

Drexel Anti-Racism Task Force:
Graduate and Doctoral Student Life Committee
Committee Report – February 8, 2021

Committee Co-Chairs:

Tiffany Eaton, MPH, *DrPH Candidate, Dornsife School of Public Health*

Idris Robinson, MPH, *DrPH Candidate, Dornsife School of Public Health*

Youngmoo Kim, PhD, *Director of the ExCITE Center, also College of Engineering*

Committee Members:

Kandra Bolden, *MS Candidate, Westphal College of Media Arts & Design*

Monique Boskett, *MBA Candidate, LeBow College of Business*

Alonzo Flowers, PhD, *Associate Professor and PhD Program Director, School of Education*

Taylor McCorkle, MS, *PhD Candidate, College of Medicine*

Katie Nelson, MPH, *PhD Candidate, Dornsife School of Public Health*

Matthew Shirley, MS, *PhD Candidate, School of Biomedical Engineering*

Angelys Torres, *JD Candidate, Kline School of Law*

Nguyen Tran, MPH, *PhD Candidate, Dornsife School of Public Health*

Dane Ward, PhD, *Teaching Faculty, Biodiversity, Earth, & Environmental Science*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Drexel graduate student community consists of 9,034 students (as of Fall 2020), including 974 who self-identify as Black/African American and 2,843 as non-white. We should recognize them as accomplished and experienced members of our University community, who have self-selected into a path of further study beyond undergraduate training. Many of our graduate students are already professionals and leaders, as well as those who will be future leaders in industry and academia.

Graduate students are heavily impacted by the inequities and racial climate of our University, not only as students, but also as spouses and parents, as part-time or full-time professionals, and as active and contributing members of society. It is a group, however, that is somewhat overlooked in terms of University policies, processes, resources, and support. While undergraduate admissions are subject to a standardized and regulated process, graduate admissions practices vary greatly across units and programs.

Furthermore, graduate students must engage in a highly unbalanced power dynamic with faculty who are not only responsible for grades, but in many cases financial support for research, as well as academic networks and recommendations for career advancement. The personal stakes of these relationships are incredibly high, which has significant repercussions in terms of the reporting of issues and incidents and confronting and addressing systemic racism at the University.

Our recommendations are rooted in the breadth and depth of experiences of our committee, consisting of 9 graduate students across 6 academic units (including some with dual roles as professional staff), and 3 faculty members representing 3 different academic units. We have developed these recommendations for anti-racist efforts that we believe will benefit all graduate students identifying as Black, Indigenous, and Persons of Color (BIPOC). We also believe that the most immediate need is to address the inequities and hostilities faced by our Black graduate students, and our recommendations reflect that urgency.

These recommendations are informed by a survey developed by the committee specifically for Drexel graduate students, which received 185 responses spanning 12 different academic units (104 doctoral candidates, 61 Masters candidates, and 20 from other graduate programs). Respondents were roughly proportional demographically to the graduate student body. Some key results from the survey:

- 29% of all respondents have experienced discrimination during formal academic activities (26% reported microaggressions and a handful reported serious physical threats).
- 25% of respondents reported witnessing microaggressions from faculty, and 28% reported witnessing microaggressions from students.
- Nearly 12% reported witnessing racial/ethnic discrimination from a *faculty* member, and 19% have witnessed racial/ethnic discrimination from another student.

Our committee finds these rates unacceptable and feels that we cannot label our institution as one that is an inclusive and welcoming environment for graduate students.

We have developed the following recommendations that can be grouped into the following categories:

- **Changing the culture and building a truly inclusive community at Drexel:** We believe this is a responsibility that must be shared across all members of our University community, and we propose a comprehensive effort to completely rework Drexel's approach from one of training and remediation to individualized learning and growth pathways for shared community building.
- **Increasing resources and support for current and prospective Drexel Graduate Students of color:** Deficiencies for current students must be addressed, and we must do much more to recruit and retain graduate students of color and demonstrate that Drexel is making meaningful advances towards becoming a truly inclusive and anti-racist institution.
- **Addressing longstanding faculty issues:** We believe faculty must be *full* participants in the proposed community building efforts, but we recommend additional efforts given that faculty actions have an outsized impact on graduate students.

We thank you for your thoughtful consideration of these recommendations.

FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

OBJECTIVE 1: Address lack of cultural knowledge across the entire Drexel community by transforming DEI Training from a “deficiency” model to a positive framework of Community Building.

Current environment:

- There is no University-wide requirement for faculty and students to participate in diversity training.
- Current workshops available are either large-scale events or “one size fits all” online trainings, which does not allow for personalization based on an individual’s background or experiences.
- Training requirements vary greatly from unit to unit (and by program).

Proposed implementation: A University-wide program to build a truly inclusive community, based on an individual, personalized pathway for learning and growth. This represents a markedly different approach from required workshops or online trainings, a view founded upon deficiency. Instead, we propose offering a robust network of activities to develop empathy and understanding and to engage actively with institutional efforts working towards equity, an approach based on community building and growth. This program could be marketed as the “Drexel Difference,” one way the University is proactively making positive change at the Institution, in the city of Philadelphia, and in the world.

- All faculty, students, and staff must participate, starting with an initial assessment to provide individualized recommendations for continued participation. This assessment could, for example, be based on the [Harvard Implicit Association survey](#).
- A suite of activities will be developed, in partnership with academic programs, to provide participation and growth opportunities for all community members. Some examples include:
 - Introductory workshop on the foundations of diversity, equity, and inclusion.
 - Specialized seminars on the history of race at Drexel and in West Philadelphia.
 - Community book reads on topics related to race and academia (see CoAS book read in Winter 2021).
 - Allyship training sessions
 - A “CIVIC 101” for [graduate students](#)
 - Drexel courses specific to DEI topics
- Graduate students must participate in at least 1 (uncharged) credit of the program per academic year.
- Every community member will develop a personal growth “transcript” to demonstrate continued participation over time.
 - These transcripts will be part of annual reviews and evaluations for faculty and staff and incorporated into decisions regarding merit increases and promotion.

OBJECTIVE 2: Develop broad, standardized recruitment effects to attract more BIPOC graduate students and increase retention of BIPOC graduate students through creating meaningful support and developing sustainable (non-external, non-ephemeral) funding sources.

Current environment:

- Recruitment processes and standards for graduate students are highly varied across units and programs. Biased standardized testing is still a large component of admissions.
- For prospective graduate students, the opportunity to visit campus and interview in person is a distinct advantage available only to some candidates.
- Pipeline and recruitment programs for BIPOC students are not coordinated and supported across the University.

Proposed implementation: Develop University-wide, equitable standards for graduate student recruitment and retention programs, incentivized by central funding support for programs/units that demonstrate commitment to these standards. Further invest in and support efforts to significantly broaden the recruitment pipeline for prospective graduate students.

- Drop **all** GRE/standardized testing requirements, which have been demonstrated to be culturally biased.
- Develop and enforce a standardized interview process for prospective students.
 - Require in-person interviews for doctoral programs and provide travel and lodging/housing support for prospective students to visit campus **or** only conduct phone/virtual interviews to foster an equitable admissions and recruitment process.
- Provide financial resources for at least one, fully-funded doctoral student fellowship (full tuition plus practice/research-based living stipend) per Academic Unit, specifically for BIPOC students.
- Provide financial resources for at least two fully-funded Masters student fellowships (full tuition plus practice-based living stipend) per Academic Unit, specifically for BIPOC students.
 - Additionally, develop a pool of funds to be awarded competitively across the University (to be distributed to applying units) to support BIPOC graduate students.
- Develop a special University fund to provide financial support for hardships experienced by Hidden Black student populations such as undocumented/international students.
- Build systems and a culture that supports students of color (focused specifically on the non-students of color) to make campus more inclusive, welcoming, comfortable and safer for BIPOC students.
- Develop and support outreach programs for underrepresented students across all units, **similar to the Kline law immersion pipeline program** (where students from underrepresented backgrounds participate in a major-specific summer intensive where they would be exposed to Drexel faculty, prerequisites, test prep, etc.).
- All units need to create and submit an Annual Report with an accounting of recruitment and retention efforts for BIPOC students.
- Establish and sustain bi-directional partnerships with HBCUs and other minority-serving institutions that serve as stepping stones to graduate school at Drexel and for building a more inclusive culture.

- Example program model: [3+3 program: Kline Law and Spelman College](#)
- Have faculty and admissions committee representatives visit HBCUs for recruiting
- Develop pipeline program with Lincoln University and Cheyney University (closest HBCUs to Drexel) but also more programs with other HBCUs around the country.
- Continue building upon the Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation (LSAMP) network, while providing additional staffing and financial support for this office, as well as greater transparency of support from Drexel administration.
- Collaborate with the Center for Black Culture (CBC) to host graduate-student programming to facilitate connecting and networking with other graduate students, faculty and staff in different units, as well as community building.
 - The CBC could potentially lead the development and publishing of an Annual State of Inclusive Engagement Report that should be posted on the university's website.
- Foster a partnership with Black organizations on campus (i.e., Drexel Black Graduate Student Union and Black Faculty and Professional Staff Association).
 - The university should provide additional support (outside of GSA/SGO) for the Drexel Black Graduate Student Union (DBGSU) and other Black student, faculty and staff organizations.
 - Specifically support event(s) dedicated to building the Black graduate community.
 - Co-host and provide additional funding for introductory and annual events in coordination with DBGSU and/or catering costs (e.g., an event at the beginning of the academic year for DBGSU members or DBGSU's annual spring event "The Fry").
 - Create a central digital home for Black graduate students and students of color.
 - Example: [Dornsife DASH](#) allows students to opt-in to receive email event updates, but also provides an organized hub with information about events, relevant student organizations, career resources, etc.
- Leverage existing co-op relationships to create graduate student career development and employment opportunities.
 - An industry rotation program to obtain industry experience for underrepresented students, who compared to their peers, are more likely to not have had an experience.
 - Fits with the Drexel "brand" of experiential education.
 - Drexel has a long-standing co-op history, this needs to be leveraged for the graduate student population.
 - Facilitate industry-graduate student opportunities in STEM through the [GEM Fellowship program](#), a program dedicated to making the connection between companies and qualified underrepresented applicants.
 - Drexel co-op already maintains industry connections with an undergraduate focus, GEM can assist with the graduate student implementation into these companies.
 - Increase the number of opportunities for mentorship and networking for BIPOC students.

OBJECTIVE 3: Increase faculty understanding, acknowledgement, and empathy for students of color, particularly among those who advise and mentor graduate students.

Current environment:

- Graduate students, in particular, feel beholden to faculty mentors for funding, academic progress, and recommendations for career advancement.

Proposed implementation: In addition to **Objective 1** (a positive approach to community building), we support the following recommendations from other ARTF committees that particularly impact the graduate student experience:

- Develop and enforce a policy for faculty to maintain respect for student needs and concerns, particularly for students of color.
- Make diversity and inclusion activities a specific and distinct section of the Faculty Annual Review.
- As detailed above, develop and mandate a mandatory DEI/Antiracism learning pathway for faculty, including an affirmative statement of anti-racist practices.
 - Raise awareness among faculty of grad student career development programs, such as NIH's Resilience Training for students, with the potential for participation in such programs as part of the community building learning pathway.
- Encourage and support doctoral students across units to have a student advocate on their dissertation committees.
 - Examples at other schools: [Texas A&M and Oregon State](#)

OBJECTIVE 4: Increase hiring of Black/African American and Latinx faculty. The current low number of Black and Latinx faculty demonstrates that institutional accountability is needed.

Current environment:

- Graduate students of color have few mentors and instructors from similar backgrounds and experiences, to serve as mentors and advisors.

Proposed implementation: Our committee fully supports the detailed recommendations of the Faculty Recruitment and Retention Committee, especially increasing central funding to support new faculty hires and startup funds to provide more, diverse faculty mentors and advisors and greater accountability for high level administrators. We offer the following additional recommendations:

- Develop funding to support visiting faculty from other institutions, supporting 1-2 year residencies at Drexel, particularly for faculty of color.
 - This aligns with the above recommendation for a bi-directional partnership with HBCUs, where faculty from HBCUs can be invited as visiting faculty, and can also lead to opportunities for developing potential collaborations (e.g., grant opportunities, etc.)
- Secure endowed professorships, specifically for faculty of color.

- In addition to diversity of faculty, hold Deans and Department Heads accountable for DEI efforts reflected in research topics, course offerings, etc.

OBJECTIVE 5: Develop a graduate student-specific conflict resolution process.

Current environment:

- Too often our students, who experience racism at the hands of faculty, are terrified to report it because of the power dynamics of the graduate student-faculty relationship.
- The University ombudsperson is one resource, but as a faculty member, may be viewed by some students as having a conflict of interest.

Proposed implementation: Create and hire a position for a graduate-student specific ombudsperson or create a conflict resolution job position/role through the Graduate College to handle conflict resolution for graduate/doctoral students.

- This new position can liaise with OED.
- Invest in a co-created tracking system that the OED and ombudsperson use to monitor student reports.
- Establish different processes for masters and doctoral students given the varying levels of complexity with each degree (e.g., funding, external practicums, dissertation requirements, timelines) as well as different program timelines.
- Safe spaces and processes should be created to accommodate for trauma and allow for healing if a student suffers a racist incident on campus.

OBJECTIVE 6: Increase the number of Black seminar/invited speakers across all units.

Current environment:

- The number of seminar/invited speakers of color at Drexel events is frustratingly low, particularly within longstanding academic series.

Proposed implementation: Building upon the recommendation from the Faculty Recruitment and Retention Committee, we recommend creating a fund to support invited speakers of color for all events and audiences (student and faculty audiences, also both broad and more disciplinary focused).

- Develop the William Pittman speaker series (first Black male graduate of Drexel), a high-profile, University level speaker series with diverse speakers that can appeal to all disciplines.
 - Work with the National Society of Black Engineers and DBGSU to select speakers.
- Establish funds to provide travel support and honoraria to bring notable and accomplished external speakers to campus.
- Establish best practices for departments in inviting external speakers.

- Request Deans from all schools to ask students/faculty/staff in the schools to create lists of potential speakers.
 - Provide University matching support for speakers that have fees that might be too high for a certain school.
 - Nominate/propose for collaboration on cost for higher profile speakers.
- Connect with external organizations to broaden the pool of potential speakers:
 - Companies: Employer Resource Groups
 - Networks of Academics

General University recommendations that would impact the graduate student community

OBJECTIVE 7: First responders to mental health crises on campus and the surrounding neighborhoods should not be police.

Current environment:

- Campus Police are often the first responders for any crises or emergency situation on campus.
- An overbearing police presence has the potential to escalate non-violent, but more common issues facing the campus community, such as student anxiety and mental health.

Proposed implementation:

- Police officers should not be the first responders for mental health crises on campus, nor for students who live off-campus.
- Build upon the successful "Healing Hurt People" program (CNVSJ) and fund 4-6 Frontline Behavioral Health Respondents.

OBJECTIVE 8: Renounce and discontinue the use of HeLa cells in biomedical research conducted in this institution.

Current environment:

- The so-called "HeLa" cell line, the most commonly used human cell line in research, derived from cervical cancer cells taken in 1951 from Henrietta Lacks, a 31-year-old African American mother of five, without her consent.

Proposed implementation: The use of these cells serves as a glaring reminder of the many injustices committed towards Black people for the sake of medical research. The University should discontinue the use of these cells in all of its activities.