

3/18/21:

Dear All:

Earlier today you received an email from Provost Lee and Dean Rasmussen condemning the recent acts of violence against people of Asian descent and to support those in our community who have been effected by these acts.

I write to echo these sentiments and reiterate our department's commitment to fostering a culture where all members feel safe and welcome. As a community, we support one another and stand with each other, with the shared goal of allowing each person to feel comfortable and valued as individuals and scientists inside and outside the Department.

The stories that have emerged of late have been heartbreaking and difficult to process. For those who are still working through these recent events, I encourage you to make use of the resources that were described in today's email. For students, please know that Sarah Lippert and the Dean of Students Office are also available to work with you and direct you to the resources that can provide you with the needed support. Faculty and Staff please make use of the Staff and Faculty Assistance Program that the University offers.

We celebrate the fact that our community is a mix of people of varied backgrounds. This provides us with the opportunity to learn from and support one another as we face the various challenges presented to us. Let us remember that and never let up from working to cultivate a welcoming and supportive environment.

Best wishes,

Chair and Professor

Department of the Geophysical Sciences

6/18/20:

Dear DoGS Community:

The last few weeks have brought systemic racism and issues of equity to the forefront of many discussions about society and academia. Last week, the #ShutDownSTEM movement challenged science departments, institutions, and fields to take time to discuss and become educated on these issues. This is an important first step as some of these discussions have revealed how complacent some people have become (some of you likely saw this news:

<https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/stephaniemlee/yale-astronomy-systemic-racism-emails>). Of course, it's important not only to discuss these issues but also to identify actions to directly confront them.

Last Wednesday, June 10th, saw people across the globe, including here on campus get involved and spark discussion. These discussions and actions must continue. As such, I invite you all to a discussion focused on Race and Equity in Our Field and Department on Monday, June 22nd, at 12 PM. I will send a Zoom link out that morning.

To provide field-specific context and to bring awareness to what we are facing, I point you the paper entitled "No Progress on Diversity in 40 years" by Rachel Bernard and Emily Cooperdock which was published in 2018 in Nature Geoscience. It can be found at: <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41561-018-0116-6> (allgeo doesn't allow attachments, but you all should have access to this link). This paper provides an excellent background on the challenges the field as a whole faces and shows the import of not maintaining the status quo. I am pleased that Dr. Bernard and Dr. Cooperdock will join us at the beginning of the meeting to discuss their experiences writing the paper and the reactions that they've seen since it was published.

The Agenda will be:

- 1) Brief Introduction and Opening Remarks (Ciesla)
- 2) Discussion of "No Progress on Diversity in 40 Years" (Bernard and Cooperdock)
- 3) Open discussion (All)
- 4) Review of Action Items (Ciesla)

All members of the department are invited to take part. I recognize that the time may not be convenient for some people; this is just our first discussion, and you can expect others in the future.

Sincerely,

Chair and Professor
Department of the Geophysical Sciences

6/3/20:

Dear DoGS Community:

In the last week, you have received communication from Provost Ka Yee Lee, Dean Angela Olinto, and yesterday our students also received communication from PSD Dean of Students Bahareh Lampert to express their concerns for campus community at large and make clear that racism will not be tolerated anywhere in the campus community. I am grateful for their messages and statements of support for our students, staff, and faculty.

I wanted to allow time for these messages to be relayed as I believe times like this require leadership to make clear what their vision is for the community and how we treat one another. That being done, I want to take time to address the view on the department level.

The events of the past few weeks have reminded us of the deep inequalities that exist across the United States. The murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor, are just the most recent events demonstrating the pervasive racism that the Black community has faced for generations. These tragedies and the ugliness they expose naturally lead to anger, frustration, despair, and fear. Such emotions, while overwhelming, should not be fought or denied, but the root cause of those emotions must be.

I want to make clear that the Department of the Geophysical Sciences aims to cultivate a culture and community where individuals are able to pursue their research interests and grow to be the scientists that they aspire to be. I stress the importance of community here: we are at our best as a department when we learn from one another and support one another, collectively lifting scientists to higher levels than can be achieved on their own. This requires trust and comfort in our environment and knowing that you are safe to be yourself without restriction. We, as a community, reject discrimination and racism of any kind. We celebrate and advocate for everyone in our community and their pursuit of knowledge, in our halls and beyond.

While our ideals are clearly stated, we must ensure that our actions are in direct support of those ideals. If we are failing in this regard, let it be known. I also refer you to the email yesterday from Neli Fanning, the PSD Director for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, who held a virtual community gathering on Monday that many of us attended. In that email, she provides an excellent discussion of what it means for us all to serve as allies to those who regularly face these issues, and I encourage all to read her comments. I include particularly relevant paragraphs at the end of this email. In addition, Neli's email includes a list of resources and opportunities to help our city and extended community at this time. It is only through action that change will come.

We have accepted a significant responsibility by coming to the Department of the Geophysical Sciences at the University of Chicago. We are current and future stewards of our respective fields. That responsibility must not be forgotten.

In closing, be safe and take care.

Sincerely,

Quote from Neli Fanning's email:

An important topic covered was 'ally-ship'. What does it mean? How can we be better allies to those experiencing palpable grief and outrage? Answers to these multilayered questions are hard to condense in a few sentences but I'll attempt to summarize in the following manner: Ally-ship is a process. It is a recognition of one's own privilege(s) and of the struggles of an oppressed group. It is the personal decision and concerted effort to learn about, support, and advocate for and alongside marginalized communities.

Self-identified allies can show support in a variety of ways—from publicly expressing solidarity on social media platforms to personally and directly connecting with those who are most affected with the intent of expressing support. Though it is difficult, allies must notice how discrimination, micro-aggressions, and racism are denied, minimized, and justified and speak out. They must recognize that we live, work, and study within a social context and be willing to engage in candid conversations around topics of race and discrimination in our current time.

Chair and Professor
Department of the Geophysical Sciences