

Conner Lab: Anti-Discrimination Action Plan

I. Background

- 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 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 ongoing 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 discussions.
 - 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 at least one DEI training beyond the required RVSM training each year.
 1. Trainings should be added to your CV or resume.
 2. Students: We also suggest filling out the committee meeting form as a self-evaluation before your committee meeting and including DEI trainings under the professional development question.
 - 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.
 4. Follow and enforce PLB Mentorship, Committee, and Comprehensive exam Documents of Expectation (<https://plantbiology.natsci.msu.edu/graduate-program/graduate-handbook.aspx>), including the Advisor-Student Expectations Companion form
 - ii. Expectations for students, technicians, and post docs:
 1. Respect lab mates and our differences; this includes respecting all lab members' work, career and personal choices, learning styles, interests, cultures, backgrounds, etc.
 2. Be supportive of lab mates' work and promote collaboration, not competition, within the lab.
 3. Follow the student expectations for Mentorship, Committees, and Comprehensive exams, linked above

- iii. Have a minimum of 1 lab meeting per semester spent learning about DEI. This may include reading papers about DEI or updating lab policies.
- iv. Build collaborative teams across lab roles.
 - 1. Mentorship in the lab is not unidirectional or hierarchical. All lab members (students, technicians, postdocs, and teachers) bring unique experiences to the lab and act as mentors for other lab members.
 - 2. This mentorship may be formal, in the case of REUs or RETs, but it is frequently informal.
 - 3. We also value mentorship from outside the Conner lab. For graduate students, additional mentors include the thesis committee.
- c. Field and Lab Safety Protocols
 - 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. Time of day, mode of travel, apparel, and proximity to drinking water are important considerations.
 - 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 the current KBS director's signature and contact information which can be used by lab members. A copy is available [in the lab OneDrive within the Active Lists](#) folder for current lab members. (Note that this file is outdated and is signed by the former KBS director, but this document will be updated when a new file is provided.)
 - 2. MSU magnet to use on personal vehicle and safety vests; there are vests and car magnets available in the Conner lab. The items should be taken when driving a personal vehicle off site.
 - 3. For each field project, 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. Jeff, and other lab members if they volunteer to be, are willing to receive text or email check in messages ("I'll be in the field near Lux Arbor from 2pm to 4pm, be worried if I don't check back in by 5pm!").
- d. Authorship Guidelines: Awarding or denying authorship can be a source of discrimination. To address this, we define six key roles in the generation of a manuscript:
 - i. generating questions to be addressed
 - ii. experimental design
 - iii. protocol development
 - iv. data collection
 - v. data analysis
 - vi. Drafting

All authors approve and have the opportunity to edit the manuscript

Any lab member, including undergrads, who played a significant role in at least one 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. This policy should be discussed as soon as possible when a project is initiated and/or when someone joins the project, understanding that projects evolve over time and clear communication about authorship is important.

e. Hiring and Recruiting Practices:

- i. Increasing the diversity of the lab is a major goal. Full-time positions are required to have a search committee, chaired by Jeff and including one or two other lab members. Lab technician and postdoctoral positions are posted on the MSU HR website, KBS Admin can post it on Indeed.com, and Jeff puts them on LinkedIn, [evoldir](#), [ecoevojobs](#), and [Texas A&M job board](#) where relevant. Jeff also reaches out to connections in the community, such as Western Michigan University and Kalamazoo College, for part-time technician positions, and emails colleagues around the country. The lab is open to new advertising suggestions.
- ii. The Conner Lab recruits graduate students primarily through the [Plant Biology department](#). [Interested students](#) should reach out to Jeff by email and contact current lab members in the fall before applying.
- iii. Conner Lab members will participate in the [Envision EEB](#) Graduate Preview Weekend events at KBS. 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](#)

f. Teaching Practices: We will incorporate anti-discrimination actions into our teaching. Including:

- i. Annually update teaching slides to be more inclusive; for example:
 1. Ensure the racist history of eugenics is addressed when eugenicists and eugenics-based concepts are discussed. [Here](#) is a good starting point from the NIH.
 2. Be thoughtful about how to teach sex and gender in biology (see [Project Biodiversify resources](#) and lesson plans from [pgEd](#)), including LGBTQ+ examples.
- ii. 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!
- iii. Continue to use many teaching approaches to appeal to many learning styles (slides, small group discussion, active learning, reading, writing, and student presentation).
- iv. Continue to discuss classroom safety reporting structures and inclusive environment during the syllabus overview.

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. To report unacceptable behavior, Jeff is the first person to go to if you feel comfortable doing so. You can also talk to the KBS Title 9 Coordinator (currently Sarah Reimer), KBS Director, PLB Graduate Director, or any other staff/faculty. They can help discuss additional options and provide support for next steps. There are formal reporting structures in place at MSU that you can utilize which are detailed below.
- iii. If you are the target of discrimination or unwanted behavior:
 - 1. If you would like to talk to Jeff, the KBS Title 9 Coordinator, or the KBS director about the situation, you are encouraged to do so, but it is not required. Keep in mind that all MSU employees 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 happens, though; a case will only be opened and pursued if the impacted person 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. The KBS Title 9 Coordinator, Sarah Reimer.
 - b. The departmental graduate director if you are a graduate student. For PLB, this is Diane Ebert-May and Lars Brudvig. You can talk to the graduate student director about an issue with Jeff or with other graduate students.
 - c. KBS Director if the concern is between KBS graduate students, staff, or faculty.
 - d. 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, or Director, or MSU Ombudsperson. For graduate students, send Jeff out of the room for a few minutes during each committee meeting to check in with the rest of your committee. This is a time when conflict with Jeff can be raised.
 - e. [Office of Student Support and Accountability](#): works to resolve conflicts that involve students. They focus on the goals and hopes of the impacted person. Any information submitted online remains confidential.
 - f. [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.
 - 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. Bystanders can also report to the hotline.
 - h. 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.

- i. [Counseling and Psychiatric Services \(for non-employees\)](#) - short-term virtual therapy, crisis hotline
 - j. [Employee Assistance program](#)
- iv. If you are a bystander, do something!
1. If there is a specific impacted person, and there is an established comfortable relationship between you and the impacted person, discuss with them how they would like you to address the situation.
 2. If there is no specific impacted person, you can initiate a conversation with the perpetrator after letting Jeff know that the situation is occurring.
 3. You can set up a meeting with Jeff or any of the options described above (particularly the Director, the Graduate Director, or other faculty/staff) to discuss the situation and have someone else address the perpetrator. This is a good option if there is a specific impacted person but you do not have a relationship with them or there is no specific impacted person and you would like support in addressing the situation.
- b. Lab policy to address discriminatory actions:
- i. If a violation has no specific impacted person, violations will first result in a conversation between Jeff and the perpetrator.
 1. 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
 - ii. If a violation has a specific impacted person, Jeff will first talk to the person impacted by unwanted behavior to see what they would like to happen about the situation. This will be considered when determining how to handle the perpetrator.
 1. Examples of these violations include: consistent misgendering, directed use of racial slurs, inappropriate questions
 - iii. In either case, if violations persist, it will be a violation of the [KBS Code of Conduct](#) and disciplinary actions will be taken.
- IV. Actions: 2026-2027
- a. Work with KBS Admin to provide continued suggested edits to the REU/URA/intern applications to be clearer and more accessible to students not familiar with applying to research opportunities.
 - i. Ava will discuss with Angie the suggested edits made by the lab
 - b. Request in person DEI training at KBS. While KBS provides numerous opportunities to engage with DEI trainings, we will request a return to in person trainings that create more engagement beyond attendance to complete a requirement.
 - i. Bystander intervention training
 - ii. Suggest wellness/burnout/imposter syndrome sessions, possibly also for summer students (Dr. [Olivia Scott](#) is an option)
 - c. Continue to increase lab discussions of racism and other forms of discrimination.

- i. We will invite scientists of color and Indigenous scientists to talk about their science, not just their contributions to DEI. We will talk about inviting a speaker during a lab meeting in June.
 - ii. 2 DEI lab meetings per year, one to update this plan and one paper discussion
 - iii. Resources: 500queerscientists.com; projectbiodiversify.org/, “Native American DNA” by Kim Tallbear
- V. Accountability Structures
- a. Assess progress of actions during December Lab meeting.
 - b. Review and update this document annually during the summer.
 - c. The DEI advocate (for 2026-2027: Jimmy Bingman) will remind us of these goals. The DEI advocate is a 1 year position and will switch over after our annual review of this document.
 - d. [Past Action Plans](#) are archived for reference (currently only accessible to lab members).

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 doorstop) bathroom on the first floor of the academic building near the ramp entrance. There is a second gender-neutral restroom on the second floor of the stack building next to the stairwell to the main 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. [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. You may change your preferred name via [My Spartan Identity](#)
- 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.
- KBS has a wellness room (Stack 143) with a sink and refrigerator available to all, including nursing mothers and anyone needing a quiet private space.
 - o PLB has a nursing room in the 1st floor south wing