



COLUMBIA LAW SCHOOL

SABIN CENTER FOR CLIMATE CHANGE LAW

**SABIN CENTER DIVERSITY,
EQUITY, INCLUSION & ANTI-
RACISM PLAN**

December 2020

FOREWORD

The climate crisis is a crisis of unprecedented scope and scale. It arises from everywhere, and impacts everyone. But some—some countries, some companies, some communities, some individuals—are more responsible than others; and some are more impacted, and more vulnerable, than others. Climate change has made clear that diversity increases the power of potential solutions and the resilience to adverse impacts—for ecosystems, social systems, economic systems and their various hybrids and combinations. At the Sabin Center for Climate Change Law we believe that by creating and fostering a culture of diversity, equity, inclusion, and anti-racism, we will improve the strength and resilience of the Center, as well as the students, researchers and scholars, law and policy practitioners, and maybe even the planet we seek to teach, inform, collaborate with and protect.

The Sabin Center Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Anti-Racism (DEIA) Plan arose from within a larger assessment and planning effort at the Earth Institute that was initiated in 2019, and the imperative to consider and address DEIA issues at the Center intensified in the midst of the national reckoning with racial injustice brought about by police killings and the growth of white nationalism in Spring 2020. The Plan that follows articulates our commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion and anti-racism among our staff, and the people, groups and partners with whom we work, as well as in the issues with which we engage. Through it, we state in the clearest of terms that we welcome, value and respect people’s differences and that we know that by inspiring, developing and accessing a broad array of perspectives, skills and ideas we can be even more effective in achieving our mission.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Sabin Center is choosing to design and implement a plan to integrate diversity, equity, and inclusion, and anti-racism (DEIA) values into our core mission, workplace, and program areas because we believe that it will improve the efficacy of our work, align with our mission, and support Columbia University's (CU or Columbia) priorities of cultivating a workforce and student body that represents the diversity and talent available in the United States and around the world. The Sabin Center's DEIA Plan (Plan) folds into larger efforts across the Earth Institute (EI) to foster a work environment and culture that is diverse, equitable, inclusive, and anti-racist, and promotes a sense of belonging among all. An institute-wide survey assessment was the first step in the EI DEIA planning process, and this Plan and subsequent action will serve as part of ongoing efforts to achieve academic excellence and real impact on the world by mainstreaming DEIA values.

DEIA initiatives improve the efficacy of climate change work, including the research, writing, engagement, and legal and policy solutions the Sabin Center carries out. In the field of environmental and climate law, diversity helps us approach environmental problems from multiple perspectives, and thus design more effective and equitable solutions. Accordingly, communities of practice in the field have sought for years to address long-standing issues of inequality and lack of diversity. As recently as 2018, a survey of more than 2,000 environmental nonprofits found that although 14.5% of organizations engaged in some form of DEIA action, Whites comprised more than 85% of staff (Taylor 2018). The push for DEIA approaches has gained even greater momentum with New York's Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act and the proposal for a federal Green New Deal, which place issues of racial justice and economic equity at the center of climate policy. At the Sabin Center, we recognize that increasing our focus on DEIA will help increase the impact of our work by engaging us with more heterogeneous professional communities and broader sections of the public; helping us to avoid organizational blind spots; and increasing creativity (Beasley 2017).

DEIA planning is important to the Sabin Center’s ability to carry out and realize its mission. The Sabin Center aims to develop and promulgate legal techniques to address climate change, and train the next generation of lawyers in the field. Maintaining a diverse, equitable, inclusive, and anti-racist work environment allows the Sabin Center to attract top talent, and cultivate leaders who represent the range of people who experience, and have solutions to, the adverse impacts of climate change. The Sabin Center’s mission also focuses on partnering with and serving as a resource to public interest legal institutions, and compiling and disseminating information for lawyers in the public, private and NGO sectors, including those who advocate for environmental and climate justice. In developing this Plan, we seek to highlight and improve the DEIA efforts already embedded in our mission and work.

This Plan is also responsive to the results of an assessment carried out under the auspices of the EI’s DEIA planning process. Although the sample size in the assessment was small, it nonetheless revealed that the Sabin Center already possesses important DEIA attributes, and pointed to areas for improvement. The vast majority of respondents are highly satisfied with their job and do not feel isolated or excluded from informal networks; and many reported that the leadership team engages in significant work to foster openness and trust. At the same time, many employees reported that they do work that is not formally recognized, and did not feel that the Center had established resources and accountability mechanisms to promote and track diversity and fairness, nor instituted fair and effective dispute resolution processes. Thus, designing a DEIA plan that improves formal recognition, accountability and dispute resolution across our Center will help us to overcome the particular challenges we face as a small team.

Finally, this Plan supports CU’s broader efforts to integrate DEIA values across the University. CU aims to cultivate a workforce and student body that “reflects the diversity and talent of New York City, the larger metropolitan area, and the nation.” To this end, CU policies and programs aspire to “ensure that its employment and educational decisions are based on individual merit and not on bias or stereotypes” (Columbia University). Many DEIA efforts at CU and Columbia Law School (CLS) seek to either strengthen the faculty diversity pipeline or secure and enhance the student experience. The Plan, consistent with the EI process, seeks to build on these efforts by focusing

DEIA efforts on research officers at different career stages and administrative staff, and mainstreaming DEIA values at the Center level.

This Plan grew out of an informal working group convened and chaired by executive director Michael Burger, and constituted with two postdoctoral research scholars, Ama Francis and Hillary Aidun. The working group surveyed the Sabin Center to develop a team-wide definition of success, conducted independent research on DEIA planning and initiatives at peer organizations, reviewed the DEIA assessment conducted by EI, participated in conversations with the consulting team from the Morton Deutsch International Center for Cooperation and Conflict Resolution at Teachers College engaged by EI, and drafted and revised the Plan based on internal and external feedback. This Plan defines diversity, outlines the Sabin Center’s DEIA goals, and details metrics for monitoring and evaluating success.

2. DEFINING DIVERSITY

“Promoting a culture of inclusion and belonging at Columbia is a collective responsibility. It challenges us to sustain an environment that nurtures dialogue across difference, enhances accessibility and cultivates community.”

-- Draft Values Statement, Race,
Ethnicity and Inclusion Task Force Report
2017-2018

CU primarily defines diversity along two axes: student diversity and faculty diversity. In support of securing success along these two axes, the Office of University Life set up the Race, Ethnicity and Inclusion Task Force in 2015 to improve the student experience of diversity both in and out of the classroom (Columbia University 2017); and the Office of the Vice Provost for Faculty Diversity and Inclusion tracks gender, racial, and ethnic diversity among faculty members. As President Bollinger affirms, “achieving continued academic excellence and creating a vibrant university

community” requires increasing diversity in CU’s workforce, student body, and educational programs (Diversity Mission Statement).

Faculty Diversity is in part measured according to the following definitions of race and ethnicity:

- Underrepresented Minority: US citizens and permanent residents who have self-identified as at least one of the following: Hispanic or Latino, American Indian or Alaska Native, Black or African American, or Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander.
- Other Minority: US citizens and permanent residents who have self-identified as Asian Origin or as Asian and White.
- International: Faculty who are not US citizens or Permanent Residents.

These definitions allow CU to measure progress towards its goals of hiring faculty from diverse backgrounds in terms of race, culture, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, sexual orientation and ability and increasing the ratio of minority and women candidates in graduate and professional programs (Diversity Mission Statement).

This Plan affirms and adopts the DEIA statements and definitions that CU has endorsed.

3. GOALS

This Plan was developed to further three primary goals:

- 1) affirm the Sabin Center’s commitment to creating and maintaining a diverse, equitable, inclusive, and anti-racist organization and workplace, which is critical to advancing climate justice and developing a new generation of effective climate lawyers;
- 2) establish and improve practices in the management, operation and conduct of the Sabin Center to reflect this commitment; and
- 3) demonstrate leadership among peer centers and institutes to increase the climate law community’s engagement with and advancement of DEIA goals.

4. OBJECTIVES

This Plan seeks to advance three (3) overarching objectives to make the Sabin Center more diverse, equitable, inclusive, and anti-racist:

Hiring

The Sabin Center will strengthen the hiring pipeline and recruit a diverse staff, as well as a staff that is culturally sensitive and shares the Sabin Center's commitment to DEIA.

Center Culture

We will aim to foster a diverse, equitable, inclusive and anti-racist office environment by creating dedicated time to discuss DEIA issues, developing a "buddy system" to pair staff members and facilitate conversations about workplace issues, and providing information and trainings to equip Sabin Center staff with the skills to informally resolve concerns that do not require University intervention.

Center Work

The Sabin Center will seek diversity in our partnerships, including with environmental justice and racial justice organizations. We commit to dedicating our research, expertise, time, and effort to addressing issues of climate justice, environmental justice, energy access and a just transition.

5. DEIA INCLUSION ACROSS SABIN CENTER INITIATIVES

Hiring

We plan to implement the following hiring practices with respect to all new positions in order to both attract a broader and more diverse candidate pool and ensure that all new hires will contribute to fostering an inclusive and culturally sensitive culture at the Sabin Center. Subject to

approval by CLS Human Resources, we will revise our official job postings to reflect that we seek candidates 1) from diverse backgrounds and 2) who share our commitment to building a diverse, equitable, inclusive and anti-racist workplace. We will also ensure communications concerning job postings expressly note that we seek candidates consistent with these criteria. We will also analyze current and future job and internship listings to determine whether they may be gender-coded or otherwise deter qualified applicants who belong to non-dominant groups and revise the listings to include language that addresses these concerns.

In assessing candidates' qualifications, we commit to considering candidates from diverse and underrepresented groups, taking into account non-academic achievements, and placing value on experiences that would allow a candidate to bring a new perspective to the Sabin Center. Interviews will be partially standardized in order to ensure that implicit bias and personal connections do not influence hiring decisions. To the extent practicable, all candidates for any given position will be interviewed by the same members of the Center. A list of standard interview questions will be used for all candidates, though interviewers will have the flexibility to also ask follow-up questions or questions specific to a candidate's resume in addition to the standard questions. The list of standard interview questions will include at least one question to assess cultural competency.ⁱ

Beyond the practices discussed above, we will broaden and diversify the fellowship hiring pipeline by conducting outreach to affinity groups at law schools, and work to raise the Sabin Center's profile at historical black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and universities serving underrepresented populations by actively seeking speaking opportunities at such schools.

We will also broaden and diversify the intern hiring pipeline by sharing the internship announcement through affinity group listservs at Columbia and co-hosting events with affinity groups at Columbia where possible to raise awareness about the Sabin Center among group members. We will expand our hiring criteria to capture students who have not yet had the opportunity to do any environmental coursework or internships but who express a clear commitment to exploring the field of climate change law and policy. All interns will be hired by a

panel of two or more to facilitate standardization and guard against bias. We will also assess the pool of candidates to whom we will extend offers to ensure the intern group reflects our DEIA values.

Integrating DEIA values into our fellowship and intern hiring practices will advance our goals of training the next generation of high-impact climate lawyers. Additionally, the EI DEIA survey found that leadership was less diverse than staff. To the extent that Center leadership expands or changes in the future, the DEIA principles discussed above should be incorporated into recruitment and hiring for leadership positions.

Center Culture

The Sabin Center will work to develop an equitable and inclusive workplace that advances our DEIA mission.

We will ensure that all staff are aware of existing mechanisms at the University to combat discrimination, and include relevant information in transition memos and intern welcome packets. Such mechanisms include the duty on all CU staff to refer suspected instances of discrimination, harassment or gender-based misconduct, directly or indirectly to the [Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action](#) or the [Gender-Based Misconduct Office](#), and the [referral form](#) for reporting incidents. They may also include any new mechanisms that emerge from the Earth Institute's ongoing DEIA initiative.

According to the results of the EI survey, some Sabin Center employees feel they lack access to discrimination and bias awareness training. We will actively encourage employees to attend trainings on racial justice, bias, and DEIA issues provided by Columbia. If such trainings prove insufficient, and depending on the availability of resources, we may also hold a training for Sabin Center staff.

We will integrate our DEIA commitment into our mission statement and endeavor to include that commitment on other public-facing materials, such as newsletters. We will dedicate time to discussing DEIA concerns and goals at the Sabin Center among all staff members at least twice a year, in addition to addressing any discrete issues that arise between discussions related to race, gender, sexual orientation, parenthood, or any other aspect of diversity, equity, inclusion, and anti-racism. We will also encourage staff to include their preferred gender pronouns in their email signatures. We will continue to constitute a DEIA working group with rotating members and the Executive Director as chair.

Efforts to advance DEIA will be valued and considered in evaluating employees' performance. In evaluating performance, supervisors will consider:

- whether an employee has supported others' work and/or collaborated with other on their work; and
- how the employee has fostered diversity, equity, inclusion, anti-racism and belonging at the Sabin Center.

Additionally, time dedicated to implementing and advancing the DEIA Plan will be considered in assessing employees' performance, portfolio and capacity.

To foster a collegial environment and facilitate communication among employees who do not work on projects together, we will continue to hold weekly staff meetings once the team returns to the office. Fellows will also be paired up with senior fellows to make space to informally discuss DEIA and other workplace issues.

Finally, we will seek to develop a culture in which staff feel comfortable raising concerns with each other about DEIA issues that do not involve harassment, discrimination, or other behavior that would require University intervention as discussed above. In transition memos and DEIA discussions we will encourage staff to be open to directly resolving interpersonal issues when a colleague raises a concern. We will provide staff with access to training through the Ombuds office

to develop the skills to resolve common conflict issues so that staff feel empowered to do so. We will also seek training to further education staff about the types of conflicts that might arise. Staff will also be encouraged to go to the Ombuds or a colleague in situations where direct resolution is unsuccessful, or if they do not feel comfortable confronting their colleagues in the first instance.

Center Work

Finally, the Sabin Center's substantive work will reflect our commitment to DEIA. First, we hereby rededicate ourselves to actively seeking and establishing partnerships and collaborations with climate justice, environmental justice and racial justice organizations. We will seek to ensure that at all times at least one fellow is working on a climate justice-focused project. However, we will also integrate climate justice across our work by committing to considering the racial and socioeconomic dynamics present in all of our projects, and endeavor to prevent any projects that we are involved with from contributing to existing racial or socioeconomic inequities.

We will also work to diversify our events, both with respect to representation and subject matter. We will hold at least one climate justice-focused event per year. These events can also serve as opportunities to partner with affinity groups at Columbia Law School, which will further our goal of raising the Sabin Center's profile among such groups. Finally, we will make sure that there is racial or gender diversity on any panels or at any events that we organize, and strive to achieve both racial and gender diversity at all panels and events.

6. MONITORING & EVALUATION

6.1 Key Metrics

- ❑ Within three months the language in job postings has been evaluated to ensure inclusivity, and revised if needed
- ❑ Within three months the language in job postings has been evaluated to incorporate DEIA mission

- ❑ Demonstrated effort to recruit from affinity groups as well as HBCUs and other universities serving underrepresented groups
- ❑ Interviews have been partially standardized by the DEIA working group
 - ❑ Standard list of questions developed
 - ❑ The standard list includes one mandatory and several optional questions to assess cultural competency
 - ❑ Hiring panels standardized
- ❑ Summer internship process, candidate pool and hiring decisions reflect DEIA values
- ❑ All Sabin Center staff are aware of mechanisms to address discrimination and DEIA issues
 - ❑ Information about such mechanisms are included in transition memos and circulated annually as a reminder
- ❑ All Sabin Center staff have completed at least one discrimination and/or bias awareness training in their first year (not including CU's required sexual harassment training)
- ❑ Sabin Center staff have been encouraged to include preferred gender pronouns in their email signatures during one of our bi-annual DEIA team discussions, and a note on signatures has been included in the fellowship transition memo
- ❑ Time is dedicated twice per year to discussing DEIA concerns and goals within the Sabin Center
- ❑ Within six months Sabin Center mission has been assessed and updated as appropriate to express our commitment to DEIA values
- ❑ The DEIA working group continues to meet; members are rotated every year with the exception of the ED
- ❑ Within six months a "buddy system" has been implemented among fellows
- ❑ Within one year staff members have been trained on resolving interpersonal issues
- ❑ At least one climate, environmental, racial or justice event is held per year
- ❑ Demonstrated effort to partner with climate, environmental or racial justice groups
- ❑ New projects are assessed for potential impacts on climate, environmental, and racial justice

6.2 Plan for Ongoing Implementation

- Post the final plan on the Sabin Center website
- Monitor and evaluate metrics over the next year
- Working Group to assess success against key metrics in September 2021
- Rotate DEIA Working Group members yearly, with the exception of the ED, to amend and re-formulate plan for implementation

References

Columbia University, *Equal Employment Opportunity and Nondiscrimination Policies and Procedures*, <https://tinyurl.com/yyllsaad>.

--Race, Ethnicity, and Inclusion Task Force Report 2017-2018, <https://tinyurl.com/y2epys4u>.

--Diversity Mission Statement, <https://tinyurl.com/yxtdvfks>.

Dorceta Taylor, *Diversity in Environmental Organizations Reporting and Transparency* 1 (2018).

Maya A. Beasley, *Beyond Diversity: A Roadmap to Building an Inclusive Organization* 8 (2017).

Showing Up for Racial Justice, *The Characteristics of White Supremacy Culture*, <https://bit.ly/34kJhyt>.

¹ For example, “Please describe a time when you saw discrimination in the classroom or the workplace and how you responded” or “Please describe an experience you have had of working with teammates from different cultural backgrounds.”