

University of Pennsylvania
Stuart Weitzman School of Design
Diversity Action Plan Update
November 27, 2020

Introduction

The tragic events involving Black, Indigenous, and People of Color over the past year – including the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and far too many other African Americans who have been killed by those charged to protect – have prompted a redoubling of the School’s commitment to building a more just, equitable, and healthy School community and to eradicating hatred, bigotry, and racism. We recognize our obligation as a school to support diversity, equity, and inclusion in our community and the professions we help sustain.

We also recognize that responding to centuries of injustice and inequality is not an intellectual exercise. If we are to make progress, we must commit ourselves, individually and collectively, to eliminate the harmful biases within our community. Over the past several months, we have taken concrete steps to strengthen our DEI efforts to make them more ambitious, comprehensive, and transparent. This *Diversity Action Plan Update* highlights recent activities and initiatives in the past year focused on the following four domains: (1) recruiting and retaining a more diverse faculty, (2) recruiting and retaining a more diverse student body, (3) creating a more inclusive community, and (4) implementing systems and structures to monitor the School’s progress and hold it accountable.

I. Recruiting and Retaining a More Diverse Faculty

The Weitzman School continues to identify strategies for recruiting a diverse pool of applicants to fill open standing faculty positions and to identify applicants with a commitment to incorporating diverse perspectives into their curriculum.

In the 2019-2020 academic year, we conducted two standing faculty searches for four tenure-track positions in Architecture and in Landscape Architecture. These searches included training for committee members on implicit bias in the search process, featured language in the job posting regarding the value of diversity in our school, expanded outreach to promote the positions, and ongoing demographic reports to inform search committee members of the demographic pool throughout the process.

Outreach for these positions included the National Organization of Minority Architects (NOMA), Women in Architecture, Hispanic Outlook in Higher Education, the Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, and the Higher Education Recruitment Consortium (HERC), DiverseJobs, and other informal networks of alumni and faculty.

In July 2020, we welcomed two women to our standing faculty in tenure-track positions, including an African American scholar whose research examines the politics of urban planning and the ways that disenfranchised groups re-appropriate their marginalized spaces in the city to gain access to and sustain urban political power. Also, the Department of City and Regional Planning, welcomed a second *Postdoctoral Fellow for Academic Diversity Program*.

In fall 2020 the Historic Preservation Program welcomed a new Adjunct Associate Professor and Senior Advisor to the *Center for the Preservation of Civil Rights Sites* who is currently executive director of the African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund which promotes the role of cultural preservation in telling the nation's full history, while also empowering activists, entrepreneurs, artists, and civic leaders to advocate on behalf of African American historic places.

Lance Freeman joined the Weitzman School in fall 2020 as the provost's distinguished visiting faculty fellow. Each year, Penn appoints a senior scholar of national or international prominence as the Provost's distinguished visiting faculty fellow based on a record of promoting civic engagement, scholarly innovation and inclusive communities. Freeman is a professor in the urban planning program at Columbia University and is the author of the book *There Goes the Hood: Views of Gentrification from the Ground Up* (Temple University Press, 2006) and *A Haven and a Hell: The Ghetto in Black America* (Columbia University Press, 2019).

II. Recruiting and Retaining a More Diverse Student Body

We continue our work to increase the number of underrepresented minority (URM) applicants to the Weitzman School. We have increased our outreach to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) and Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI) in the past year. Our admissions office has contacted 33 HBCUs and HSIs for recruiting presentations, including Morgan State University Hampton University, Georgia Tech, Howard University, and Morehouse. In addition, we collaborated with the National Organization of Minority Architects (NOMA) to announce various programs and scholarship opportunities, and we participated in the NOMA Graduate School Fair and the California Forum for Diversity in Graduate Education. We've increased the number of recruiting fairs, including adding nine institutions that show relatively high percentages of undergraduate URM students, such as Dillard University, Arizona State, North Carolina A&T State, Loyola Marymount, and University of Illinois Chicago

Weitzman has included DEI content at our open houses with DEI panel discussions, students of color receptions, and an information session for LGBTQ students. Our yield rate for underrepresented minorities has gone from 27% in FY 19 to 41% in the current fiscal year; however, we know that it is important to increase the overall number of URM applications through assertive outreach and recruitment.

We currently have a Penn Fontaine Fellow in the Department of City and Regional Planning. Fontaine fellowships support graduate students from groups “traditionally and historically underrepresented” in higher education – specifically U.S. African American, Native American, and Hispanic students – and, as diversity is now more broadly defined, may also include, for example, first-generation college students who are from low income families, or students whose backgrounds are most underrepresented in a specific discipline or field. We also had an architecture PhD student receive Penn’s *Predoctoral Fellowship for Excellence through Diversity*. This fellowship support scholars from a range of backgrounds who can contribute to the diversity of Penn and the higher education community.

III. Fostering a Culture of Inclusion

Over the summer of 2020, the Dean’s Office developed a new *Commitment to DEI Action Plan* (attached) that includes 14 measurable goals in five categories: (1) recruitment and retention of faculty, staff, and students, (2) creating a more inclusive community, (3) knowledge production/advancing the professions, (4) financial support, (5) infrastructure, transparency, and reporting. This plan was developed with input from the department chairs, the School’s Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee, and Inclusion in Design (IiD), a student group dedicated to fostering an environment in which students of color, marginalized identities, and allies can thrive. It includes guiding principles demonstrating the School’s commitment to anti-racism and articulates clear, measurable actions. The Dean also charged each department and research center to develop DEI plans focused specifically on their department/center, and each department was also required to identify a department-specific Diversity Search Advisor as well as representatives to the School-wide DEI committee. Many of the specific principles and actions in both the School-wide *Commitment to DEI Action Plan*, and in each department’s plan, contribute directly toward the School’s goal of fostering a culture of inclusion.

Since then, the Dean’s Office has met with IiD, and the DEI Committee, which includes faculty, students, and staff, has also continued to meet. This DEI Committee organizes DEI events, coordinates trainings and discussions on related issues, updates the school’s website, communicates to the wider school community, and reports progress toward goals outlined in the school’s Faculty Diversity and Affirmative Action Plans. Below are some recent initiatives implemented by the School and the DEI Committee.

- **Curriculum Review**

This September, the Dean charged each of the School's five departments with reviewing and restructuring the curricula to ensure a more diverse representation of voices and perspectives, including BIPOC voices. More specifically, each department was required to work with faculty to review their departmental curriculum, courses, and syllabi to examine all courses and syllabi to ensure that:

- A diversity of voices and perspectives are represented,
- Courses and syllabi do not promulgate racist assumptions,
- Models elevated and cited do not reproduce a homogeneous discipline,
- Courses and studios (both required and elective) explore social impact, social justice, and interrogate canonized bibliographies, histories and methodologies to address material and voices previously excluded,
- Courses and studios identify strategies to address absent voices and topics, and
- Community representatives and BIPOC critics are invited to attend mid and final reviews.

A review of each department's curriculum and recommendations are due to the Dean at the end of this fiscal year.

- **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Trainings**

- In August 2020, the School identified three DEI facilitators to work with the school community to provide ongoing trainings and workshops to be offered to faculty, staff, and students. In academic year 2020-2021, faculty, staff, and students will participate in versions of the following workshops:
 - *Workshop #1, October 21: Introduction to DEI and Oppressive Systems* - an overview of what DEI really is, investigate systems of oppression, power, and privilege, and explore implicit bias.
 - *Workshop #2, November 13: Intersectionality, Our Own Identities, and Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression Foundations* - an overview of the important framework of intersectionality, allow attendees to consider their own social identities, and introduce what it means to be anti-racist and anti-oppressive.
 - *Workshop #3, January 2021: Microaggressions, Inequities, and Toward a Cultural Shift* - an overview of microaggressions and explore how diversity, equity, and inclusion issues exist in academic settings, including structural and systemic inequities in academia, and identify how to support marginalized communities and promote cultural change.
- In August 2020, Weitzman offered two Faculty Workshops on *Discourse Across Difference* – Led by Lubna Mian, Associate Vice Provost for Faculty; this session provided an overview on patterns of latent bias in our academic life, educational and climate implications, and ways to

- support students with the inequities of our culture; includes strategies for teaching and talking about and across race, including classroom scenarios to consider.
- In August 2020, the School introduced a new canvas course, developed by PennNursing and SP2, *The Penn Experience: Racism, Reconciliation and Engagement*. This course, with focused content modules, was offered as a component for incoming students and used in various ways by each department. Plans are underway to provide this to all students (new and returning) in future years. This course works towards developing a common language and concepts to facilitate subsequent difficult conversations about race, racism, and difference. The comprehensive course features video interviews, presentations, short readings, and podcasts.
- **Roundtable Discussions/Coalitions beyond Penn**
 - Penn's Architecture Department was represented by students at two AIA NY roundtable discussions regarding systemic racism within the field, taking place in August and October.
 - Penn's Architecture Department is represented in an Equity, Inclusion, and Diversity (EDI) consortium of greater Philadelphia architecture schools, local AIA chapter, and local design firms, convened by the Philadelphia Center for Architecture and Design. This group meets bi-weekly and is working collectively to advocate and develop new initiatives to attract and retain more students of color to the architecture field, advocate for the needs of underrepresented individuals in the profession, and provide new educational opportunities to consider the impact of design work on communities of color.
 - **Student-Focused Events**
 - In August 2020, we added a new DEI session to new student orientation, led by Erin Cross and Malik Muhammed from Penn's LGBT Center.
 - For New Student Orientation, we added a panel discussion focusing specifically on community engagement, highlighting the work of PennPraxis Design Fellows.
 - In September 2020, the Dean hosted two Weitzman Welcome events; these were meet-n-greet sessions for students of color and LBGQT students.
 - **Initiatives Focused on Racial Justice and Public Space/the Built Environment**
 - Monument Lab, which is affiliated with the Weitzman Center for Public Art and Space, a Center within the Department of Fine Arts, received a transformative \$4 million grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. The grant will support the production of a definitive audit of the nation's monuments; the opening of ten Monument Lab field research offices; and capacity for Monument Lab to hire full-time staff and develop significant art and justice

- initiatives. The grant was created “to transform the way our country’s histories are told in public spaces.”
- Dean Steiner is co-chairing the Campus Iconography Group at Penn. This group will engage in broad outreach and advise on further steps to ensure that the placement and presence of statues and other prominent iconography better reflects our achievements and aspirations to increase the diversity of the Penn community.
 - Announced in October 2020, Weitzman launched the Center for the Preservation of Civil Rights Sites (CPCRS), led by Faculty Director Randall Mason, to advance the understanding and sustainable conservation of heritage sites relating to African American struggles for equality, from before the passage of the 14th Amendment to the present day.
- **Initiatives Focused on Design Outreach to Younger Scholars**
 - In summer 2020, our undergraduate architecture department taught design skills to rising high school seniors attending the School District of Philadelphia public and charter schools as part of the Penn Rising Senior Summer Academy. This completely free, online program, open to over 14,000 rising seniors, introduced new students to the design professions.
 - In summer 2020, the Penn Praxis Design Fellows program expanded through a partnership with the Fresh Air Fund of New York City to launch *Fresh Air Everywhere*, an intensive seven-week online program that provides high school students with an introduction to the fields of design and architecture while fostering skills in communication and community engagement. A team of Penn graduate students and recent graduates from the architecture, fine arts and landscape architecture departments took on the task of developing a curriculum for 150 high school students.
 - **Public Talks/Lectures**

The Weitzman School offers over 50 lectures/talks/panel discussions each semester for students, alumni, and the public. Below is a sampling of some events in summer and fall 2020 that address topics relating to diversity, equity, and inclusion:

 - July 9: Development and Alumni Relations presents: *Been Here: A Virtual “Corner Talk” on Black Urbanism, Design, and Planning*
 - September 29: Development and Alumni Relations presents: *Activism in Practice: A Conversation with two of the founders of Women in Design (1999-2000)*
 - October 5: Architecture presents: *Esra Akcan: Right-to-Heal: Architecture and Transitional Justice*, discussing new ways to understand architecture’s global movement, as well as its complicit or constitutive role in global, social and environmental justice.

- October 12: City and Regional Planning presents Dr. Destiny Thomas: *In Search of Our Mother's Urbanism: A Womanist Call for Spatial Reparations*. Dr. Destiny Thomas is the founder and CEO of Thrivance Group, a multi-regional, socially responsible firm that works to make public spaces and public services safe, healthy and accessible, especially for Black, Indigenous, and transgender people, and those with disabilities.
- October 21: Andrea Roberts: *The Freedom Colony Repertoire: Promising Approaches to Bridging and Bonding Social Capital between Urban and Rural Black Meccas* Roberts engages in an ethnographic study of rural freedom colonies.
- Activ-ISM series: As part of raising consciousness about design justice, the Department of Landscape Architecture devoted the fall 2020 seven-part lecture series (*Activ-ISM*) to talks regarding activist practices and community engagement.
- October 8 - 9: Fine Arts presents *Monument Lab Town Hall: Shaping the Past Symposium*. This project facilitates a transnational exchange program bringing artists and activists together in dialogue to highlight ongoing critical memory interventions in sites and spaces in North America and Germany.
- October 9: Historic Preservation presents Brent Leggs, *Out of Culture and Preservation, a Racial and Economic Justice Movement*
- November 2: Architecture presents Sophie Hochhäusl: *Memories of the Resistance: The Defiant Life of a Female Architect, 1938-1945*
- Spring 2021: *Transdisciplinary Urbanism in Times of Precarity* lecture series, funded by the Provost's *Excellence Through Diversity* initiative. This lecture series will include three talks, all developed in collaboration with partners in from GSWS, LGBT Center, Casa Latina, and Kelly Writers House.

IV. Monitoring Our Progress/Holding Ourselves Accountable

To help operationalize the actions outlined in the Weitzman *Commitment to DEI Action Statement*, the School developed a workplan that includes goals, specific action steps, people responsible for implementing specified actions, target dates, and performance/outcome measures. The goal of this work is to document the School's progress, identify areas requiring improvement, and measure our accomplishments using data, feedback, observation, and reports.

The Dean's Office has also hired a part-time DEI Initiatives Assistant – a work-study paid position created to support these efforts and help track progress. Some departments are also designating paid student work specifically to DEI research efforts within their disciplines.

V. Conclusion

In the past year, the Weitzman School has made progress in articulating, refining and implementing plans to promote greater diversity, equity, and inclusion in our community, and we are proud of the increase in conversations regarding implicit bias, racial justice, and social equity that are taking place across the School. However, we recognize that the School still faces tremendous challenges, particularly in terms of recruiting and retaining BIPOC students, faculty, and staff. Changing the School's culture to make sure that every member of our community feels valued and supported, and that the School's teaching, scholarship, research, and community engagement activities increase opportunities to participate for those whose voices have previously been underrepresented requires a multi-faceted approach. We look forward to tackling these challenges with increased dedication and with the plans, structures, support systems, team members, partnerships, and openness necessary to make real change possible.