

Integrative Biology Graduate Student Organization (iBioGO) Statement in Support of Racial Justice

This statement is the product of discussion among the Department of Integrative Biology (iBio) graduate students following the release of statements of support from Kelin Boldiis and Dr. Lauren Ritters but no word from the rest of the department. We hereby share our public support for the ongoing racial justice movement and engage the department in **taking concrete actions to increase racial justice** in our academic community. Below, we outline our values, intentions for writing this document, the socio-political environment necessitating its writing, and a list of specific, actionable goals and demands for our peers, mentors, and advisors within iBio.

Dear Integrative Biology staff and faculty,

We, the graduate students of the Department of Integrative Biology (iBio) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (UW-Madison), resolutely believe **Black Lives Matter**. We also believe that our position as scientists, students, and/or academics does not preclude us from participating in activism for racial justice.^{1,2} The recent surge of protests around the country in response to the murders of **George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Tony McDade, Breonna Taylor, Riah Milton, Nina Pop, Elijah McClain, Tony Robinson, and others** are a symptom of the ongoing epidemics of racial injustice and police brutality deeply ingrained in the United States. **We cannot rely on self-reflection and theorizing alone to dismantle these systems of white supremacy.** As students at a majority white institution in Wisconsin, which exists on stolen Ho-Chunk land,³ **we feel responsible to demand action from our peers, supervisors, and institutions while also holding ourselves accountable.**

First, we must acknowledge the social and political context of life for those students in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields identifying as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) in Madison, WI. The diversity of racial and ethnic groups in the United States is not reflected in STEM career fields, and this disparity continues to widen at higher degree levels, maintaining a disproportionately white scientific community.⁴ In addition to systemic racial injustice, implicit bias and racism against those identifying as BIPOC are pervasive in STEM broadly and academia specifically.^{5,6} We also recognize that Madison reflects the existing racial disparities and injustices throughout Wisconsin. Indeed, only 6.4% of Madison residents identify as Black or African American according to 2017 population

¹ [Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard.](#)

² [Berenbaum \(2020\).](#)

³ [Encyclopædia Britannica, 2020 “Ho-Chunk.” Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica.](#)

⁴ [Estrada, Hernandez, and Schultz \(2018\).](#)

⁵ [Deb Roy, Rohan. Apr 9, 2018. “Science Still Bears the Fingerprints of Colonialism.” *Smithsonian Magazine*.](#)

⁶ [Leonardo \(2012\).](#)

demographics.⁷ UW-Madison's racial inequality is even worse than its city; in the Fall 2019 semester, individuals who identify as Black or African American made up a scant 2.6% of UW-Madison faculty and only 2% of our student body.⁸ Within iBio, merely 4 of the 79 graduate students accepted and enrolled in the last 10 years are considered "targeted minority students".⁹ These students have lacked a supportive environment, with only 20% graduating within 5 years, compared to 41% of "non-target students".¹⁰ Furthermore, in the 2019-20 academic year specifically, only 2 of 34 graduate students enrolled in the department at that time were "targeted minority students".¹¹ We recognize that these disparities are not a coincidence and instead a result of the perpetuation of white supremacist policies within our career field, city, university, and department. Acknowledging the scope and scale of much of the required work to address these issues, **we must first call for accountability within our department through tangible implementation of anti-racist practices.**

An anti-racist stance should be one of iBio's core values. While iBio has previously committed to concrete actions, such as participation in the Faculty Diversity Initiative¹² and recently forming an Equity & Diversity Committee, considerably more effort is needed. For example, despite the aforementioned initiatives, no members of the Equity and Diversity Committee (EAD) nor the Campus Diversity and Climate Committee (CDCC) are faculty from iBio.^{13,14} **Below, find a list of goals and demands we as graduate students have created for our faculty mentors, advisors, and Principle Investigators (PIs) in the Department of Integrative Biology to address persistent racial inequality, systemic racism, and white supremacy as outlined above.**

- I. **We demand that all Integrative Biology-affiliated faculty author a unified letter of intent, voicing their support for the goals and demands outlined below as well as committing to continued efforts for racial justice. Faculty must also maintain clear and open communication with the graduate student body in regards to the progress the department administration is making on the below goals.**
 - A. An integral aspect to this letter is that PIs and other faculty pen this letter as a unified voice, and sign their respective names, thus individually asserting their commitment to the values and action steps outlined by their graduate students.

⁷ [Data USA. \(2017\). Madison, WI, Madison-Diversity.](#)

⁸ [Data Digest 2019-2020, Students, pg 8. UW-Madison.](#)

⁹ [UW-Madison Graduate School Office of Academic Analysis, Planning and Assessment, "Graduate School Applicants, Admits & New Enrollments](#)

¹⁰ [UW-Madison Graduate School Office of Academic Analysis, Planning and Assessment, "Graduate School Time to Degree: 2010-2019](#)

¹¹ [UW-Madison Graduate School Office of Academic Analysis, Planning and Assessment. 2020. "Total Enrollment in Graduate School Programs."](#)

¹² [Faculty and Staff, Office of the Provost, University of Wisconsin-Madison. 2020. "Faculty Diversity Initiative."](#)

¹³ [Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research & Graduate Education \(OVCERGE\). 2020. "Equity and Diversity Committee Roster."](#)

¹⁴ [Committee Tracker, University of Wisconsin-Madison. 2020. "Campus Diversity and Climate."](#)

- B. This letter shall be released via publication on the iBio website as well as emailed to the students, faculty, and staff affiliated with iBio **no later than the second departmental meeting of the fall 2020 semester, i.e. October 6th, 2020.**
- C. It is not enough to simply publish a statement of support and then consider the issue of white supremacy solved. Ongoing problems require ongoing solutions. Therefore, a list of future action steps are as follows.

II. We demand equality and inclusion be stated core values within the workspace and lab environment created by our advisors/mentors/PIs, as well as an explicit description in a 'lab expectation' sheet created by each faculty member for their respective labs of how those values are to be upheld.

- A. As with any professional workspace, expectations for how one is to be treated and treat others should be clearly outlined in lab policy sheets circulated to new/current graduate student members. This shall include a diversity/inclusion statement and a specific description of the inclusive environment faculty members expect themselves to uphold. Each graduate student shall be expected to co-sign this as a contract of expectations with their chosen faculty advisor. This shall be created by individual faculty members for their respective labs **no later than the end of the fall 2020 semester.**
 - 1. Faculty are encouraged to publish this outline of expectations with a diversity/inclusion statement on their website for transparency for prospective students and the broader scientific community.
- B. To hold future graduate students accountable as well, iBio shall require a Diversity Statement in iBio's application package for prospective graduate students. Similar to Diversity and Inclusion statements used in faculty hiring, this statement should describe how the applicant's experiences demonstrate their commitment to diversity and inclusion in their work and personal life. It should also exemplify their ability to engage with these important issues without mandating they disclose their identities. This shall be completed for implementation **in the 2021-22 graduate student recruitment/application cycle.**
- C. Once per semester, faculty must engage in professional development activities around racial justice to ensure that they are properly informed and trained on supporting BIPOC lab members. This could take the form of attending the UW-Madison Diversity Forum, implicit bias workshops, activist reading groups, attending a Biology Colloquium justice lecture (see below), among others.

III. We demand that all Integrative Biology faculty integrate justice studies into their course curricula. Sustained education of the diversity in and social history of

scientific advancements is crucial for student engagement in these topics. Science is inherently political.¹⁵ It is necessary for professors to address this fact.

- A. Every iBio professor must include a diversity statement in their course syllabus on how they individually will respect and celebrate inclusion in their classroom throughout the duration of the course. This should be implemented **during the fall 2020 semester** to better reflect our dynamic sociopolitical atmosphere.
- B. The syllabus for every graduate and undergraduate course offered by iBio must include an impact statement tailored to how inclusion and diversity relate to the course content. Indeed, all iBio courses need to incorporate more work from BIPOC and underrepresented scholars. These statements should be **present on the syllabi of the spring 2021 semester**.
- C. In addition to incorporating underrepresented voices in course curricula, iBio must create a course that focuses on racial justice in biology. We must elevate marginalized and underrepresented voices in the field, rather than solely continuing to valorize white male accomplishments. We must also discuss the history of science and how it has been used as a tool of oppression. This course should be developed **by the fall 2021 semester**.

IV. We demand that the entirety of the Department of Integrative Biology be representative of the immense diversity of our community and country at large. The University of Wisconsin-Madison is an international university, therefore, there is no valid excuse as to why the students, faculty, and staff are not representative of those diverse identities and backgrounds.

- A. The Biology Colloquium is one way in which iBio can broaden its horizons and implement a culture that celebrates diversity. As such, we encourage the Biology Colloquium series to incorporate at least one lecture each month that covers topics pertaining to diversity and/or the history of the intersection of science and politics, as well as increasing the overall diversity of guest lecturers. We acknowledge that BIPOC are experts in fields beyond diversity studies, therefore we encourage iBio to look beyond such studies when inviting underrepresented and minority lecturers. We expect these changes to be implemented **by fall of the 2021-2022 academic year**, i.e. the next iteration of the Biology Colloquium series.
- B. iBio faculty need to participate in the university-wide diversity committees such as the EAD and CDCC, not just within iBio. This work is necessary to further an anti-racist agenda, and iBio needs to contribute to the conversation. If we are not part of the solution then we are part of the problem. In addition, such committees consist of individuals who do vast amounts of physical and emotional labor on topics that often directly affect their personal wellbeing. Serving on such

¹⁵ [Ubadah Sabbagh, "Science Has Always Been Inseparable From Politics" Scientific American, April 25, 2017](#)

committees is an expectation for faculty members. As there are positions becoming vacant, or currently vacant, in both of these committees, iBio faculty joining such committees needs to occur **no later than the fall semester of the 2021-2022 academic year**.

V. We demand that the Department of Integrative Biology implement efforts that focus on both recruitment *and* retention of BIPOC students and faculty. In order to cultivate a safe and supportive environment for BIPOC students and faculty, current faculty must actively engage in a wider campus climate of inclusion and commitment to diversity.

- A. In order to better understand changes that need to be made in regards to recruitment of BIPOC graduate students, iBio needs to collect feedback from prospective graduate students who ultimately did not choose UW-Madison for their graduate careers. Possible questions could center around where UW-Madison came up short, why another program was more desirable, and what UW-Madison can do better. This should be done via anonymous surveys, and ultimately published so all members of the department can see what problems exist. This should be implemented **in the 2021-22 graduate student recruitment/application cycle**.
- B. In order to better understand changes that need to be made in regards to retention of BIPOC graduate students, iBio needs to conduct anonymous exit interviews of its graduate students. These interviews should encompass graduate students who are leaving the university for any reason, including following the successful completion of their doctorate or possibly transferring to another university. Like the point above, these general results should be anonymized and published. Scheduling of these interviews should occur **on or before the end of the spring 2021 semester**.
- C. In regards to faculty, iBio needs to increase the hiring rates of BIPOC faculty and invest in their retention. iBio needs to identify and address reasons for low recruitment of BIPOC faculty using the methods described above. Further, the iBio administration should implement new methods to enhance retention of BIPOC faculty, including but not limited to: an increase in networking and mentorship opportunities; the cultivation of a supportive anti-racist community with intentional collaboration efforts on research projects; and a prolonged dedication to campus- and city-wide changes. We recognize that the hiring of BIPOC faculty is an ongoing process, so participation in campus diversity committees (as outlined in the previous demand) is paramount. Therefore, as stated, joining such committees needs to occur **no later than the fall semester of the 2021-2022 academic year**.
- D. Faculty hiring, promotion, and tenure should strongly consider and value the concrete actions towards racial justice, diversity and equality of the faculty or

faculty candidate. For the sake of transparency, from here onward, the committees responsible for hiring, promotion, and tenure decisions shall release public statements about the concrete actions the faculty they decide to hire or promote have taken to address racial justice, diversity and equality. To increase transparency related to retention and recruitment, the administration should expand and formalize the role of graduate student opportunities in departmental governance and faculty hiring. Graduate students that serve on these committees should be nominated by their peers, rather than the ad-hoc appointments by faculty that exist currently.

VI. We demand that the Department of Integrative Biology reduce economic barriers for both current and potential graduate students by: abolishing international student fees, waiving segregated fees, increasing the graduate student stipend to levels on parity with peer institutions, and eliminating application fees for both undergraduate and graduate programs. We demand this be done for all graduate students in Integrative Biology, Freshwater and Marine Sciences, and those who have a primary appointment outside of these departments.

- A. Other departments at UW-Madison – such as Counseling Psychology and History – have covered international student fees for their graduate students. According to the Teaching Assistant Association (TAA):
 - 1. “The international student fee is an extra burden on international students. These students are already paying tuitions higher than their peers—they should not have to pay additional fees to cover unjust monitoring. This fee is an inequitable way for the university to balance its budget on the backs of international students.”¹⁶
- B. Other departments at UW-Madison – such as the School of Human Ecology – cover segregated fees for their graduate students. Abolishing segregated fees for graduate students – regardless of appointment status – is one way that the Integrative Biology administration can reduce economic barriers for its graduate students. As it stands, segregated fees account for over \$1,800 per student annually.¹⁷
 - 1. As of February 2020, federal student loan debt is rapidly approaching \$1.6 trillion, with the average student accumulating debt over \$30,000.¹⁸ Such debt disproportionately affects women, especially Black women, and first generation college students.¹⁹ This exacerbates the gender and racial barriers that exist in higher education and severely narrows the

¹⁶ [TAA Issue Statements on Graduate Pay and Fees. 2018. “Rescinding the international student fee.”](#)

¹⁷ [Bursar’s Office, University of Wisconsin-Madison. “Segregated Fees.”](#)

¹⁸ [Friedman, Zach. Feb 3, 2020. “Student Loan Debt Statistics In 2020: A Record \\$1.6 Trillion.” *Forbes*.](#)

¹⁹ [American Association of University Women \(AAUW\). 2020. “Deeper in Debt: Women and Student Loans.”](#)

demographics of prospective students at universities that still require their graduate students to pay segregated fees, such as UW-Madison.

- C. In order for the University of Wisconsin-Madison to compete internationally and garner a diverse and well-qualified population of graduate students, the administration needs to increase the graduate student stipend. Specifically, the stipends for Integrative Biology TAs, PAs, LSAs, and RAs are too low to be considered competitive to incoming graduate students, especially when compared to the cost of living in Madison, WI. The current stipend is not a liveable wage.
 - 1. As of July 2020, the average cost of a one-bedroom apartment in Madison is \$1,152 per month.²⁰ Annually, that comes to \$13,824, which is over 50% of the annual stipend for the highest paid doctoral students (PAs) of \$25,056, not including taxes, health and other insurances, and utilities.²¹
 - 2. As previously stated, failure to recognize the sexist and racist ramifications of underpaying and undervaluing graduate students severely limits the diversity of applicants.
- D. In addition to the above economic barriers for existing students, potential students also encounter barriers while even considering the pursuit of a degree. Waiving application fees for undergraduate and graduate programs is one way to eliminate yet another financial obstacle that disproportionately disadvantages individuals from low-income backgrounds and those unable to rely on generational wealth (especially first generation students, women, LGBTQIAP+ community members, and BIPOC).
 - 1. Having established that student loan debt is linked to gender and race, family earnings severely limit who will even consider applying to UW-Madison.
 - 2. As of 2017, women on average only make about 70% of what white men make, Black women about 60%, and Latina women only about 53%.²² In a country with such a vast disparity in income level directly linked to gender and race, it is unjust to require entry fees into a system which already results in vast amounts of debt.
 - 3. Waiving application fees for undergraduate and graduate programs makes UW-Madison more desirable for first generation college students, those from working class families, BIPOC, and international students, thus increasing the diversity of the student body as a whole.
- E. Knowing this, UW-Madison cannot both claim to value diversity while also financially burdening their graduate students with excess fees and non-liveable

²⁰ [ADOBO. "Monthly Rent Report-Madison."](#)

²¹ [Graduate School, University of Wisconsin-Madison. Nov 5, 2019. "UW-Madison Increases Minimum Stipends for TAs, PAs, and LSAs."](#)

²² [U.S. Department of Labor. 2017. "Earnings."](#)

wages. **We fully expect this to be an ongoing conversation between students and faculty**, with the latter understanding the urgency of the abolition of such impactful economic barriers.

VII. We demand that the Department of Integrative Biology support local efforts of racial justice and liberation. We are members of many communities beyond our roles within iBio. We must actively engage in calls for racial justice outside of campus as well as within UW-Madison.

- A. Support local efforts by organizations such as Freedom Inc and Urban Triage to defund the Madison Police Department.
 - 1. Freedom Inc. and its supporters have successfully removed police from Madison Public Schools.²³
 - 2. The Movement for Black lives has demanded a “divestment from the police and investment in Black communities.”²⁴
- B. Support local community members’ calls for significant changes in structure and defunding of UWPD.
 - 1. Despite only ~2% of students at UW identifying as Black, 40% of use-of-force instances by the UWPD involved Black people.²⁵
 - 2. The 2018-2019 budget for UWPD was \$12.8 million,²⁶ almost five times the national average budget for campus law enforcement.²⁷ Defund the UWPD and reallocate these funds to scholarships and programs that support Black students at UW-Madison.
- C. These actions will not stand alone. iBio students, faculty, and staff must join in on the nationwide call for defunding the police. Indeed, faculty at other institutions have explicitly supported these efforts.²⁸ This will not happen overnight, and so we demand that the faculty letter of intent explicitly state the support to defund UWPD and MPD and any future endeavors to that end.

VIII. We demand the support of the Integrative Biology faculty as we participate in future campaigns for racial justice, seeking to implement campus- and city-wide changes. Graduate students should not fear retaliation, professional or otherwise, as a result of participating in the protests and social movements of their choosing. Possible future campaigns could include, but are not limited to the following:

²³ [Beyer, Elizabeth. July 31, 2020. “City of Madison attempt to remove 'Police free schools' street mural blocked by protesters.” *Wisconsin State Journal*.](#)

²⁴ [Movement for Black Lives. Policy Platforms.](#)

²⁵ [Use of Force Data: 2019 Totals. UWPD. UW-Madison.](#)

²⁶ [Budget in Brief 2019-2020, UW-Madison. “Part II: Expenditures in Fiscal Year 2018–2019” pg 10.](#)

²⁷ [Davis, Charles H.F. III, and Jude Paul Matias Dizon. June 2, 2020. “More Colleges Should Divest From the Institution of Policing.”](#)

²⁸ [Kestecher, Katie. June 8, 2020. “UCLA profs join nationwide 'defund the police' push.” *Campus Reform*.](#)

- A. Supporting the Black Student Union and their campaign for the removal of the Abraham Lincoln statue (support BSU demands).^{29 30}
- B. Support racial justice initiatives in professional societies (Ecological Society, Society for the Study of Evolution, Entomological Society of America,^{31,32} and others).
- C. Supporting increased access to and diversity of staff members in mental health resources for all students.
- D. Such support should take the form of public departmental statements, lending space and resources to student movements when possible, making donations, attending events in solidarity with activists, and more.

In closing, we would like to recognize that given the lack of diversity within the graduate student population of the Department of Integrative Biology, we make these demands primarily through a lens of white accountability. Our statement represents an acknowledgement of the maintenance of white supremacy within our department and offers clear actions to begin to implement anti-racist practices in a timely manner. Anti-racist work can be uncomfortable. That discomfort is indicative of being challenged in our white privilege, and we must progress through that discomfort in order to better follow an anti-racist agenda. We hope to use our statement to engage with BIPOC organizations, faculty, and students across campus and the broader Madison community to ensure that the needs of our colleagues are reflected in this document and appropriately addressed. Therefore, we recognize that this is a document that has the capacity to change to best serve our BIPOC colleagues. We look forward to open dialogue within our department and seeing these actions implemented, as we have a lot of work to do.

Sincerely,

The graduate students of the Department of Integrative Biology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison

[A list of signatories is available here.](#)

²⁹ [Meyerhofer, Kelly. June 30, 2020. "University of Wisconsin students call for removal of Abraham Lincoln statue on Madison campus." *Chicago Tribune*.](#)

³⁰ [Reid, Amy. June 25, 2020. "UW-Madison students call for removal of Lincoln statue, 'Just because he was anti-slavery doesn't mean he was pro-Black'." *Channel 3000*.](#)

³¹ [Tai, Harnsberger, Kochanski, Lowe, McIntosh, and Iuliano. \(2020\).](#)

³² [Entomological Society of America. "Change the name of the Linnaean Games: Entomological Society of America. *Change.org*.](#)