



## **EEB's Statement on Departmental Climate, and Moving Forward**

In our departmental discussions of achieving excellence in research and teaching, we can often overlook some of the most fundamental ingredients for reaching these goals. A thriving Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology requires an inclusive, welcoming environment free of harassment, discrimination and bullying, where all students, staff and faculty have fair and equitable opportunities to conduct their work and be supported. Success in research and teaching requires a rich, interactive climate that avoids implicit and explicit forms of discrimination.

In order to fully achieve this, we as a department must recognize that our historically 'passive' approach to this is not sufficient, for a number of reasons. While the University of Toronto has formal policies and processes to address incidents of harassment and bullying, we cannot simply rely on the institutional processes to foster an inclusive community. In the absence of an explicit statement of our departmental values and a code of conduct, we have not formalized the values we expect all members of the department to uphold. Our lack of clearly stated and established pathways to seek informal departmental resolution to conflicts along with information about the University-level processes makes it harder to address inappropriate behaviour early on and provide local resolution, and harder for people to know how to navigate the University supports. Without explicit training and support for ally-ship, we are not fully equipped to react and support those who have experienced inappropriate behaviour. Furthermore, those who are not in positions of power and privilege may feel unsafe coming forward to share concerns about micro-aggression, harassment and discrimination that are affecting their daily lives as scientists, staff, and students. Without explicit reflection and consultation on department culture, drawing from the experiences of graduate students, staff, postdoctoral fellows and faculty, we cannot hope to get a sense of the full spectrum of barriers department members are facing to achieve our goals of inclusion. As we reflect on the causes of systemic racism and other forms of institutional discrimination, the very first place for self-examination lies in how we can do better to foster an inclusive climate for those who are already in our EEB community.

With this in mind, we launched a new EEB Wellness Committee in Fall of 2019. The formation of this committee was motivated by a growing awareness of the importance of taking a more intentional approach to our department climate. The goals of the Wellness Committee include:

### **1) Establishing a statement of values and code of conduct**

We are drafting a statement of values and code of conduct, which will be posted on our website, posted as signs in the buildings, and provided to all incoming department members to sign and confirm their agreement. All visitors to the department (seminar speakers, sabbatical visitors) will also be made aware of this statement and our values. This helps hold up a clear departmental standard of expectation, and will emphasize that research excellence is multidimensional: excellence in research is not simply a measure of research productivity, but is also about making positive impacts on our community; offering support, encouragement, and constructive criticism to peers and those they mentor, and upholding the values of mutual respect. The documentation will also clearly describe the processes to follow if people have experienced or observed inappropriate behaviour.



**2) Building a system of Ally-ship**

Drawing inspiration from the Safe Evolution ‘Evo Allies’ program (<https://www.evolutionmeetings.org/safe-evolution.html>), we plan to establish an Ally system, wherein specific members of the departmental faculty, staff, and students will be tasked with, and trained to, provide peer support for those who have experienced inappropriate behaviour. Allies will first and foremost listen, but will also be able to provide department members with information about the types of support available through the university and beyond as well as the pathways for pursuing them. Beyond this, we are planning to bring in workshops that provide training for all members of the department, including bystander training, and workplace civility (faculty and staff have already participated in workshops on civility).

**3) Explore ways to build a more inclusive community that builds more lines of trust and communication between faculty, staff, postdoctoral fellows and graduate students**

One small first step with this goal this year was to introduce post-seminar snacks/discussion in the ESC building directly following the seminar, enabling more informal departmental interactions and opportunities to interact with the seminar speaker in a more inclusive environment.

**4) Make recommendations in an advisory capacity to faculty and departmental leadership on changes in practice to the graduate and undergraduate programs**

- Recommending that faculty consider establishing and discussing lab statements of values and mentorship contracts (e.g. <https://cimerproject.org> and <https://ictr.wisc.edu/mentoring/mentoring-compactscontracts-examples/>)
- Recommending that labs establish internal mechanisms of allyship
- Revisiting departmental awards criteria to further emphasize that research excellence is not a one-dimensional metric founded only on research productivity, but incorporates mentorship and positive contributions to departmental climate
- Adding greater departmental recognition for those that make positive impacts on our community

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