Anti-Racism: Where are we a year after the BSEC petition?

Introduction

In June 2020, in the wake of the uprisings following the murder of George Floyd, the Black Scientists and Engineers of Caltech (BSEC) presented a list of action items to make Caltech an anti-racist institution that supports its Black community members. This petition was signed by over 1,000 students, post-docs, faculty, staff members, and campus organizations. In the year since, Caltech has pledged to address many of the concerns presented in the petition and respective Town Hall. It is the responsibility of the Caltech community to hold ourselves accountable in continuing the efforts to make Caltech an equitable and anti-racist institution. We must continue to evaluate our progress even as the national focus on racial justice and the Black Lives Matter movement has waned since summer 2020. In this document, we present a point by point update on each action item of the BSEC petition.

Publishing transparent, public-facing demographic data

As scientists, we recognize the importance of data collection and publication. Sustainable efforts to combat diversity issues must include collection and publication of complete demographic information at each stage of the admissions process.

1.1) Disaggregate "Underrepresented Minority" enrollment statistics

It is important for Caltech to be transparent about the current enrollment statistics of both Undergraduate and Graduate student populations. Previously, only the Undergraduate enrollment data was available publicly. Furthemore, all data used the term "Underrepresented Minority" as a category for Black, Hispanic/Latinx, and Indigenous students. **The Office of the Registrar has since published the disaggregated enrollment data for both the Undergraduate and Graduate population.** Furthermore, Caltech has established a dedicated website to Diversity Equity and Inclusion.

Caltech for Black Lives acknowledges the marked change in transparency. However, we would also encourage the Office of the Registrar to disaggregate the "International" label as well. At the moment, racial demographic data are not collected for International students, but we would encourage the Institute to begin collecting these data to give us a clear understanding of the makeup and needs of our student body, particularly since Caltech attracts a large number of international graduate students.

1.2) Utilize demographic data to inform institutional diversity efforts

As stated above, since the initial presentation of the BSEC petition, Caltech has published and disaggregated enrollment data at both the graduate and undergraduate levels. Caltech has additionally published a report on recruitment and diversity as informed by the enrollment data. It

is clear based on the newest enrollment statistics that Caltech has used the previous enrollment data to make a conscious effort to admit a more diverse student body. The incoming class this year includes 21 Black undergraduates and 10 Black graduate students. These numbers amount to over double the current number of Black students on campus. The number of Hispanic/Latinx has also increased by nearly a factor of 2 in the graduate student population, and by over a factor of 6 in the undergraduate population. **It is clear that Caltech has used prior enrollment demographic data to improve the diversity of incoming classes. Given the impact of this action, we urge Caltech to continue using this data to make material impacts in campus diversity.**

Increasing yield of racially minoritized students

Applicant yield is defined as the ratio of matriculants to admissions offerees. The Graduate School's overall yield is consistently around 40% every year. The yield of racially minoritized students is often much lower (data not publicly available for citation). This means we are losing talented students of color to competitor institutions. This section outlines strategies for making a Caltech admissions offer more attractive to students of color.

2.1) Guarantee and expand funding for existing diversity programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels

Existing diversity programs at Caltech, especially WAVE, have received additional funding and support, resulting in notable expansion. However, these successful programs must still be endowed in order to guarantee their continued success and demonstrate Caltech's permanent commitment to its most successful DEI initiatives.

The Office of Student-Faculty Programs (SFP) has invested in expanding diversity programming by acquiring greater funding and subsequently bolstering support and outreach for existing DEI programs, including WAVE, FSRI, and Future Ignited. SFP has also hired Maria Manzanares as a new program assistant to support this growth. Funding has primarily come from division-level financial commitments; endowments have not yet been secured as a more permanent source of support.

The WAVE Fellows' Program has secured the following division-level pledges for 2021:
- Resnick Sustainability Institute
- Kavli Nanoscience Institute
- Chen Institute for Neuroscience
- Center for Environmental Microbial Interactions
- Institute for Quantum Information and Matter
- Information Science and Technology program
- Division of Humanities and Social Science.

Expansions to WAVE include:
- Larger enrollment: 80 fellows in 2021; 25 fellows in 2020
- Increased student compensation: The stipend has increased to $6,620 + $2,000 housing supplement (new for 2021) + $ for travel to/from Caltech (new for 2021)
- Increased recruitment efforts, which led to twice as many applicants in 2021 as 2020: These efforts included tripling the number of attended conferences and strengthening the program's national faculty email list
- Increased fraction of URM applicants: 2x women, 4x Black/African American, 2x Latinx/Hispanic
- Consistently high standard of applicants: median GPA (3.75) has been constant over the last 3 years.
- Prioritized student housing: all 80 admitted students were given option to live/work on campus this summer (70/80 took this option)

Existing diversity programs at Caltech have indeed been expanded in the last year; nevertheless, permanent funding of these successful programs through endowments is essential for ensuring Caltech's lasting commitment to equity, inclusion, and anti-racism.

2.2) Establish cohort-building programs for new graduate students of color

The BSEC petition (2.2) proposed a month-long orientation program for incoming racially minoritized graduate students that focuses on exploring research opportunities, community building activities, and a peer mentorship program. In response, the Student-Faculty Programs (SFP) Office will be coordinating a 10-day, in-person [Graduate Summer Research Institute (GSRI)](#) for incoming graduate students in Fall 2021. According to SFP, GSRI aims to prepare its participants to navigate their first year as graduate students at Caltech by offering programming focused on academic and professional development, mentoring, and relationship building. GSRI has a stated mission of (i) promoting the value of graduate education; (ii) improving the research enterprise through increased diversity; and (iii) ensuring incoming graduate students from historically marginalized groups thrive at Caltech. **This year, GSRI will involve 30 participants and 6 current graduate students, who will serve as Council members.**

In 2.2 of the BSEC petition, it was also recommended that such an orientation have regular programming throughout the year in order to further develop an enriching experience for the cohort; in turn, the SFP also reported plans of working with CCID and the Graduate Dean's Office to provide monthly cohort-building programs for GSRI.

A promising pilot cohort-building program has been implemented for new Caltech graduate students. Future success will depend on continued support from the Student-Faculty Programs Office.

2.3) Award fellowships to students committed to increasing diversity

Fellowships and awards have been created to increase diversity and inclusion; however, according to the [Committee on Student Admissions and Recruitment](#), the number and types of awards ought to be broadened, and they should include financial incentives and provide multi-year extension opportunities.

The Presidential Graduate Fellowships were recently introduced; however the [Report of the Committee on Student Admissions and Recruitment](#) notes that this one-year fellowship does not include incentives beyond the accolade itself. In order to encourage potential fellows to accept the offer, the committee recommends including additional financial resources and an opportunity to extend into multi-year funding, as well as increasing the number of offered fellowships from 10 to 20.

In addition, a number of divisions/groups on campus have committed to offering the following diversity-related awards on-campus:

- [Chen Institute Diversity and Inclusion Award | Chen Institute](#)
- [KNI Catalyst Awards | The Kavli Nanoscience Institute at Caltech](#)
- [EAS New Horizons Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Award](#)
- [CMS Gradient for Change Awards](#)
- [MCE Outstanding Service Award](#)
- Dr. William "Bil" Clemons, Jr. Agent of Change Award | CCID
- Sarah Sam Activist Scholar Award | CCID

Other external scholarships and fellowships with Caltech affiliation include:
- [Curated list of external scholarships from Caltech Financial Aid](#)
- [External fellowships for underrepresented groups from the Caltech Graduate Studies Office](#)
- Amgen Scholars, Base 11 Program, Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship, Questbridge, WAVE

Many departments at Caltech have committed to expanding awards and fellowships to include diversity and outreach efforts. However, we encourage Caltech and individual departments to join other institutes in creating diversity and service related scholarships for incoming students in order to establish a commitment to students participating in outreach efforts on campus.

2.4) Reduce racial bias in graduate admissions

The [Report of the Committee on Student Admissions and Recruitment](#) (CSAR) details recommendations for the formation of a Graduate Admissions Committee (GAC), whose aim is to develop and maintain a set of institute-wide standards and best practices for a fair and inclusive graduate admissions process. According to the report, the Graduate Dean and Chief Diversity Officer should be responsible for holding divisions accountable to these standards by reviewing

annual reports submitted by each division. While many of their recommended best practices are clearly aimed at achieving these goals, **surprisingly absent is a recommendation that all divisions diminish the role of Graduate Record Examination (GRE) scores in the application process, despite accurately reporting the GRE's well-studied bias and low overall utility**. Caltech has not yet demonstrated intentions to implement CSAR's recommendations.

The CSAR report recommends the GAC be composed primarily of faculty members, as well as graduate student representatives and option managers. They further suggest distributing GAC members across divisions in proportion to student population.

The report outlines a number of specific standards to be set, including:
- Written rubrics for application evaluation, made publicly available
- Multiple reviewers per applicant, and an additional "backstop" reviewer for female and URM applicants
- Ensuring essay prompts are clear and do not disadvantage applicants with under-resourced backgrounds
- Clarify recommendation letter prompts
- Standardized interviewing processes (e.g. documented consistently)
- Document justification for every admissions decision
- All participants of admissions process must complete implicit/unconscious bias training

In addition, the report acknowledges that these standards will need to be continuously improved, and points to the benefits of the GAC engaging with DEI experts.

The report also discusses usage of the Graduate Record Examination (GRE), and succinctly summarizes its lack of correlation to student success and its well-documented bias against minoritized, first-generation, and low-income students. Indeed, all but two options have suspended accepting GRE scores for 2 years; the remaining two options have made it optional. Despite their lucid observations, the committee ultimately recommended leaving the choice of using GRE scores to individual options.

We therefore report that although many departments have made efforts to reduce bias in their graduate admissions process, failing to address the bias of the GRE renders this action item incomplete. We encourage the Institute to develop centralized standards to ensure anti-racist admissions in every graduate program across the Institute. The CSAR report provides useful recommendations for moving towards this goal, and further reflection and concrete action is necessary**.**

Vitalizing diversity recruitment efforts

Increasing representation of racially minoritized groups in the application pool is yet another approach for improving diversity of the student body. This section describes strategies to enhance diversity in the applicant pool.

3.1) Pilot fly-out program to raise diversity in graduate applicant pool

Previously Caltech did not offer a fly out program. Caltech has since started the [Future Ignited program](#) with the goal to have a conference that provides underrepresented minorities the opportunity to learn more about graduate school life, the application process, and research at Caltech. Future Ignited is an Institutional wide program available to applicants in all departments. The program took place virtually in 2020 and is planned to be virtual again in the upcoming year due to COVID.

We recognize a virtual fly-out program was established in 2020. We encourage departments to transition to in person fly out programs in the future to better help students get an understanding of graduate student life and make connections with their peers and other graduate students.

3.2) Engage in diversity recruitment through conferences and visits to minority-serving institutions (MSIs)

The BSEC petition highlighted the burden often placed on minority students in campus diversity efforts including recruitment efforts at identity first conferences. Compensation for these recruitment efforts was suggested. **So far, no plans to implement this recommendation have moved forward.** Center for Inclusion and Diversity (CCID) has been working with the career development office to better participate in identity first conferences.

Additionally, delays in per diems and reimbursements for all conference travel can be a deterrent to attend and we urge the graduate divisions to work to develop a process to minimize the delays and upfront costs graduate students must put forth themselves.

A financial burden potential graduate students face is the cost of applying to graduate programs. Caltech had offered application fee waivers in the past, but the process for obtaining a waiver was not always clear. Multiple graduate departments across Caltech have since updated the application website to provide easy access to the fee waiver instructions and necessary forms. We recommend that any department that has not updated their application website do so and that at the institutional level Caltech considers abolishing application fees altogether.

We report that this action item is incomplete and recommend development on new conference reimbursement procedures and the waiving of all graduate application fees.

In the past Caltech has had some connections with HBCUs, HSIs, and MSIs, but again the burden of maintaining these relationships has been placed on a few individuals. Listed below are some of the current programs and partnerships Caltech has or is working on developing.

- 3/2 program: Students in their junior year at select colleges can apply to transfer to Caltech and upon completion of the program will obtain a degree from Caltech and their home institution
- CCE Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Visiting Professional: underrepresented executive related to CCE that serve as in-residence professional
- CCE DEI Visiting Faculty: 3-6 month stay for a diverse or diversity-supporting visiting faculty member within CCE

- Other individual partnerships between MSIs and departments are being developed
  - Charles Drew mentorship program

We recognize the initial efforts Caltech and departments have made towards establishing programs and relationships and encourage the development of funding and support at the institutional level to continue expanding these connections.

3.3) Prioritize community service by incorporating outreach participation into tenure review criteria

At the institutional level Caltech did not have any requirements for diversity or outreach in the hiring or tenure review processes. Diversity Statements are now required for new faculty applicants, but no diversity or outreach requirements have been added to the tenure criteria.

Tenure requirements are decided by the Office of the Provost and cannot reasonably be altered by individual departments. By not requiring outreach or diversity statements in the tenure review process at the institutional level, Caltech is not emphasizing the importance of faculty commitment to these priorities. As a commitment from current faculty to DEI initiatives, **we recommend that outreach participation be incorporated in the requirements for tenure at the institutional level and encourage departments to require training for tenured faculty members. Furthermore, we encourage a diversity statement requirement for all endowed professorships and departmental leadership positions. We therefore report that this action item has not been met.**

Improving the diversity climate on campus

As we attract more Black and otherwise minoritized students to Caltech, we must also retain them by making sure they feel welcome here. In this final section, we describe changes that are imperative for providing adequate support to racially minoritized students on campus.

4.1) Advertise all campus-wide CCID events in Caltech Ion

Sharing CCID event information in Caltech Ion is important in signalling that education about equity and anti-racism at Caltech is a community-wide effort and therefore should be advertised to the entire Caltech campus. **The Office of Strategic Communication has since worked with the CCID to ensure that CCID events are highlighted in the Caltech Ion emails.**

4.2) Rename the buildings currently honoring racists: Millikan, Watson, Ruddock, and Chandler

The BSEC petition pointed out the fact that many buildings on campus were named for prominent eugenicists, who actively worked to harm people of color, indigenous people, disabled people, and other marginalized groups (discussed by the LA Times in July 2020). It therefore

called for these names to be removed in order to create an environment where scientists and engineers belonging to these groups feel welcomed on campus. This also provided an opportunity for members of the Institute to reflect on our white supremacist past and present, and to better understand what it would mean to move forward in a true anti-racist effort. **While the institute has ultimately decided to remove the names of eugenicists on campus buildings, concrete action has not occurred, rendering this action item incomplete---recent campus newsletters, current Caltech websites, and colloquial references on campus still refer to these locations by their disavowed names.**

A concerted effort by students and community members to rename these buildings launched in early June 2020. See a full timeline of events at https://caltechforblacklives.com/comms/. The Institute's response to this effort was slow and inciting, minimizing the experiences of Black students while demanding their labor, and publicly displaying the very racism with which it was meant to be reckoning.

In late July of 2020, Caltech President Tom Rosenbaum announced the creation of a "Naming Task Force," (later referred to as the "Committee on Naming and Recognition") comprised mainly of trustees, but which included one Black student, which was "charged to consider and make recommendations for general policies related to space naming and other forms of recognition, as well as consideration of specific building names on campus." In late September of 2020, Sarah Sam, the only Black student on the committee resigned, writing "Because of the unwillingness to condemn irrefutable evidence of overt racism, I have lost faith that this committee will be able to complete its charges in a responsible way." The President's insufficient response to Sarah's resignation was criticized by the LA Times in October 2020.

In January 2021, the Committee on Naming and Recognition's report was finally released publicly. The report recommended that "removing names should be undertaken (1) only in exceptional circumstances, (2) when there is significant breach of Caltech's core commitments, (3) when there is a threat to Caltech's future, and (4) in a manner that recognizes the full complexity of Caltech's past."

The committee also recommended "that Caltech remove the names of the individuals of concern [Millikan, Chandler, Gosney, Munro, Robinson, and Ruddock] from all assets and honors, except for Watson [Thomas J. Watson Sr]."

As of April 2021, the renaming process stands as follows:
- For gifts which included as a stipulation that a eugenicist's name be used, a court order is needed in order to remove the name. A letter from the President stated, "the Institute recently filed court petitions to remove names from the Robert A. Millikan Memorial Library and Fellowships, the Harry Chandler Dining Hall, the William Bennet Munro Memorial Lecture Series, and the Albert B. Ruddock Professorships. At the same time and to the extent possible, we have been in contact with known descendants of the donors."
- With regard to other gifts, the President wrote, "The Board of Trustees

additionally will consider recommendations for the renaming of the Linde + Robinson Laboratory, the Robert Andrews Millikan Professorship, and the Millikan Medal, assets that are not bound by gift or other legal obligations. Where there are unrestricted divisional assets identified by the Committee on Naming and Recognition, those have been or will be renamed by the divisions."

- A committee has been convened to decide on a new name for the undergraduate dormitory known as "Ruddock House."

We note that email newsletters sent to the campus community in July and August 2021 (Ion Caltech and Caltech Library BBE Newsletter) still refer to "Millikan Library" and "Millikan Pond." Also, as of 8/26/21, the Caltech Dining website still refers to "Chandler Dining Hall." **We acknowledge that the institute has decided to remove the names of eugenicists on campus buildings. However, we report that at this point, colloquially on campus and in communications this action item is incomplete.** Furthermore, we encourage Caltech to include plaques near buildings formerly named after eugenicists to explain the history and reasoning behind the renaming campaigns.

4.3) Clarify procedure for reporting racial bias

The BSEC petition highlighted the mechanisms through which Caltech is currently underprepared to handle reporting of racial bias, harrasment, or discrimination. The petition highlighted that the previous recommendation for those experiencing racial discrimintation is to report to "whomever you trust, including Caltech's Title IX Coordinator, Deans, RAs, RLCs, faculty, and staff. Caltech's Counseling Center staff, Health Center staff, and the designated staff at the Center for Inclusion & Diversity." This is inadequate as it places the burden of reporting on the student by creating uncertainty in proper channels.

After inquiring with departments across campus, the prevailing recommendation remains to report to Title IX rather than with a specific office dedicated to racial bias and discrimination. Title IX has since updated their website to provide an easily [accessible link to report concerns](#). This is a noted improvement in the previous process where it was unclear how to report racial bias. Additionally, some departments have discussed establishing a department specific anonymous reporting form, rather than rely on the centralized form in the Title IX office, but this has yet to be established. **We therefore report that this action item has been partially addressed.** Although the reporting process is more direct, there is not a specific office for racial bias reporting and there is not enough support at a departmental level.

4.4) Provide adequate support for students applying to diversity-related fellowships

The Fellowships Advising and Study Abroad Office previously did not have adequate information on fellowships and scholarships for Black, Hipsanic/Latinx, Indigenous, and other racially or systemically minoritized communities. **The office has since updated their website to**

include a section specifically for scholarships of this nature. This site has also included other databases to give students more opportunities for funding.