

SUGGESTIONS TO REDUCE RACISM IN ACADEMIA

INCREASE AWARENESS

- Give undergraduates tutorials on racism, bias and the benefits of a diverse team.
- Create opportunities for staff and students to have conversations on racism, and be willing to listen.
- Review curricula to ensure that Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) academics are fairly represented and that no groups feel marginalized.

PROVIDE SUPPORT

- Develop clear procedures for people to report workplace bullying and prejudice, with support for complainants.
- Set up BAME staff and student networks, and provide a BAME counsellor in student-support centres.
- Lobby universities to address BAME pay and promotions gaps.

DELIVER OPPORTUNITIES

- Develop robust, transparent recruitment procedures that ensure all job ads also target minorities.
- Adopt guidelines for the organization of diverse conferences and workshops.
- Ensure BAME representation on interview panels, paying for external members if required.

MAKE ROLE MODELS VISIBLE

- Organize a prestigious annual public lecture by a BAME researcher.
- Nominate worthy researchers from minority ethnic groups for prizes and honorary degrees.
- Lobby universities to appoint BAME staff to senior positions.

More suggestions and links to resources are at go.nature.com/3hftk1d. **K.N.L.**

psychological defence mechanisms that lead us to mis-categorize our experiences as trivial – to say to ourselves, ‘they’re just little things’ – are part of the problem. There are no ‘little things’ when it comes to racism.

The explicit racism of my past is now superseded by subtler discrimination. For 30 years, I have struggled with the fact that some founders of my field are still idolized as if their racist and eugenicist views were unimportant. (Only in 2020 has this problem finally been acknowledged by the Society for the Study of Evolution, based in St Louis, Missouri, which is renaming one of its prizes to avoid such associations.) I welcome this step, but I fear there remains little general

understanding of how academic cultures inadvertently exclude some groups. And for decades, I’ve also been attending scientific conferences in Europe and North America and have seen barely any BAME representation.

I probably would have been less successful as an academic if my father hadn’t anglicized our family name. His original surname was Lala, which he changed in the hope that his children would experience less prejudice. Even today, people with names associated with minority ethnic groups are substantially less likely to get a job interview, according to a report by sociologists Valentina Di Stasio and Anthony Heath (see go.nature.com/2egysnh), and BAME researchers receive fewer and smaller grants than their white counterparts. Names still matter in 2020, yet name-blind procedures are applied only haphazardly across academia.

That said, for me, academia has been a haven. Others are not so fortunate, and I regularly hear reports of harassment of BAME students across the sector. We delude ourselves if we think that there is no racial discrimination in academia because racist expletives are rarely uttered. Statistics show that the BAME population is under-represented at many UK and US universities (particularly at top-ranked institutions, and at more senior levels), that ethnic-minority staff are less likely to get promoted than their white counterparts, and that there exists a pay gap between white and BAME university employees (see Kalwant Bhopal’s 2015 book *The Experiences of Black and*

Minority Ethnic Academics). Sadly, many UK and US BAME academics continue to feel like outsiders, and that they have to reach higher standards to have the same level of success (as Bhopal also describes).

For the ethnic diversity of our universities to improve, actions are required that increase awareness and provide support (see ‘Suggestions to reduce racism in academia’). These are small steps, but they can have lasting effects, too. Our policies need to reach out to the excluded, to give them opportunities, and help them to perform at their best.

It is better to regard actions, rather than people, as racist. Each stereotype, social slight or micro-aggression propagates inequality, as does every case of someone being overlooked for promotion or admission to an institution, and every unfairly rejected grant application.

Many of us, including me, have spent too long viewing our experiences as too trifling to complain about, but we were wrong. The Black Lives Matter movement has helped me to appreciate this. Redressing racist brutality is surely the priority, but it is not enough. All of us must speak up and take responsibility for our corner of the world. Racism will be defeated only when people understand that these ‘little things’ matter.

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TIPS FOR BOOSTING CAMPUS DIVERSITY

Reimagine spaces to promote belonging.
By Danielle McCullough and Ruth Gotian.

Women, people from minority ethnic groups, first-generation university students and disabled people – to name but a few – are woefully under-represented in the basic sciences worldwide. Reports by the Association of American Medical Colleges and the US National Science Foundation show that this under-representation is pervasive at every level of academia, including among graduate students, postdocs and faculty members.

As scientists, we need to ensure that the basic sciences are more welcoming and inclusive. The COVID-19 pandemic has created a tipping point at which no one can ignore the growing public outcry for justice and equality,

particularly in light of the Black Lives Matter movement, which quickly became global. We already know that diverse perspectives increase productivity and creativity. So we must reimagine our spaces, behaviour and processes to promote a sense of belonging.

D.M. actively works to diversify her clinical field as chair of the committee on diversity and inclusion in anaesthesiology at Weill Cornell Medicine in New York City. For more than two decades, R.G. helped Weill Cornell’s Tri-Institutional MD-PhD Program to become a nationally recognized leader in recruiting and retaining students from under-represented groups. She also ran a popular summer programme in biomedical science for undergraduate students



Researchers validate COVID-19 antibody tests in New York City.

from minority ethnic groups.

Micro-aggressions and racist language and behaviour create a feeling of exclusion. As a Black woman and clinical faculty member, D.M. had several such experiences, including introducing herself as a physician but being mistaken for a janitor or a food-services worker. She subtly modified her own behaviour: she changed her hairstyle when entering a professional environment, always introduced herself as 'Doctor' rather than using her first name, and spent less time exchanging pleasantries with colleagues for fear of seeming unserious.

Feeling forced to take particular measures in the hope of receiving equal treatment reinforces a sense of demoralization. Institutions can take specific actions now to create a more welcoming and inclusive environment, rather than placing the burden of change on those against whom discrimination is directed. Here are five strategies that can help.

Identify sources of recruitment. Organizations such as the US-based Society for Advancement of Chicanos/Hispanics and Native Americans in Science, the Annual Biomedical Research Conference for Minority Students and the Leadership Alliance have established systems and programmes to develop a diversified scientific workforce. For decades, they've trained tens of thousands of students and postdocs from under-represented groups to find research opportunities, present their research and identify mentors and collaborators. Their national conferences are a magnet for junior scientists and physician-scientists. Such conferences, most of which are virtual now, are a wonderful opportunity to establish relationships with potential students, postdocs and their advisers.

Institutions might also wish to consider

developing their own pipeline. In 2019, the US National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine produced a comprehensive report on effective mentoring in science, technology, engineering, mathematics and medicine. The authors outlined interventions that included programmes with mentoring experiences, such as the Gateways to the Laboratory Program (R.G. led) and the US National Institutes of Health programme Maximizing Access to Research Careers.

Consider the speaker roster. Institutions that invite speakers need to examine their choices. Do the speakers look the same as those who were invited last year? Do they offer a diversity of perspective? Institutions might wish to ask others for recommendations on thought leaders in a particular field or to access a curated database of diverse scientists such as 500 Women Scientists or Editors of Color.

Re-evaluate physical spaces. Walking down the hallway and not seeing anyone who looks like you can be demoralizing. Hanging formal portraits of previous leaders is a long-standing tradition in academic institutions, but department heads, administrators and others should not discount the value of informal photographs from laboratory meetings, conferences and retreats. These images from camaraderie-building events showcase the diversity of people in the labs and in the institution.

Celebrate small wins of everyone in the lab. If a lab member publishes a paper, presents a poster, gives a talk or wins a grant or fellowship, principal investigators (PIs), department heads and administrators should show support by amplifying those achievements in department newsletters and websites and on personal

and departmental social-media platforms. Social-media posts of photos should include a congratulatory remark. This will amplify their achievement for everyone in their network, while underscoring support for their work.

Gather educational materials. We know that informal chats within US institutions are often focused on racism in the nation: the protests and calls for police reform have trickled into our offices. PIs and department heads should offer voluntary training to lab members now, because many are likely to be ready to engage on this subject, and should invest resources to make anti-bias training available to every staff member. Learners' attention will be more focused when they actively volunteer for training, rather than fulfilling a mandate.

Capitalize on this interest by making educational materials available to the lab. Strong anti-bias resources should be validated, easy to complete and free of charge to participants. The implicit-associations test is a quick way to start diversity training. It's free online and can be completed in about 30 minutes. The assessment aims to reveal the test-taker's unconscious biases against many groups, including women, people from minority ethnic groups and people who are obese or who have disabilities.

Those who are administering the test should emphasize that the results are completely private and only for self-reflection. Other options include a series of short videos published in 2016 by *The New York Times* that show how implicit biases affect everyday life for everyone. 'How to overcome our biases? Walk boldly toward them', a TEDx talk by lawyer Verna Myers, a US national activist in diversity and inclusion, has been celebrated for its aim of gently giving permission to people to accept their own biases in order to dismantle them.

It is important to note that everyone has subconscious or implicit biases, and that the first step towards overcoming them is self-awareness. Normalizing the fact that everyone has biases helps to create a safe space for learning; more robust and long-term initiatives such as formalized training programmes can be implemented later and can create lasting cultural change within organizations.

Diversifying the scientific workforce will not happen overnight, but we can take these steps today to change the landscape, improve productivity and help people to feel that they are a vital part of the team.

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