

Annual Report of the BSA Committee on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI committee)  
July 2023

Committee members 2022-2023

Chelsea Specht, Chair (2023)

Charles Bush, USR (2023)

Manya Singh, GSR (2023)

Janelle Burke (2023)

Keri Maricle (2023)

Madhav Nepal (2023)

Kadeem Gilbert (2023)

R. Shawn Abrahams (2024)

Ana Almeida (2024)

Rocio Deanna (2024)

Gretchen North (2024)

Adam Ramsey (2024)

Historic Context:

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 events surrounding the murder of George Floyd and the associated societal awakening of 2020 combined with disparities brought to light by the pandemic (2020-2022), the focus of this committee was expanded to issues of social justice and creating an inclusive culture within our society and at our annual meeting and the name was changed to the DEI Committee.

In 2022, we had several virtual meetings of the full committee and attended to other business via email communication. In 2023, we had two meetings but the full committee was never able to get together as many members had conflicting schedules. Most DEI efforts taking place at the broader level occurred through the ROOT&SHOOT (R&S) initiative which engaged the BSA membership more broadly but did not specifically engage the DEI committee. As chair of the committee, I (along with Catrina Adams) was BSA representative on the steering committee of R&S and attended the annual meeting in September held at the HHMI Chevy Chase Campus. Other members of the committee were encouraged to join R&S working groups, but this was not coordinated and participation was not consistent. **My recommendation is that a subset of the DEI committee (perhaps forming a 'working group') commit to supporting the R&S initiative moving forward in order to streamline efforts across the society and engage more individuals invested in DEI.** These members would also report back to the full committee on their participation and track progress on the committee goals for diversity, equity and inclusion as stated in the Strategic Planning document.

As part of S&R, we organized a series of workshops in awareness and training in antiracism, responding to racism and bias, dialoging across differences, allyship, and other aspects of career development to support the advancement of BSA as a multicultural and antiracist community. BSA also had members participate in an Inclusive Conferences working group and in a project

associated with improving inclusivity in our election and nomination processes, work that was ongoing since 2019. Again as a recommendation, it would be helpful if members of the DEI committee would participate in these activities and report back to the DEI committee in order map these activities back to the strategic plan. I believe my biggest failings this past year were in (1) coordinating and keeping track of all the activities from R&S and Botany360 and mapping them back to the strategic plan and (2) encouraging members of the DEI committee to engage.

We unfortunately lost Sarah Sims as Diversity Programs and Outreach Coordinator in December, and this led to some atrophy of communication and connectivity among the various ongoing DEI programs and initiatives.

Critical needs for the DEI committee:

- Have a member serve on Nominations and Elections
- Have a member serve on R&S steering committee
- Have a member engaged with the Indigenous Voices program
- Have a subcommittee for the Belonging in Botany lecture who researchers and proposes names for a speaker, gets the input of the full committee, and decides who to invite based on that feedback.
- Have a subcommittee for the BSA Impact award with the responsibility of a full search committee: getting nominations = advertise, reach out to nominators AND potential nominees) and reviewing nominations. This subcommittee would propose their selection to the full committee.

### **Practices and Procedures:**

#### *Honors and Awards:*

The DEI committee oversees two major honors and awards, the Belonging in Botany lecture and the BSA IMPACT award.

- *Belonging in Botany Lecture:* This year's Belonging in Botany speaker is Shanny Spang Gion. Shanny is a Visiting Tribal Scholar at the University of Idaho where she works to identify ways in which institutions of higher education can facilitate indigenous education, increase enrollment and increase success rates of existing students. Shanny is Northern Cheyenne and Crow and an enrolled citizen of Northern Cheyenne. As part of her lecture, Shanny will discuss her career as a scientist and how her culture plays a role in the way she has continued her education and conducts her research.

Our original speaker was schedule to be Jessica Hernandez. Jessica was to speak at Botany2022 in Anchorage Alaska but cancelled at the last minute with health concerns. We offered for her to record her talk, but she preferred to instead delay until 2023 in Boise and confirmed in December her intention to speak at Botany2023. We stopped receiving any communication from Jessica however, and in May reached out to Sweeney Windchief. Dr. Windchief is a highly gifted and inspirational speaker who would continue to support our efforts to incorporate the indigenous community and indigenous values

in our Belonging in Botany series. Sweeney recommended Shanny Spang Gion as an alternative, although he remains of interest to the committee for future years (and would likely be interested in being a future Belonging speaker given more notice).

- *BSA Impact:* We received no nominations for the BSA impact award this year. As chair of the committee, I take responsibility for this failure. Committee members and the chair must play an important and critical role in outreach to secure an outstanding pool of nominations, as a search committee does for any academic position. The nomination package was intentionally constructed to be as minimally onerous as possible, so I do not believe there is any needed change in that area. We need to leverage the ease of nomination with the visibility of the intent and impact of the award to do better in encouraging our members to nominate our impactful leaders, collaborators, colleagues, students, mentors, etc.

*Inclusive Representation in Leadership:* We continued monitoring the results of our work in overhauling the process for nominations and selection to committees, and additional work was taken on by a membership group formed through R&S.

DEI Committee member Gretchen North served on the Committee on Committees to oversee the process and ensure best practices, and also identify if there are any challenges that the committee could work to overcome throughout the nomination process. Dr. North reported back to the DEI Committee in 2022 that the nomination process was effective in reaching a broad and diverse pool of candidates, and that procedures followed during the selection process were intentional in centering contributions to diversity and considering inclusion and career development in leadership positions. During the selection process, individuals were considered for their career stage (inclusion of early career in leadership positions), career trajectory (inclusion of PUI, MSIs, and government institutions) and matching the goals of the individual to the committee service.

As stated in last year's report, 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. For the past 2 years, I proposed to form a subcommittee or working group dedicated to this task. I would like to see several members of the committee form a subcommittee that focuses on Nominations (2 members plus one student member). Potential function could be:

- Hold a special meeting in January to discuss names and forward those to the Nominations Committee by Feb 1.
- Work with the member of the DEI committee to ensure information is provided to the Nominations committee to fully consider these candidates.

The report from R&S discusses the importance of having more than 2 names on the ballot as a mechanism by which to increase voter turnout, and using ranked voting as a more equitable form of elevating voices. These best practices should be following moving forward.

### *Symposia and Conference Speakers:*

The 2021 committee 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. We continued to include 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 for 2022-2023: BSA now has collected and processed demographic data from our members for the past 5 years, with intentionality in the questions asked so that the data can best be used to understand who we are, who attends our meeting, who we elevate to leadership positions, who we fund with our research grants, and who we honor with our awards.

As part of the R&S consortium, BSA is working to develop mechanisms for analyzing membership data and using this to best support our efforts in building belonging and inclusivity into our culture.

### *Affinity Groups:*

This year we discussed the formation of affinity groups that BSA can support by centering communities and needs through priorities for funding, networking, collaborations and career development. For Botany2023, we did not have anyone on the DEI committee who volunteered to host affinity groups for the annual conference (previously student rep Adriana Hernández was a liaison for planning meetings of the affinity groups). We can provide funding and logistic support to affinity groups interested in hosting gatherings, providing space and other needs to create the community and impact they desire. The commitment of the committee is to enable the affinity groups to self-organize. We discussed at our last meeting that DEI Committee is interested in finding ways to elevate the voices of these affinity groups such that any concerns, ideas, suggestions might be addressed such that the goals of these groups are represented in all society activities and actions. This is particularly important for groups that have limited representation. The Indigenous Voices and R&S initiatives are both working to address the participation of marginalized voices within BSA and will ideally link through the DEI Committee.

### **NSF- LEAPS:**

Over the past 2 years, BSA members have been heavily engaged in the following funded projects:

***RCN: LEAPS: Rooting Out Oppression Together & SHaring Our Outcomes Transparently (ROOT&SHOOT)***, is working to build a collaborative network of plant science and partner organizations aimed at seeding and cultivating cultural change towards an inclusive, equitable, scientific future. We are working as a group to 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). As a consortium of societies, we work together 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). Chelsea Specht stepped down from the Steering Committee in January and Brenda Molano-Flores now serves in that role as President elect and will continue to serve as President. Catrina Adams also serves on the Steering Committee (SC). The SC meets monthly for 1 -2 hours and has established best practices for engagement and democratic voting, creating an environment in which progressive growth can take place.

As part of my role as Chair of the DEI committee, I make sure that calls from S&R are distributed to our membership. The Equitable Conferences Working Group was one of those. This working group developed community agreements for conferences and participants that outlines principles and standards that support equity and inclusiveness, provides recommendations for a transparent site selection process that considers safety and inclusion, provides guidelines for practices that improve accessibility, and generates guidelines for inclusive selection of speakers and equitable programming. My recommendation is that a member of the DEI committee serves and reports back on the progress of these working groups as they emerge.

***RCN: LEAPS: Culture Change for Inclusion of Indigenous Voices in Biology*** We are in the second year of 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. The project represents a 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.

AISES is hosting an Indigenous Voices Gathering and Lunch at Botany2023 following the Belonging in Botany lecture, delivered by indigenous scholar Shanny Spang Gion. I recommend participation of the DEI committee in this effort, especially with the loss of Sarah Simms as our liaison to this effort.

#### **Development of DEAI Resources –**

*Accessibility webpage:* Diversity and inclusion are core values of the Botanical Society of America; this includes accessibility for people with disabilities. In an effort to help all presenters make their presentations more accessible to BOTANY conference participants with a variety of disabilities we've created a brief guide on our new accessibility webpage.

For the 2023 conference, there is a page dedicated to the code of conduct and resources. Resources include LGBTQ+ friendly doctors and resources (including emergency abortion services), a list of businesses that support diversity and inclusion, a list of restaurants, coffee

shops and bars owned by LGBTQ+ and allies, and a directory of black-owned businesses in Boise.

Submitted  
July 21 (super late)  
Chelsea D. Specht