

Conner Lab: Anti-Discrimination Lab Action Plan

I. Motivation

- a. The Conner Lab is committed to creating a [lab culture](#) with a strong foundation in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), which we feel is an essential focus in any lab. We recognize that this statement must be accompanied by concrete actions to create an inclusive and equitable lab environment, and to address racist and other discriminatory structures that persist in science today.
- b. We recognize that aspects of identity are intersectional. While this action plan includes statements specific to race, gender, and sexual orientation, social and political identities overlap and cannot be addressed in isolation.
- c. We do not expect reward for this work. We do it because it is needed, and we communicate it to educate others. We hope that many actions can initiate change at higher (e.g. institutional) levels and cultivate an inclusive lab culture.
- d. This document is the result of lab discussions and further reading with input from all lab members.

II. Standing Lab Policies

- a. Create and maintain an inclusive lab environment in which lab members:
 - i. Feel physically and emotionally safe
 - ii. Feel comfortable and able to participate in discussion
 - iii. Feel able to make mistakes and express frustration
 - iv. Are aware of 'white' culture and take action to dismantle structural racism in academia
 - v. Participate in trainings offered by KBS or MSU at least once per year
 - vi. Know that anti-racism, climate justice, and inclusion work is valued
- b. Lab Expectations
 - i. Expectations for Jeff
 1. Acknowledge my inherent position of power and take on responsibility that comes with it, including being open to ideas and criticism
 2. Be supportive to lab members if there are conflicts with other members of the MSU and KBS communities
 3. Enforce lab policies to ensure safety of all lab members
 - ii. Expectations for students and post docs
 1. Respect labmates and our differences; this includes respecting all lab members' work, career and personal choices, learning styles, interests, cultures, backgrounds, etc.
 2. Be supportive of labmates' work and promote collaboration, not competition, within the lab.
- c. Authorship Guidelines: We define five key roles in the generation of a manuscript - experimental design, protocol development, data collection, data analysis, and drafting and editing the manuscript. Any lab member who played a significant role in at least two of these should be a coauthor if they agree to be; our policy is to be inclusive rather than exclusive. The first author plays the lead role drafting the manuscript and on one or more of the other key parts of the project. Jeff is not an author on all papers to come from the lab, but is often last author, which means he played a leadership role throughout the project.
- d. Hiring and Recruiting Practices

- i. Lab technician and postdoctoral positions are posted on the MSU HR website and Indeed.com. Jeff also reaches out to connections in the community, such as Western Michigan University and Kalamazoo College, for part-time technician positions. Full-time technician and postdoctoral positions are also advertised on [evoldir](#), and Jeff emails colleagues around the country. The lab is open to new advertising suggestions. Most employee positions are as post-docs or part time research technicians.
- ii. The Conner Lab recruits graduate students through the [Plant Biology department](#). Interested students should reach out to Jeff by email and contact current lab members.
- iii. Starting in Fall 2021, Conner Lab members will participate in the [MSU EEB graduate program preview](#). The goal of this program is to demystify the graduate school application process and increase access of graduate education for historically excluded communities.
- iv. Resource: [KBS Culture and Inclusion Committee guidance on diversifying hiring practices](#)
- e. Teaching Practices

- i. See Anti-racism actions below (IV.d.)

III. Discrimination Reporting and Consequences

Note there are specific [protocols related to sexual misconduct](#) for Relationship Violence and Sexual Misconduct (RVSM) related issues. These points address other offenses

a. Structure for Reporting

- i. Reporting will vary between situations, and the course of action will depend on who is reporting (a victim or bystander) and how the victim wishes to proceed. It will also vary if the actions target a specific person, a specific group of people, or are broadly unacceptable.
- ii. If you are a bystander, do something!
 1. If there is a specific victim, and there is an established comfortable relationship between you and the victim, discuss with them how they would like you to address the situation.
 2. If there is no specific victim, you can initiate a conversation with the perpetrator after letting Jeff know that the situation is occurring.
 3. Additionally, you can set up a meeting with Jeff or the KBS director to discuss the situation and have someone else address the perpetrator. This is a good option if there is a specific victim but you do not have a relationship with them or there is no specific victim and you would like support in addressing the situation.
 4. You can also report the incident anonymously to the [MSU misconduct hotline](#)
- iii. If you are a victim:
 1. If you would like to talk to Jeff or the KBS director about the situation, you are encouraged to do so, but it is not required. Keep in mind that Jeff and the KBS director are mandatory reporters, meaning that if you talk to them about an issue of sexual misconduct or relationship violence, they will have to report it to OIE. This doesn't mean an investigation immediately happens, though; a case will only be opened and pursued if the victim chooses to do so. While this document pertains to non-RVSM discrimination, we recognize that misconduct concerns may overlap with RVSM.

2. For additional support, problems with Jeff, or problems that you are not comfortable discussing with Jeff, set up a meeting with:
 - a. [MSU Ombudsperson](#) - You can set up an appointment to talk with them one on one about your options in addressing the situation. They can also facilitate a discussion between two parties, if you'd like. Anything you tell them is confidential.
 - b. If you would like to see formal sanctions and an investigation, you are encouraged to report an incident to OIE: speak to a mandatory reporter (Jeff is one) or report directly to the [Office of Institutional Equity \(OIE\)](#). The initial report of an incident does not immediately open an investigation, and you do not have to pursue a case if you do not want to. If you pursue a case, there is an investigation by OIE and MSU Police, and there may be sanctions for the perpetrator. You may also ask about who will be informed when your case is submitted. For employees, in some situations Jeff will be notified about the case. For students, the relevant department chair will be notified. These [confidential resources](#) may help you decide which actions you would like to take.
 - c. [MSU Dean of Students Office \(DOSO\)](#)- works to resolve conflicts that involve students. They focus on the goals and hopes of the victim. Any information submitted online remains confidential.
 - d. The departmental graduate director if you are a graduate student. For PLB, this is Diane Ebert-May. You can talk to the graduate student director about an issue with Jeff or with other graduate students.
 - e. KBS Director if the concern is between KBS graduate students, staff, or faculty. The KBS Director is Fred Janzen.
 - f. Other faculty/staff. They can help discuss options to address the situation and provide support in a later conversation with the perpetrator, Jeff, the graduate director, KBS director, or MSU Ombudsperson. For graduate students, this might be someone on your committee.
 - g. [MSU's hotline](#) for reporting misconduct - you can remain anonymous if you'd like, and the report can result in an investigation of the situation.
- b. In the case of a violation that has no specific victim, violations will first result in a conversation between Jeff and the perpetrator. If violations persist, it will be a violation of the [KBS Code of Conduct](#) and disciplinary actions will be taken.
 - i. Examples of these violations include: use of racial slurs, lack of respect for lab members, violating the safety of lab members, taking credit for another lab member's work, not participating in annual DEI trainings
- c. In the case of a violation with a specific victim, Jeff will first talk to the victim of unwanted behavior to see what they would like to happen about the situation. This will be considered when determining how to handle the perpetrator. Again, if violations persist, it will be a violation of the [KBS Code of Conduct](#) and disciplinary actions will be taken.
 - i. Examples of these violations include: consistent misgendering, directed use of racial slurs, inappropriate questions

IV. Actions: 2021-2022

- a. Increase lab discussions of racism and other forms of discrimination
 - i. Minimum of 1 lab meeting per semester spent learning about DEI. This may include reading papers about DEI or updating lab policies.
- b. Set up field and lab protocols to ensure safety
 - i. Include conversations about student comfort level before heading into the field in small groups or pairs. Revise any field plans to ensure student safety and comfort.
 - ii. Send lab members to the field with:
 - 1. Letter on MSU letterhead about their work; the KBS Culture and Inclusion Committee has drafted a fillable letter including Dr. Janzen's signature and contact information which can be used by lab members. A copy is available in the lab OneDrive under the Active Lists folder.
 - 2. MSU magnet to use on personal vehicle and safety vests; there are vests and car magnets available for KBSers in the Conner lab. The items should be taken when driving a personal vehicle off site.
 - 3. Draft a scripted answer for community members who ask what you are doing when in the field to be prepared for their questions.
 - 4. Keep a copy of required permits or permission documents in the vehicle and with you in the field.
 - iii. Use a check-in system when in the field:
 - 1. Could include signing a sheet in the lab when you go to the field and when you return each day or having another lab member aware of your plans ('I'll be in the field from 2pm to 4pm, be worried if I don't check back in by 5pm!')
- c. Build multi-mentoring structure in the lab
 - i. For undergraduate students: graduate students, post-docs, and PI
 - ii. For graduate students: post-docs, PI
 - iii. Mentorship from students, post-docs and faculty members outside the Conner Lab is valuable in building a multi-mentoring structure. For graduate students, additional mentors may include the thesis committee.
- d. Anti-racism Actions
 - i. Ensure weekly lab meeting readings and invited seminar speakers include diverse scientists, including scientists of color
 - 1. Assess numbers annually as a lab for who we invited to speak, which talks we attended, and how we chose lab meeting readings.
 - 2. Aim for scientists of color to talk about their science, not just their contributions to DEI
 - 3. Resources: 500queerscientists.com; projectbiodiversify.org/
 - ii. Teaching
 - 1. Update teaching slides to ensure the racist history of eugenics is addressed when eugenicists and eugenics-based concepts are discussed
 - 2. Utilize online databases (such as the resources above) to expand the examples used to teach concepts to provide students with examples of diverse scientists, particularly underrepresented scientists, doing super cool science!

3. Continue to use as many teaching approaches as possible to appeal to many learning styles (slides, small group discussion, active learning, reading, writing, and presentation).
4. Continue to discuss classroom safety reporting structures and inclusive environment during the syllabus overview

V. Accountability Structures

- a. Assess progress of actions during December Lab meeting
- b. Review and update this document annually during the summer

This document was influenced by the [Evans Lab Anti-Racism Corrective Action Plan](#).

References:

<https://saraheevanslab.weebly.com/diversity-equity-and-inclusion.html>

<https://mitgovlab.org/updates/action-plan-to-support-anti-racism-and-black-lives-a-start/>

<https://osf.io/7npfy/wiki/E.%20Lab%20Plan%20for%20Anti-Racism/>

Information You Should Know

- [CAPS](#) - Free counseling services for undergraduate and graduate students. Usually the appointments will only go for a semester, but they make exceptions if you cannot afford other counselling.
- Faculty, staff, retirees, graduate student employee, and their families can access free counseling through the [Employee Assistance Program](#).
- At KBS, there is a gender-neutral and wheelchair-accessible (technically; it's hard to get through the room, and you have to move the doorstep) bathroom on the first floor of the academic building near the ramp entrance.
- On main campus, there are two gender-neutral and wheelchair-accessible bathrooms on each floor of the Plant Biology labs building down each South hall. There is also a gender-neutral (not wheelchair-accessible, requires handling of doorstep) bathroom in the basement of the Plant and Soil Sciences building, between the growth chamber prep room and A66, by the elevators. [Here](#) is a map of all single-use bathrooms on main campus.
- Information on preferred name for graduate students and undergraduate students can be found [here](#).
 - o When applying as a graduate student, you can have a preferred name. The preferred name on your application is used when setting up your MSU NetID. Some systems, such as EBS for being paid as a TA, do use your legal name.
 - o Jeff should not (as in, he probably does not) have access to your legal name.
 - o As an employee, Jeff should still not have access to your legal name though HR will use your legal name in some systems.
- KBS is working to improve wheelchair accessibility. Elevators, ramps, and accessible bathrooms are available, but the elevators do not always work. Increasing accessibility is an ongoing conversation in the KBS community and the Accessibility subcommittee of the KBS Culture and Inclusion Committee.