

BRAVING DIVERSITY: C. Shupla¹, J. S. Gorce^{1,2}, J. Filiberto², P. Mane^{1,2}, E. G. Rivera-Valentín¹, C. Svambara¹,
¹Lunar and Planetary Institute, USRA (shupla@lpi.usra.edu), ² Astromaterials Research and Exploration Science (ARES) NASA Johnson Space Center.

Introduction: Organizations benefit when the workplace climate is inclusive and supportive of diverse staff. A healthy workforce climate benefits from increased staff awareness of potential issues, examining cultural norms and traditions, and an active willingness to discuss uncomfortable topics with care and respect.

Braving Diversity: In 2020, staff at the Lunar and Planetary Institute (LPI) initiated discussions on diversity and inclusion topics such as microaggressions, power imbalances, and personal identity, with the goal of nurturing and sustaining an inclusive workplace climate. Authors Shupla, Filiberto, Rivera-Valentín, and Svambara determined that rather than conducting a single workshop, holding a series of seminars that they titled “Braving Diversity” on assorted topics would be more meaningful. These seminar and discussion sessions are intentionally designed to supplement, not replace, traditional trainings and workshops on unconscious bias, bystander intervention, harassment, and other topics.

Braving Diversity is a series of LPI staff discussions, coordinated by and open to all staff on the challenges related to maintaining an inclusive and accessible environment. The vision is to hold these hour-long sessions, which include current research on diversity and inclusion and facilitated dialogue, several times each year.

Design and Format: The first session was a broad introduction to the topics; this was followed by sessions on cultural sensitivity, identity, microaggressions, and power imbalance; other upcoming topics may include bullying, assertive versus aggressive behavior, agism, intersectionality, fragility and fear, and gender-neutral language.

LPI staff are invited to help in the planning and facilitation of these sessions, which are for the staff and by the staff. Dr. Hutzler assisted in the session on cultural sensitivity, and authors Gorce and Mane joined the planning and facilitation team in late 2021.

All sessions to date have been conducted virtually and are limited to LPI staff. All LPI staff members are welcome but not required to attend. This follows work in the social sciences that showed that required diversity training had the opposite intended affect; it has been shown to reduce the diversity of new hires [1]. Voluntary training, on the other hand, has led to much better outcomes [1,2]. Additionally, to build trust around these difficult topics and create and maintain a safe environment, sessions are not

recorded, and no notes are taken, but there are anonymous polls and surveys to gather feedback.

In addition to presentations on important diversity and inclusion concepts mentioned above, the seminars also include activities and opportunities for discussion amongst the LPI staff. For example, the session on identity included a circle of trust activity (Figure 1), in which everyone privately created their personal list of people that they trust the most, then compared characteristics of those people (e.g., gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, education) to themselves and to each other by putting an ‘X’ next to names whose characteristics were different from their own. The purpose of this exercise was to demonstrate affinity bias and initiate a discussion on how this bias reduces abilities to build relationships, and ultimately our ability to better understand people who are different. For this and many other challenges, the first step to improvement is increasing our awareness of these biases.

The Circle of Trust

Add columns for ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, education
 Put an X for anyone with a DIFFERENT identity than your own

Initials or First Name	Gender	Ethnicity	Sexual Orientation	Age	Education
Person 1	X				
Person 2					
Person 3					
Person 4	X				

Figure 1: An activity example from a Braving Diversity Seminar. Participants were asked to compare characteristics of people they trust in a table format.

Sources and Resources: The organizers leveraged their own experiences at workshops and trainings, books, and online resources to help craft these sessions.

Workshops have included trainings on unconscious bias by USRA’s Joan Schmeltz, the February 2020 ADVANCE Geo train-the-trainer Bystander Intervention workshop, the June 2020 Preventing Harassment in Science workshop, trainings by the American Library Association conducted for the NASA@ My Library program, workshops at the American Camp Association conferences, seminars on Experiences of Black STEM in the Ivory, and others.

Resources were included or recommended during sessions including websites such as ADVANCE Geo Partnership Community Resources [3] and the

Division of Planetary Scientists (DPS) Inclusivity website [4], and books including Subtle Acts of Exclusion [5], Microaggressions in Everyday Life [6], and How to Be an Inclusive Leader [7].

Comparisons with Other Efforts: *Braving Diversity* is intended to be a small semi-formal platform for staff discussion to increase awareness and sustain an inclusive climate at LPI. Participants are encouraged to take what they learn in the *Braving Diversity* seminars and apply it to situations inside and outside the workplace. Several staff members supplement this experience with other diversity and inclusion-based organizations and activities. For example, staff also attend presentations planned by the Universities Space Research Association (USRA) Inclusivity, Equity, Diversity, and Accessibility (IDEA) committee and conference sessions. Several staff scientists participate in USRA's *Unlearning Racism in Geoscience* (URGE) team, which is exploring curriculum to deepen the science community's knowledge of the effects of racism on the participation and retention of Black, Brown, and Indigenous people in Geoscience. The program focuses on developing anti-racist policies and strategies as well as sharing, discussing, and modifying anti-racist policies and strategies within a dynamic community network and on a national stage. While the intended audience of *Braving Diversity* is LPI staff (including scientists and non-scientists), the geoscience community (and by extension, the scientific community as a whole) is the intended audience of URGE. Both *Braving Diversity* and URGE encourage participants to discuss uncomfortable issues in a safe environment, explore how they affect the interaction and communication of diverse peoples in the work environment, and strive for the goal of creating safe spaces for all individuals.

Evaluation and Feedback: Anonymous feedback has been gathered during and after each session through polls and open-ended surveys. Some of the feedback has been used to help determine future topics.

The majority of responses have described the sessions as either fairly or extremely useful (33 out of 35), with two describing sessions as slightly useful. Participants varied greatly in their assessment of the amount of new information provided, with the majority (28 out of 33) selecting "some" or "significant" new information and five selecting "little" new information.

References: [1] Frank, D. & Kalev, A. (2016) Harvard Business Review 97, 7. [2] Kulik, C. T. et al. (2007) Journal of Organizational Behavior 28, 753-769. [3] ADVANCE Geo Partnership Community Resources. [4] Division of Planetary Scientists (DPS) Inclusivity website. [5] Jana, T. & Baran, M. (2020)

Subtle Acts of Exclusion. [6] Sue, D.W. & Spanierman, L. (2020) *Microaggressions in Everyday Life*. [7] Brown, J. (2019) *How to Be an Inclusive Leader*.

Additional Information: If you have any questions or would like additional information regarding this initiative please contact Christine Shupla at shupla@lpi.usra.edu.