



Research

OVCRGE Equity and Diversity Committee (EAD)

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Center for Quantitative Cell Imaging (CQCI)

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Cellular and Molecular Biology (CMB) Graduate Program Forms a Student-led Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee

The Center for Quantitative Cell Imaging (CQCI: <https://cellimaging.wisc.edu/>) in the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research and Graduate Education promotes excellence in interdisciplinary cell imaging through research, education, and outreach via CQCI principal investigators and its network of collaborations. A key component of the CQCI mission is to act as the administrative home to the Cellular and Molecular Biology (CMB) graduate program (<https://cmb.wisc.edu/>). The CMB program is inherently interdisciplinary with over 200 CMB faculty trainers in over 40 academic departments.

In the past year and a half, the CMB program has increased efforts to address issues of equity and diversity within the program and at the university. Led by graduate students, during the summer of 2020, the CMB program held a number of virtual forums to discuss ways to make the program more equitable and to position CMB as an actively anti-racist organization. The CMB program has worked closely with graduate students to create a student-led Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee (DEIC) and to address the committee's recommendations. The committee membership includes six graduate students (each representing a different cohort) and three faculty members who also serve as liaisons to different CMB committees, and meetings are open to the entire CMB community.

After receiving feedback from CMB students and faculty during open forums, students created a detailed list of action items and priorities ranging from additional resources that could be provided by the graduate program to larger, university-wide changes that students hoped the CMB program could advocate for. DEIC members also coordinated with diversity committees in other biological science graduate programs to share ideas and leverage resources. From the beginning, the DEIC has placed a strong emphasis on transparency and shares regular updates on the committee's work with faculty and students in the CMB program. The committee tracks project progress and assigns volunteers via shared Google Docs, and different students have taken the lead on different projects.

One of the DEIC's priorities is to enhance support systems for current students. In the past year, with input from the DEIC, the CMB program has expanded its mentoring program so that incoming students' first year faculty advisors and peer mentors are more actively involved and continue to advise new students beyond their first semester in the program. The CMB program has also increased the number of check-in meetings with students, and the CMB program chair individually reaches out to each of our 120+ students each semester to offer to meet with them one on one to discuss anything that is on their minds. This has been a great way to keep track of how our students are doing and has helped our chair identify any problems early and try to provide solutions and/or support, which has been especially important given the current increased pressure on students to make up for lost time with COVID-19 related research delays.

The DEIC is also working to make recruitment and admissions more equitable and to expand the program's efforts to recruit a diverse pool of students. Starting in 2019 (prior to the formation of the DEIC), CMB eliminated GRE scores as part of the admissions review in light of the fact that scores have been shown to be significantly skewed to the disadvantage of women, students from underrepresented minority groups in STEM, and students of lower socioeconomic status. The CMB program is intentional about reviewing admissions applications in a holistic way, and for the past few years has required that Admissions Committee members attend a training offered by WISELI on implicit bias in evaluation processes. In response to feedback from the DEIC, in 2020 the CMB began providing application fee waivers to any student from a racial

or ethnic group that has traditionally been marginalized in STEM graduate programs. The program is also considering additional financial incentives such as offering larger welcome checks for students in these groups as a way to recruit a more diverse pool of applicants.

CMB has also partnered with two other graduate programs to create the Bioscience Initiative for Recruiting and Networking (BIRN). The BIRN program strives to build on the success of the previously offered Bioscience Opportunities Preview Weekend (BOPs) by connecting UW-Madison bioscience faculty, staff, and graduate students with faculty, advisors, and prospective underrepresented minority students from other institutions and/or geographic areas and was funded by the Graduate School starting in 2019-2020. The BIRN program will continue to incorporate input from the DEIC in future activities.

Improving diversity, equity, and inclusion in our program and within the CQCI and ensuring that all students feel welcome is something we will need to continuously work on. We truly value the efforts of our students to improve CMB and to support their fellow students, and we look forward to continuing this important work. To learn more about the CMB program's efforts around diversity, equity, and inclusion, see the [CMB Diversity web page](#) or contact [Lauren Weitkamp](#).