MBL Diversity and Inclusion Efforts, 2021 Committee Report

The stated goals of the D&I committee for 2021 were to promote a more welcoming and inclusive environment at the MBL by improving visibility of our diverse community through campus improvements, virtual programming and other initiatives. Although the COVID-19 global pandemic continued to affect in person gatherings, travel, and other meeting events during 2021, the MBL D&I committee was able to advance these goals in significant ways.

Campus Improvements
The MBL implemented the “Legacy of Leadership” project, led by Dr. Nipam Patel (MBL Director) and Gina Hebert (MBL Director of Communications). This exhibit honors individuals with close ties to the Marine Biological Laboratory who have made important, under-recognized contributions to scientific research, education, and administration. The D&I committee assisted in the project by nominating individuals for recognition, reviewing the candidate list, and otherwise advising during several stages of project development. Individuals recognized are: Cornelia Clapp, Jewel Plummer Cobb, Jean Clark Dan & Katsuma Dan, Ernest Everett Just, Stephen Kuffler, Joe Martinez & James Townsel, and Lilian Vaughan Morgan & Thomas Hunt Morgan. Information about these MBL leaders can be found at: https://www.mbl.edu/legacy-of-leadership/. The project was launched in spring 2021 with the renaming of Lillie Auditorium to be the Cornelia Clapp Auditorium, accompanied by new portraits of these scientists in the lobby and an official naming of the wings throughout the Loeb education building.

Additionally, the D&I committee in collaboration with MBL Communications advanced the “Be Yourself at MBL” campaign with digital flyers scrolling on the campus monitors. Individuals were invited to self-identify for this project and provide a brief description of their scientific and personal interests to share with the MBL community. The project garnered participation from year-round scientists and students in the Advanced Research Training courses. We will continue and expand this project in 2022.

In Person and Virtual Events
Throughout 2021, the D&I committee was actively involved in organizing multiple events celebrating diversity. Committee members Matthew Person and Jennifer Morgan participated on the organizing committee for 2021 Woods Hole Black History Month (BHM). Virtual events for 2021 BHM included a 40th anniversary celebration panel with originators of the Woods Hole Black History Month (Feb. 4, 2021); a keynote interview of Dr. Walter Massey (UChicago faculty; President Emeritus of Morehouse College; MBL Board Member) (Feb. 9, 2021); and a panel discussion with journalist and project founder Jeneé Osterheldt on her short film series called “A Beautiful Resistance,” (Feb. 17, 2021). Each event had 120-200 registrants. In March 2021, MBL also participated in Women’s History Month with a discussion on International Women’s Day, hosted by UChicago, on the theme “Choose to Challenge” (Mar. 8, 2021). Notably, community participation in all of these events was significantly up from prior years.
The “Be Yourself at MBL” campaign launched 2 new initiatives in 2021. Together with Neurobiology Course Assistant Martin Rosenfeld (Yale), the D&I committee organized and hosted a “Be Yourself at MBL” event to celebrate diversity at the MBL, including our LGBTQ community and Pride Month (July 25, 2021). This was an in-person event on a Sunday afternoon under the Loeb quad tent that attracted >50 participants from around the MBL community, including year-round staff, visiting summer researchers, and ARTC course participants. The second was a printing of “Be Yourself at MBL” buttons and stickers, which were a huge hit in the courses and labs. The buttons and stickers disappeared quickly and were appreciated by all, prompting a second printing. Finally, MBL participated in Falmouth and Mashpee High Schools’ STEMfest Juneteenth program, featuring a set of interviews conducted by high school students with regional scientists: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t-0X4ValxLs. Matthew Person was MBL’s rep on the planning committee along with educators at Falmouth and Mashpee High educators, NOAA, and Waquoit Bay National Estuarine Reserve. MBL’s research assistant Sylvia Klein (Echeverri lab) was one of the 12 STEM interviewees in the program (Sylvia’s segment can be seen at 58:11).

Improved Review Processes for MBL Faculty Searches:
Substantial changes have been made to the hiring process for MBL faculty, with discussions on how to implement them in other staffing hires. These changes include: more holistic review of applications, request for Diversity Statements, pre-determined evaluation rubrics, and standardized interview processes. The Diversity Statements are now being requested as part of the job application process for faculty hires, allowing candidates to self-identify their interests, experience, and successes around diversity, equity and inclusion. These changes were applied to the Ecosystems Center faculty search (Jan.-March, 2021), and are being deployed for the Bell Center faculty search (Nov.-Dec., 2021). We also broadened our advertising strategy to include a number of scientific societies and Twitter groups focused in the DEI space (e.g. SACNAS, @BlackInNeuro, @LatinxinSTEM, @LGBTSTEM), which reached >100,000 individuals in total. Although there is still a lot of room for improvement, there is a general sense that these efforts are beginning to diversify the applicant pool.

Recruitment to MBL programs:
The EE Just Fellowship was recently expanded to include a stipend for travel, supplies, child care and other expenses related to research in support of faculty at HBCUs or MSIs, members of a traditionally under-represented minority in science, or someone dedicated to the advancement of URMs in science. In 2021, the MBL was able to host its first recipient of this expanded award, Dr. Indu Sharma of Hampton University, who was accompanied by two undergraduate researchers from her lab. In addition, in Dec. 2021, the MBL received a planning grant from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation for “Creating Equitable Pathways to STEM Graduate Education” (PIs: Linda Hyman, Jennifer Morgan, Veronica Martinez-Acosta). This grant will support the planning phase of a formal post-baccalaureate program at the MBL, which would fill a gap in MBL’s training programs at this important career transition. Collectively, these efforts help bridge and extend MBL programs, now spanning high school to advanced faculty support.
Involvement with the Woods Hole Diversity Initiative (WHDI):
In 2021, MBL continued and expanded its broader community engagement in partnership with the WHDI. During the summer, Dr. Nipam Patel, along with the Directors of other Woods Hole research institutions, re-signed the WHDI memorandum of understanding (MOU), committing to creating a more diverse, inclusive, and equitable environment in the village, in science, and beyond. Originally signed in 2004 and renewed in 2012, the WHDI MOU restated its commitment to the goals, which included a 2021 update on their progress. The MBL D&I committee was involved in preparing this most recent DEI update.

2022 Efforts and Activities:
The MBL’s Diversity and Inclusion Advisory Committee will continue to support Black History Month, Women’s History Month, Indigenous and Hispanic History Months, and Pride Month. In addition, the MBL has declared Juneteenth as an official holiday, and we will be partnering with the community on event planning. We are also planning a presentation and interactive workshop on Land Acknowledgments, presented by Dr. Nitana Greendear (Brown Univ.) and culminating in an official MBL Land Acknowledgement statement that can be used before seminars, events, and in email signatures. We will also continue to work with the Communications Department to expand the “Be Yourself at MBL” activities via campus monitors and new light pole banners, among other efforts. We will also partner with UChicago and MBL Human Resources to provide additional training opportunities and workshops, ideally in person events, as the covid situation allows. Through these efforts and many others we hope to continue improving our environment to make MBL a more welcoming and inclusive institution to everyone.