Director  
Michael Donoghue (2022), President  
Heather Cacanindin, Executive Director  
Catrina Adams, BSA Director of Education

The Botanical Society of America has had a committee dedicated to broadening participation in botany and the BSA for over a decade, the Human Diversity Committee. Given recent events and the need to expand the focus of this committee to issues of social justice and creating an inclusive culture within our society and at our annual meeting, the committee was reconstructed in 2020 as the Committee on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

In 2021, we had several virtual meetings of the full committee and attended to other business via email communication. We had planned to do several Belonging in Botany activities throughout the year (now change to Botany360), including a series that included training in antiracism, responding to racism and

bias, dialoging across differences, allyship, the myth of the meritocracy, and other aspects of career development to support the advancement of BSA as a multicultural and antiracist community. Due to strategic planning and engagement with the NSF LEAPS proposal (see below), these activities were placed on hold until we can incorporate them into a broader, effective strategic plan that centers our goal to function as an antiracist society and centers the needs of the most marginalized members of our community. This includes the feedback received after the Town Hall and Listening session on DEI issues with a trained facilitator from the 2020 Virtual Botany conference as well as feedback from an open google survey form where the membership provided ideas and feedback on DEI initiatives. We have a google doc where we are listing possible events and considering planning for this year-round programming:

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1nvpDpiVf9u8sAS\\_japmhngFuzR94coXtEWxldymMFY/edit#](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1nvpDpiVf9u8sAS_japmhngFuzR94coXtEWxldymMFY/edit#)

### ***Belonging in Botany Lecture:***

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BSA has sponsored and organized a Diversity Lecture at our conference for the past 10 years. As recommended by the Human Diversity committee in 2020, the “Diversity Lunch” format was changed so that attending the lecture is not tied to the cost of seating. For Virtual Botany2021, the name of the lecture was changed (by vote of the committee) to the “Belonging in Botany: perspectives on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Lecture” and will be followed by a general discussion about diversity, equity, inclusion and access. Other options for this named lecture, which may be useful for future symposia, workshops, gatherings, and named events or awards, were:

- Cultivating CommUNITY
- Rooted in Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion: How to Build a Better Future Today
- Breaking Bud: Emerging as Leaders in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
- Deeps Roots, New Shoots, and Fresh Fruits: Intersectional Advocacy in the BSA Community
- The Blossom Lecture: a talk about equity, diversity, inclusion and broadening participation in botany
- IDEAL Botany Lecture: harnessing inclusivity, diversity, equity, accessibility and leadership to build a better botany.
- Sowing Seeds Lecture: cultivating inclusivity and belonging in botany

The 2021 speaker is Dr. David Asai, who was the top choice of the committee. The Committee members each nominated speakers and provided a short bio for their nominees, and voting was done with a survey that allowed members to rank candidates 1-8. While Dr. Asai was the top choice, the following nominees were also ranked highly and merit consideration for future years:

**Dr. Linda Tuhiwai Smith:** <https://www.waikato.ac.nz/maori/linda-tuhiwai-smith> - for her highly influential work on research and indigenous peoples, namely her book "Decolonizing Methodologies" which delves into how scientific research is implicated in colonialism and how we can change systems and reframe perspectives to be inclusive of all knowledge.

**Dr. Sarah L. Rodriguez:** <https://rodriguezsarah.weebly.com/latinas-in-stem.html> & <http://faculty.tamuc.edu/Sarah%20Rodriguez/> - for her research on Latina experiences in STEM and the importance of identity; equity, access, and retention issues for underrepresented students in the educational pipeline

**Dr. Marjorie Weber** (<http://www.theweberlab.com/>) Early career evolutionary ecologist doing very interesting research on plant-animal interactions, and she has also spearheaded Project Biodiversify, "an online repository of teaching tools to promote diversity, inclusion, and belonging in STEM classrooms": <https://projectbiodiversify.org/>

**Dr. Clif Poodry:** <https://ethicscenter.csl.illinois.edu/people/clifton-a-poodry/>

Dr. Poodry is currently a Courtesy Professor at the University of Oregon where he participates in the instruction of an ethics course for graduate students. As NSF rotating Program Director, Poodry developed the minority supplement initiative that was copied widely at NSF and later at NIH. He was the Director of the Training, Workforce Development and Diversity Division at the National Institute for General Medical Sciences (NIGMS), NIH, where he was responsible for developing and implementing NIGMS policies and plans for research training programs and capacity building programs that reflect NIGMS' long-standing commitment to research training and the development of a highly capable, diverse biomedical and behavioral research workforce. At NIH he developed the Institutional Research and Academic Career Development Award (IRACDA) in which postdocs, as part of mentored training, teach at minority serving institutions. He also developed the Native American Research Centers for Health program in collaboration with the Indian Health Service. As a Senior Fellow in the Science Education Department at HHMI he led the Gilliam Fellowship Program and an experiment for adoption/adaptation of the UMBC Meyerhoff Program. Dr. Poodry is a native of the Tonawanda Seneca Indian Reservation in Western New York. He has served on the advisory boards of both AISES and SACNAS

*From Ann: Clif Poodry was scheduled to be one of the speakers in an earlier BSA Broadening Participation symposium but had to cancel at the last minute due to medical issues. He worked for many years at HHMI to promote the training of underrepresented students in STEM in all disciplines. He has since retired.*

**Dr. Cassandra Quave** - gives a motivational and scientific talk that incorporates her experiences as a disabled woman (born with multiple congenital skeletal defects) pursuing a high paced, demanding career in science/medical ethnobotany. She has attended Botany conference before, but it has been many years. <http://cassandraquave.com/>; <http://etnobotanica.us/>

**Dr. Terrell Morton:** <https://education.missouri.edu/person/terrell-morton/> - Assistant Professor of Identity and Justice in STEM Education at the University of Missouri. Dr. Morton identifies as a Scholar-Activist. His research and work focus on identity as it informs the persistence and engagement of racialized and minoritized students in STEM postsecondary education. He draws from critical race theory, phenomenology, and human development to ascertain Black students' consciousness and how it manifests in their various embodiments and actions that facilitate their STEM postsecondary engagements. Dr. Morton works to transform the positioning and understanding of Blackness in mainstream education, specifically STEM; seeking justice and joy for Black women, Black students, and other minoritized individuals given the social-cultural-political-historical positioning of their identities. He advocates for identity, justice, and joy to be fundamental for education. He also works to transform STEM learning environments, creating spaces that are recognized and understood as extensions of students' identity rather than sites of oppression that perpetuate hostility and exclusion. *From Chelsea: Dr. Morton gave a very inspirational SABER webinar this past fall to an audience of 900 and it generated lots of conversation and dialog between Dr. Morton and the attendees.*

**Dr. Julie Posselt:** <https://pullias.usc.edu/julie/> - associate professor of higher education in the USC Rossier School of Education and was a 2015-2017 National Academy of Education/ Spencer Foundation

postdoctoral research fellow. Rooted in sociological and organizational theory, her research program examines institutionalized inequalities in higher education and organizational efforts aimed at reducing inequities and encouraging diversity. She focuses on selective sectors of higher education— graduate education, STEM fields, and elite undergraduate institutions—where longstanding practices and cultural norms are being negotiated to better identify talent and educate students in a changing society. Her books include *Equity and Inclusion in Graduate Education* and *FIELD: Fieldwork Inspiring Expanded Leadership in Diversity*.

The 2020 conference included a conference-wide townhall discussion on diversity, equity, and inclusion led by a facilitator who was also hired to conduct training for BSA staff. Overall, the committee and our membership felt that the conference town hall had an impact that was diminished from our hopes and expectations, partly due to the sensation that perhaps the community as a whole was more ready to take action than the facilitator had anticipated, and partly because marginalized voices were not centered during the town hall process. As a result, we shifted gears a bit this past academic year and focused on Racial Identity training for the BSA Strategic Planning committee. This training was held by Come Abide Here LLC and involved racial awareness and importance of having a growth mindset for building an antiracist organization.

#### ***Changes to Practices and Procedures:***

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##### *Awards:*

Last year the committee was unanimously in favor of establishing a major award to recognize substantial efforts to increase diversity and inclusion, in addition to making changes to the language for the Distinguished Fellow award to recognize lifetime achievements in broadening participation. We did not make progress in establishing a new award this year, although rewarding DEI work was also brought up as a necessary/desired action by the Strategic planning committee. ***This will be a top priority for the coming year.***

##### *Inclusive Representation in Leadership:*

At the initiative of the graduate student representatives to the board (Minya and Shelly Gaynor), we overhauled the process for nominations and selection to committees to be more inclusive and allow for broadening participation in BSA leadership – recognizing that committee positions are often filled by a few ‘known’ individuals. We developed procedures for online, easily accessible nominations and self-nominations for committee membership and assigned the chair of the DEI committee to serve on the Committee on Committees to oversee the process and ensure best practices. The procedures are now updated on the web and were followed this year (see Committee on Committees’ report for details) leading to a broader slate of candidates and increased participation by members in the process via self-nominations. As Chair of the DEI committee, I served on the Committee on Committees to ensure best practices were followed and impacts were made on expanding our leadership opportunities to all members of the society. ***In future years, I’d like to have the DEI committee elect a member of the committee to serve in this role to reduce conflicts with my position on the BSA Board.***

The Nominations Committee also worked with the chair of the DEI committee to ensure best practices in selecting nominations to run for elected BSA positions. Elected positions this year included President-elect, Secretary, Director at Large for Education, and BSA board Student Representative. The nominations committee received 16 nominations for the four offices, but it’s important to note that individuals nominated might not necessarily be willing to run for office. I’d like to see greater

participation of the DEI committee in nominating individuals to run for positions and in bringing those names forward to the Nominations Committee. ***We will form a task force on Nominations (2 members plus one student member) and hold a special meeting next year in January to discuss names and forward those to the Nominations Committee by Feb 1.*** We will also research and discuss the possibility of having more than 2 names on the ballot as a mechanism by which to increase voter turnout. (this would require a change to BSA Bylaws)

#### *Symposia and Conference Speakers:*

The 2021 committee again emphasized the need to consider the diversity represented by the speakers at the annual Botany Conference as a factor to be considered in approval for symposia and colloquia. As we considered symposia this year, we included language in the call that encouraged proposals to include speakers at a diversity of career stages, from a broad set of academic and research institutions, and to consider balance and representation in gender and racial identities. We will continue to prioritize symposia and colloquia that incorporate diverse voices, and are looking for ways to ***incentivize symposia and colloquia that explicitly center topics that build on diverse perspectives in all aspects of our science (research, teaching, education, communication).***

#### *Demographic Data Collection and Assessment:*

The collection of demographic data was a major point of consideration this year. BSA has been collecting demographic data from our members for the past 5 years, but now with more intentionality in the questions asked and how the data will be used. The DEI Committee reviewed and approved changes to the questions posed to members when they join/renew, supporting the implementation of new demographic data collection during application for membership, and for meeting attendance. This includes race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity along with career stage so we can see how our demographics are distributed across our membership. Answering these questions is mandatory with the option to “not respond” to any single question. We are also now collecting data from those who attend our annual Botany conference and from applicants for some of our society awards; we continue to dialog about baseline statistics to assess progress in recruitment and retention of different groups within the BSA, to assess any biases in awards – both graduate awards and career awards, and to assess the success of different DE&I efforts. As such, these data will be used to understand who we are, who attends our meeting, and who we elevate to leadership positions, who we fund with our research grants, and who we honor with our awards. These data are stored securely and at this point will not be used outside the society.

#### *Affinity Groups:*

The committee received and supported a request for financial support in order to amplify the voices of Black Botanist Week through social media, announcements, and sponsoring a Black Botanist Week discussions session at our annual meeting. We are also providing BSA memberships to the organizing committee members for BBW.

Throughout the course of the year, we have communicated with Black Botanists Week organizers on how to best amplify their voices, and also discussed the formation of other affinity groups that BSA can support by centering communities and needs through priorities for funding, networking, collaborations and career development. As we move through the strategic plan, we will engage with the BSA committees and communities to discuss how to infuse DEI principles and elevate emerging ideas and suggestions from these affinity groups in all society activities and actions.

#### ***Strategic Planning:***

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In January 2021, BSA went through a 5-year strategic planning process. Prior to the first meeting, all white or white-identifying members of the strategic planning committee participated in two sessions of targeted racial awareness and racial intelligence training to ensure that we were considering fundamental principles of diversity, equity and inclusion throughout the process. DEI was considered explicitly as one of the organization's strategic priorities/pillars, with a group of individuals focused on developing a DEI strategic plan that defines goals and integrates strategies across activities of the society. The DEI Committee was involved in reviewing the DEI section of the strategic plan and providing feedback to the Board.

The vision that emerged from this strategic planning is that the Botanical Society of America will become a multicultural anti-racist society with a culture that fosters shared sense of identity and purpose; all BSA members will have a strong sense of belonging and demonstrate the knowledge and skills necessary to navigate and lead in a diverse, multicultural world. We strive to be a more just, inclusive and thriving community, and invite all members to join our collective efforts to transform ourselves, our relationships, and our systems through critical self-reflection, courageous conversations, and bold actions. The Committee will be using this document to guide our efforts and center our priorities over the upcoming year, creating a DEI action plan.

#### ***Plants II-III transition:***

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BSA also runs the PLANTS (Preparing Leaders and Nurturing Tomorrow's Scientists) program, an NSF funded pathway program that has been continually funded since 2011, providing a network of graduate and faculty mentors to undergraduates who attend our annual meeting and receive support in building relationships, developing soft skills, exploring careers, and engaging in scientific inquiry. This year, a few DEI Committee members (Ann Sakai, Anna Monfils, Muriel Poston) along with BSA staff Catrina Adams and Heather Cacanindin were involved in crafting a new NSF grant proposal entitled PLANTS III: Botany and Beyond for \$1.2 million. If funded it will provide for a new BSA staff person who would spend 80% of their time running the newly envisioned PLANTS program along with 20% of their time on Society DEI initiatives.

#### ***NSF- LEAPS:***

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This spring, several members of our DEI Committee were involved in responding to the Dear Colleague letter for LEAPS (LEading cultural change through Professional Societies of Biology) issued by NSF. Ann Sakai, Tanisha Williams and I attended and presented at an NSF meeting designed to pull together members for the Ecology and Evolutionary Biology societies to submit proposals, including BSA and ASPT as "organismal" societies. We formed initial collaborations with SSE, SSB and ESA although of these only ESA decided to move forward with a proposal. In addition, we were invited to join efforts of ASPB and the Plant Science Research Network that demonstrated the values and goals that BSA was interested in investing in for our own society. An ad hoc committee of BSA staff and members from DEI and Education committees (myself, Ann Sakai, Anna Monfils, Michael Donoghue, Catrina Adams, Heather Cacanindin) worked together to evaluate the different collaborative opportunities with other scientific societies and selected several to move forward. The DEI committee committed to serve on the Steering Committees of 3 proposals if awarded, and to provide collaborative support through the PLANTS program for a fourth. As of this morning, two of the proposals have been recommended for funding.

*This is confidential, but for your information I provide the following:*

**RCN: LEAPS: Rooting Out Oppression Together & SHaring Our Outcomes Transparently (ROOT&SHOOT),**

will build a collaborative network of plant science and partner organizations aimed at seeding and cultivating cultural change towards an inclusive, equitable, scientific future. We will develop and propagate tools for cultivating a sustainable sense of shared belonging and removing oppression from individuals with identities that are historically and currently marginalized (based on gender, gender identity, disability status, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or race). Although each RCN Participant Organization has begun this work, we lack the coordination and resources needed to exert meaningful change; both are essential to achieve lasting impacts and reshape the plant science community. Our goal is to support plant science organizations as they evolve to become truly equitable, inclusive, and anti-racist (ROOT) and through doing so provide evidence, advice, and guides so that others can learn from our experiences (SHOOT).

**RCN: LEAPS: Culture Change for Inclusion of Indigenous Voices in Biology**

AISES proposes a four-year project, Culture Change for Inclusion of Indigenous Voices in Biology, referred to as Indigenous Voices, to drive organizational culture change among biology professional societies to transform how Indigenous scholars and communities engage in biological research and professions. AISES in partnership with three closely aligned biological professional societies: Botanical Society of America, Ecological Society of America, and Entomological Society of America, will form a Steering Committee to: 1) assess the current status of Indigenous inclusion within the organizations, 2) address structural barriers and build Indigenous communities within the organizations, and 3) expand relationships and understanding to fundamentally improve Indigenous representation within biology research and professions. The proposed LEAPS project represents a new collaboration between AISES and BSA, ESA, and EntSoc to advance efforts among all organizations to increase the inclusion of Indigenous peoples, culture, and values in biology, recognizing the unique identities and circumstances of Indigenous peoples in the United States and the implications for education, research, and workforce development through the lens of Tribal Nation Building.

2021-2022 planning:

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Current and incoming committee members were all invited to a virtual Zoom meeting June 26th to discuss the planning of the upcoming Virtual Botany2021 and to organize ourselves into subcommittees for the coming year. Many of the new members attended and we are very excited to have them on board!! We have a post-Botany meeting planned for early September.

Submitted by Chelsea Specht, DEI Chair  
July 2021