

## Equity and Justice Initiative Updates - September 2021

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### SEAS Student Center

The [SEAS Student Center](#), formerly known as the Office of Academic Programs (OAP), will be a one-stop academic shop for students that includes admissions and recruitment; grants and scholarship support; student curriculum advising; career services; and various types of student programming and support. You can read more about the Student Center [on the SEAS website](#).

#### SEAS Student Center hosted the following events:

DEI student activities

[DEI presentation at orientation](#)

Healing Space for SEAS APIDA Students: April 1, 2021

Virtual LGBTQIA+ Trivia Night: June 25, 2021

Pride Never Ends Picnic: July 1, 2021

### Incoming Student Diversity Numbers

The Equity and Justice Initiative set out to explore ways to provide information about the composition of SEAS student body. The chart below shows progress made toward achieving equitable representation in the SEAS student body.

Ethnicity Breakdown (MS/MLA) <sup>‡</sup> (Domestic Only)	Fall 2017	Fall 2018	Fall 2019	Fall 2020	Fall 2021
	Matric	Matric	Matric	Matric	Matric
UR** TOTAL	20%	19%	27%	24%	26%
URM* TOTAL	11%	10%	13%	14%	20%

\* URM: Underrepresented Minorities (African Americans, Hispanic Americans, American Indians/Native Alaskans, Native Hawaiians/Pacific Islanders, & multi-racial students identifying w/ at least one of the previously listed categories, excludes Asian Americans)

\*\* Non-URM: Includes Asian Americans, Whites, & Not Indicated

‡ Data reflects the latest information available for matrics from Business Objects

## SEAS Communications

The communications team has continued to prioritize BIPOC stories and stories related to inclusion, equity and justice. Since the last update, the following stories have been published:

Student blog post: [Redlining and Environmental Racism \(8/16/21\)](#)

Student blog post: [Rethinking Conservation of National Parks \(7/28/21\)](#)

Student blog post: [Ensuring Universal Access to Safe and Affordable Water for Detroit Residents \(7/14/21\)](#)

Student blog post: [Decolonizing the Curriculum for More Inclusive Learning \(7/24/21\)](#)

Alumni profile: [John Petoskey \(MS/JD '20\): Preserving the Environment for Future Generations \(7/15/21\)](#)

[SEAS Professor Tony Reames Tapped by DOE to Lead Energy Justice Policy \(6/15/21\)](#)

Student blog post: [Energy Inequities Exist Between Advantaged and Disadvantaged Communities \(6/14/21\)](#)

[U-M Energy Equity Project to Develop First Standardized Tool for Driving Equity in Clean Energy Industry \(5/25/21\)](#)

Student blog post: [Celebrating Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month \(5/18/21\)](#)

Student blog post: [Decolonizing the Curriculum at SEAS \(posted 5/17/21\)](#)

Stewards article: [Professor Kyle Whyte: Advocating for Indigenous People and Environmental Justice \(Stewards email, 5/13/21\)](#)

Communications also developed messages in honor of Women's History Month (March), AAPI Month (May), and Pride Month (June), and we are planning to highlight Latinx/Hispanic Heritage Month (Sept. 15-Oct. 15).

## Decolonizing the Curriculum

A year ago the Equity and Justice Initiative began a pilot which engaged teams of faculty and students (paid) in curriculum decolonizing efforts. The pilot was granted funding to work on one course per specialization as a place to start, and included 12 MS students and 6 faculty, with the primary goal of revising syllabus content and optionally, land acknowledgements.

This same model was replicated during the Winter 2021 semester, also with 12 MS students and 6 new faculty. During the Winter semester, our program's team expanded from 3 to 4 MS students.

During Summer 2021, the program model was adjusted to include 3 PhD students, 2 MS students, and 5 new faculty.

In total, 18 faculty have worked on decolonizing their syllabi with the support from approximately 20 students, as some students participated over multiple years.

During the Fall 2021 semester, the program team will bring on 2 new MS students, and will spend the semester collecting data from past students and faculty participants in order to restructure the program model. The work will also involve the new DEI office.

## Changes to the DEI staff at SEAS

A year ago, the Equity and Justice Initiative stated a goal to hire two additional DEI staff members to support the school's efforts to better recruit and retain JEDI students, faculty, and staff. Since that time, the DEI part-time manager left SEAS and the dean took this opportunity to create a new administrative structure for SEAS DEI.

SEAS will have a Director of Diversity, Equity, and Community, who reports directly to the dean, chairs the SEAS DEI Committee, serves as liaison to the University's central DEI coordinator, and supervises the two new staff members. We are pleased to announce that **Lauren Davis** (she/her/hers), has joined SEAS in this director's role.



Lauren has over 13+ years of higher education experience at the University of Michigan. She comes to SEAS from the U-M School of Social Work where she was the Assistant Director of their DEI Office since its founding in 2017. She worked collaboratively alongside students, staff, and faculty to advance the School's DEI and anti-racism goals. She was responsible for the coordination and implementation of the School's DEI strategic plan, executing annual DEI assessments, supervising student staff, and creating DEI initiatives.

Lauren is a lecturer in Social Work, teaching courses related to Diversity and Social Justice, Racial Equity, and generalist social work practice. Lauren received her BA in Psychology and Sociology and her MSW from the University of Michigan. She believes that DEI is central to the mission of every organization and is an essential part of everyone's role. She looks forward to making connections with the students, staff, and faculty of SEAS, and being able to contribute to the School's mission.

Lauren Davis may be reached at [laurdavi@umich.edu](mailto:laurdavi@umich.edu).

The Equity and Justice Initiative outlined two additional positions to help achieve the school's goals. We welcome **Vanesa Jackson**, as Program Manager, Graduate and Undergraduate Student Diversity Services and **Kris Surla**, as DEI Recruitment and Training Specialist for Faculty and Staff Development.



**Vanesa Jackson** (she/her/hers) is a first-generation graduate from Grand Rapids, Michigan. She has helped push forward DEI efforts throughout her educational career at a variety of institutions. She was previously the Intercultural Affairs Coordinator & Smooth Transitions Program Director at Albion in Albion, MI, where she managed the overall leadership, administration, program development, event planning, hiring of staff, and created program evaluations and reporting methods.

She has created and deployed several workshops and speaker series to create and sustain a sense of community and provide opportunities for discussions regarding social justice issues, advocacy work/projects, and educating our community on how to socially navigate through society today. She strongly believes that equity should be accessible and the standard for all.

Vanesa studied English and Spanish with a Higher Education Concentration during her undergraduate studies. She holds a Master of Arts in Educational Leadership from DePaul University, Chicago with a Higher Education emphasis.

She can be reached at [vanesaj@umich.edu](mailto:vanesaj@umich.edu)



**Kristen Surla** (she/her/siya) is excited to join the School for Environment and Sustainability at the University of Michigan as the DEI Training Specialist focused on faculty and staff development. Kris is transitioning into the University of Michigan from her previous role as the Course Coordinator for Student Leadership Training within the Department of Educational Administration at Michigan State University (MSU).

Kris brings 8+ years of experience working in higher education including her role as Assistant Director of the Multicultural Resource Center at Oberlin College and Conservatory, the Center of Urban Research and Learning at Loyola University Chicago, and the Center for Minority Serving Institutions at the University of Pennsylvania.

Kris has collaboratively published on many topics related to her interests, and is a co-founder of the Chosen Collective which provides DEI organizational change, assessment, and strategic planning to leaders in education, nonprofit, and corporate sectors. As a complement to her academic work, Kris uses art as a way to connect with her local and global communities around topics of social justice, equity, and access.

She is currently finishing her PhD in the Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education Program at MSU and received her B.A. in English and Sociology and her M.Ed. from Loyola University Chicago. Her dissertation research interrogates the navigation of academic socialization, funding structures, and identity capitalism by BIPOC graduate students in science fields.

Kris can be reached at [ksurla@umich.edu](mailto:ksurla@umich.edu)

You can learn more about the DEI staff at: <https://seas.umich.edu/about/diversity-equity-inclusion>

## **Creating a more diverse Faculty**

1. A faculty search is under way for a new tenure-track Professor in Environmental Justice hire, and they will hopefully start teaching in the next academic year.
2. A second faculty search is underway for a new Visiting Professor in Environmental Justice hire, and they will hopefully start teaching in winter term.
3. A Lecturer in Environmental Justice has been hired, and they will start teaching in winter term, this hire will be announced soon.
4. A SEAS-led proposal has been submitted to the Provost's Anti-Racism Faculty Hiring Initiative for a 4-school 4-faculty cluster hire "for Addressing Environmental Racism and Promoting Health Equity". We are hoping for success with the proposal, and to be able to initiate hiring before the end of the semester. The goal is to have another tenure-track Professor teaching in SEAS in the next academic year.
5. Three more tenure-track faculty searches were just approved, each involving a focus on DEI and Environmental Justice: one in Global Change Biology, one in Environmental Policy and Planning, and one in Behavior, Education, and Communication. A goal of these searches is to integrate DEI and Environmental Justice scholarship more thoroughly in all we do.

Each faculty hiring process involves a public talk and interview opportunities. All will be announced to the SEAS community in advance.