

**Weitzman School of Design
Excellence Through Diversity Update – 2022-2023
October 12, 2023**

1. Introduction

The Weitzman School of Design is committed to cultivating an environment that celebrates and promotes diversity, champions social equity, and is inclusive of all members of our community. Our pursuit of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) is framed in terms of nurturing a greater sense of *justice* by planning to make structural changes that ensure everyone in our community has access to equal opportunities and that everyone in our community knows that they *belong*.

While *diversity* is about representation (are there “enough” people from different backgrounds here?), *inclusion* is about action (what can we do to make people with different identities feel welcome?), and *equity* is about giving everyone access to the same opportunities (recognizing that some members of our community experience unfair advantages or barriers), creating a sense of *belonging* means that *everyone* in our community feels valued and is not afraid to ask questions or raises issues.

The Weitzman School Justice and Belonging (JxB) Initiative invites students, faculty, and staff from all over the world to become more aware of their power as learners, educators, and facilitators to make design justice a central motivation for the Weitzman community. We are working to create a shared understanding of how to undo and unlearn the systems of oppression by focusing on our curriculum, community engagement, and culture. We have organized these ambitious actions around five primary areas detailed below: 1) Recruitment of faculty, staff, and students, 2) Creating a more inclusive community via training and programming, 3) Knowledge production/preparing students/advancing the professions, 4) Financial support, and 5) Infrastructure, Transparency, and Reporting.

2. Recruitment of Faculty, Staff, and Students

In the past year, the School’s assertive outreach efforts contributed to an increase in the number and percentage of BIPOC faculty, staff, and students joining the Weitzman School community.

- The percentage of BIPOC standing faculty from 18.4% in Fall 2022 to 25.9% in Fall 2023, and the percentage of Black, Hispanic, and Indigenous standing faculty increased from 12.2% in fall 2022 to 18.5% in fall 2023.
- The percentage of female standing faculty in Weitzman increased from 44.9% in Fall of 2022 to 46.3% in Fall 2023.
- The percentage of BIPOC students in the AY 2022-2023 Academic Year increased from 42% of Weitzman’s US students in Fall 2022 to 42.7% in Fall 2023. The percentage of

students who self-identified as Black, Hispanic or Indigenous increased from 27% in Fall 2022 to 28.6% in Fall 2023.

- Once again Weitzman is participating in the *Deans Equity and Inclusion Initiative*, a consortium of nearly two dozen design schools dedicated to nurturing a diverse population of emerging scholars by providing mentorship to BIPOC assistant professors and post-docs. This year, an assistant professor in Landscape Architecture is the School's participant.

3. Creating a More Inclusive Community – Training and Programming

The Weitzman School continued efforts to create an inclusive environment that embraces difference and welcomes diverse perspectives through trainings, lectures, events, and socially engaged special initiatives. Below are some examples.

- **New Student Orientation Design Justice Session** - On August 25, 2023, all entering Weitzman students participated in a mandatory New Student Orientation session focused on the principles of Design Justice, which aims to rethink design processes with a greater focus on communities that are normally marginalized by design. Dr. Matt Kenyatta, the School's first Director of Justice and Belonging, discussed the basic principles of design justice, which focus on working collaboratively with community members and valuing their experiences, centering the voices of people directly impacted by the design process, prioritizing design's impact on the community over the intentions of the designer, and working toward sustainable, community-led, non-exploitative design outcomes.
- **Hidden Histories Tours.** As part of the School's New Student Orientation, Dr. Kenyatta also developed, led, and narrated guided tours highlighting some of the hidden histories of Penn's most iconic as well as lesser-known sites. These 30-minute Hidden History Tours seek to complicate glossy myths about the built environment at Penn and reveal legacies of injustice that have yet to be confronted.
- **Penn Experience 2.0.** As in years past, Weitzman students from three of the School's five departments participated in the *Penn Experience 2.0 Initiative* during respective departments' summer workshops and new student orientation programs. Developed by Penn faculty across campus, the Penn Experience 2.0 modules focus on implicit bias, racism, inequity, and reconciliation, including Penn's history of racism and the University's movement toward greater equity and inclusion.
- **Welcome Receptions for Students of Color and LGBTQA students.** This September, Dean Fritz Steiner hosted welcome receptions for students of color and for LGBTQA students to provide an informal opportunity to meet other faculty, staff, and students and to learn more about various student groups and University resources. Both receptions were well attended, and students signed up to participate in an array of activities.
- **Design for Belonging: How to Build Inclusion and Collaboration in Your Communities.** Dr. Susie Wise, a consultant who specializes in creating learning experiences focused on

innovation practices and equity design with a PhD in Learning Sciences and Technology Design from Stanford University, facilitated workshops for faculty and staff in November 2022. These workshops were intended to offer concrete frameworks to help participants understand how to create a sense of belonging in the built environment and public space and how design work can reduce othering and encourage a greater sense belonging.

- **Intercultural Communication Workshop & International Food Fair.** On February 13, 2023, Weitzman’s Office of Student Services partnered with International Student & Scholar Services (ISSS) to host an Intercultural Communication Workshop and International Food Fair. The hour-long workshop focused on how communication styles and norms vary by culture and encouraged students to examine their own understanding of communication cues, norms and biases when interacting with people from other cultures.
- **The Design Justice Working Group.** The *Design Justice Working Group (DJWG)*, a coalition of faculty, staff, students, and alumni from the Department of Landscape Architecture, continued to hold meetings focused on the DJWG’s seven primary goals, which include: (1) recruit and retain more faculty and staff of color; (2) recruit, support, and retain BIPOC students, (3) review and restructure the curriculum to ensure a more diverse representation of voices and perspectives, including BIPOC voices; (4) conduct ongoing antiracism and diversity and inclusion training for faculty, staff, and students; (5) increase the diversity of studio critics, jurors, and other academic participants in the department; (6) work to build meaningful relationships with communities of color beyond the confines of the university; and (7) adopt new Indigenous acknowledgement protocols for a range of situations including formal gatherings, public events, syllabi and departmental publications.
- **CPCRS Events and Dialogues.** The [Center for the Preservation of Civil Rights Sites \(CPCRS\)](#), whose goal is to advance the understanding and sustainable conservation of heritage sites commemorating American civil rights histories and Black heritage, held a series of [CPCRS Dialogues](#), which aim to raise visibility, deepen discussion, and spread the word about civil rights heritage and the equity, memory, design, legal, and other issues brought to light by its preservation. Speakers from the 2022-2023 series include:
 - **Melvin Marshall**, the Founder and Chief Curator of Art Culture Now LLC and ArtCultureNow.com and a gallery co-owner, senior curator and writer at Band of Vices Art Gallery in LA. He was the first chief curator at the Museum of Contemporary African Diasporian Arts (MoCADA) in Brooklyn, NY, where he co-curated the “ground-breaking exhibition” “From Challenge to Triumph: African American Prints & Printmaking, 1867-2002.”
 - **Bryan Lee Jr**, founder/Design Principal of [Colloqate Design](#) and founding organizer of the [Design As Protest Collective](#) and [Dark Matter University](#) and an architect, educator, writer, and Design Justice activist. He is the founder/Design Principal of Colloqate Design, a nonprofit design practice, and a founding organizer of the Design As Protest Collective and Dark Matter University.

- **Dr. Tara Dudley** is an Assistant Professor at the University of Texas at Austin School of Architecture. Dudley's work reflects an interdisciplinary approach to the study of cultural resources with a focus on nineteenth-century American design, African American architectural history, historic preservation, and material culture.
- **Black Personhood & Black Preservation.** CPCRS Research fellows discussed their research on the legacy and preservation of the Freedman's Colony in Manteo, NC, and Black intergenerational expression in West Philadelphia.
- **Justice Alliance for Design Education in Philadelphia (JADE-PHL)** is a consortium of greater Philadelphia architecture schools (Penn, Drexel, Jefferson, Temple, the Community College of Philadelphia, and Penn State which has a studio in the city), the local American Institute of Architects chapter, and local design firms. The Dean and Weitzman faculty are active participants in this group, which is working to 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. On May 18, 2023, JADE convened the region's design schools, non-profits, and industry associations to address the challenge of social inequity in design education. Educators from across the region shared examples of how they advocated for higher levels of social equity in their respective schools.
- **Studio+.** This past spring, Weitzman offered its second *Studio+*, a school-wide interdisciplinary design /build studio focused on community-engaged design, planning, art and preservation in Philadelphia – a permanent Weitzman School social justice initiative coordinated by PennPraxis. The aims of *Studio +* are to encourage long-term dialogue between communities of color and the University to shape new agendas and partnerships, and skills development for Weitzman students. The Spring 2023 *Studio+* studio focused on working with community members to conceptualize and develop the Lex Street Community Garden, located near the intersection of Lancaster Avenue and 44th Street. The Lex Street Garden was designed to embody the [New Freedom District](#), an initiative focused on illuminating the Civil Rights heritage of the Lancaster Avenue corridor that was named in part to commemorate the two-day “Freedom Now” rally that King held near 40th and Lancaster streets in August of 1965 .The site repurposes and activates formerly vacant lots with new landscaping, newly built furniture, and a student-built pergola.
- **Design to Thrive.** PennPraxis received a \$7.5M from Lori Kanter Tritsch (MArch'85) and William P. Lauder (W'83) to continue *Design to Thrive*, a summer youth development initiative that has served school-aged youth of color in New York City and Philadelphia in the summers since 2020. The *Design to Thrive* studios are a major learning investment based on the high engagement / deep experience model of design education at the Weitzman School of Design. The studios are taught by Weitzman graduate students, seniors in the College of Arts and Sciences, and young alumni in Architecture, Landscape Architecture, and Fine Arts, supported by faculty and PennPraxis. The aim of *Design to Thrive* is to address the opportunity gap for low-income youth of color, to advance skills development and awareness of the relevance of design, planning, art and preservation professions, and to increase diversity in design schools and professions over the long run.

- **Rising Scholar Success Academy.** This summer, Weitzman faculty participated once again in the Penn Rising Scholar Success Academy (Penn-RSSA) by offering a one-week introduction to the design professions as part of a free, virtual, six-week summer program designed for rising high school seniors in Philadelphia School District or Archdiocese schools.

4. Knowledge Production/Preparing Students/Advancing the Professions

Weitzman recognizes the role that the design, planning, fine arts, and preservation professions have played in advancing asymmetries of power and inequity, and perpetuating spatial segregation, resource extraction, and cultural erasure. Accordingly, we are committed to contributing new knowledge to the professions we serve and re-examining and revising the School's various curricula to address this history of injustice.

- **Center for the Preservation of Civil Rights Sites (CPCRS) Symposium.** On Friday, October 20, 2023, CPCRS will host an interdisciplinary symposium entitled, "*What Remains: Preserving the Heritage of Africatown*." This symposium will bring together scholars, activists, and designers dedicated to amplifying the history of Africatown, Alabama through ensuring community-led processes for racial, environmental, and economic justice. Africatown, also known as Plateau, is a community north of downtown Mobile that was founded in 1866 by formerly enslaved West Africans who were brought to Alabama in 1860 on the *Clotilda*, the last documented slave ship to arrive to the United States.
- As noted above, CPCRS also offered a series of CPCRS Dialogues to scrutinize the nation's collective understanding of what constitutes a civil rights heritage site and advance the means and methods by which "sites" are preserved. These dialogues bring the interdisciplinary research, advocacy, and partnerships of CPCRS are to Penn and public audiences in an accessible, affordable, and digestible digital format.
- **Weitzman School Lecture Series.** The Weitzman School offers over 30 lectures/talks/panel discussions each semester for students, alumni, and the public. Many of these interdisciplinary lectures address topics related to diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice. Examples from Academic Year 2022-2023 include lectures focused on sanctuary cities, the architectural history of the African American Methodist Episcopal Church, and the intersection of landscape architecture and environmental justice/democratic design.
- **The Center for Architectural Conservation** at Weitzman, which is directed by Frank Matero, Professor and Chair in the Graduate Program in Historic Preservation, continues work on a \$1.3 million grant from the Getty Foundation to develop a conservation and management plan and professional training program for Wupatki National Monument in Arizona, which was once home to the ancestors of the Hopi, Zuni, Navajo, Yavapai, Havasupai, Hualapai, and several bands of Apache and Paiute people.
- **Housing Justice Futures Conference: Philadelphia Forum on Design, Race, and Climate Change.** In March 2023, Weitzman hosted a two-day conference that brought together researchers, practitioners, and community stakeholders to examine the historical inequities

that precipitated the housing crisis in Philadelphia and other US cities while considering actionable strategies for housing justice in the future.

- **Racial Equity Course Review.** The City and Regional Planning (CPLN) Department invited the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) to discuss racial equity's importance in classrooms through multiple workshops, and the CPLN Department Chair set aside a fund of up to \$5,000 to help faculty pay for community engagement expenses. Several courses have been designated as ABCS courses with the Netter Center

5. Financial Support

In our efforts to create a more just and equitable community, Weitzman recognizes the need to address the current challenges facing financially strained students and implement new initiatives and policies to help prevent economic exclusion.

- In the past year, the School continued to distribute funding to students in need during the second year of the *Student Emergency Fund*.
- In addition to offering Weitzman Scholars Fellowships for students whose backgrounds and experiences demonstrate the ability to contribute to increasing socioeconomic and multicultural diversity awareness at Weitzman, the School also offers the *Moelis Scholars Program*, which supports students in the Master of City Planning program with a commitment to diversity who are interested in housing and community and economic development.
- Weitzman continues to award the *Julian Abele Fellowship in Architecture*, which was established in Fiscal Year 2021 and is given annually to a graduate architecture student or students once the fund is fully endowed. The Fellowship is named for the first Black architect to graduate from Penn in 1902.
- In Fiscal Year 2023, Weitzman increased funding for Weitzman Scholars scholarships for students by 11% when compared to FY 2022.

6. Conclusion: Working Towards Justice and Belongingness at Weitzman

In the coming year, Weitzman will continue to strengthen our Justice and Belonging initiatives by hiring a new *Director of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging*. This new position will be responsible for providing thought leadership, planning, development, administration, communication, and evaluation to help the School become more culturally welcoming, socially accountable, and intellectually transformative for students, faculty, and staff. They will work closely with the School's five departments and research centers to coordinate and lead DEIB initiatives, organize trainings, assist with student recruitment and retention activities, establish annual goals and action steps, and measure the School's progress toward achieving these goals to ensure ongoing accountability. Weitzman is proud of the School's continued commitment to encouraging a sense of belonging among all members of our community but we recognize that the School still faces tremendous challenges. We look forward to keeping the Provost's Office apprised of our progress.