Our ongoing commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion

GPS EDI Committee Chair Elizabeth Lyons shares ways the school is striving for equal access, opportunities and success

GPS News sat down with the school's current Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Committee Chair [Elizabeth Lyons](#) to discuss the committee's progress on working toward our commitment of ensuring GPS is an inviting, inclusive place for all.

What are the goals of the EDI Committee at GPS?

We want to make sure our staff, faculty and students at GPS have an equally positive experience – equal opportunities to grow, to learn, to build relationships and to feel valued, regardless of their gender, ethnicity, disability, sex or race. Access and success are huge for us; we want to ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to apply to work at GPS or apply to our programs. There's a lot involved with that, such as ensuring our outreach efforts to potential students, faculty members and staff reflect our desire to ensure equal opportunity.

We have also focused on inclusive climate, which means the culture at GPS strives

to be inclusive and respectful. Organizational culture is super important for promoting access and success. A toxic culture can do the opposite, only supporting the few who are able to take advantage of that culture. We also have a goal of improving accountability, examining how we are monitoring our work toward our objectives and how we respond to signals that we aren't doing the right things.

What steps are being taken to reach those goals?

The first thing we've already done is institute a requirement that course syllabi include more diverse authors, contributors and topics so that students in the classroom are exposed to a diversity of opinion and are seeing a diverse set of people generating these ideas – people they can identify with. We are also expanding course offerings to include EDI content.

We've improved our awareness of how news and world events might affect our students and staff in different ways and looked at what we need to do to support them. Because of this, we've introduced weekly community hangouts, inviting students, faculty and staff to come in and talk about any issues they're experiencing relating to EDI in their lives. These hangouts are led by faculty members, who provide a sounding board for anyone in attendance.

We have also introduced the [EDI Fellows program](), which, for the students selected, provides funding for students interested in focusing on EDI during their time at GPS. The EDI Fellows help the committee better understand what is going on among students. They're the voice for us among their peers so we know where we are and aren't doing well, and they help us stay accountable and communicate our goals to the student body. They are also given space to work on projects they are particularly interested in to help us achieve these big goals, which is very exciting.

We're working with the Career Services team to build out some EDI-related content for students applying for jobs, focusing on helping students know how to respond if they face bias or discrimation in an interview or at work, as well as things to look for in an organizational culture that would help them better succeed.

The committee has also created new staff interview and hiring guidelines to address and combat implicit bias during the hiring process, and we are already

seeing some positive impacts from those changes. We're actively working on hiring initiatives to improve the diversity of our course offerings and research output. That's important because we hope to teach students who will become global leaders.

What are some of the biggest challenges we face as a school and university in terms of EDI?

I think for any postsecondary institution anywhere in the world, inequities are everywhere. The selection on who ends up getting to pursue higher education has been driven by huge differences in opportunity, not driven by potential. The chances that we're capturing the universe of people who have great potential are very low, because many people don't have the opportunity to get to the point where they're able to attend a university like UC San Diego, especially in a graduate program. Similarly, for faculty – in economics, for instance – the majority of people who have a Ph.D. have a parent who has a graduate degree.

The biggest challenge goes well beyond the present – it goes into developing a deep understanding of the history that has led us to this point where we're really not diverse. Going forward, we have to look at how to do things that change that, not just focusing on people getting undergraduate degrees but even those in high school. How do we reach people much earlier to ensure they're not facing hurdles they aren't able to overcome and that they can actually make it to GPS or any other great graduate program?

Is the EDI Committee connected to any larger, university-wide groups or efforts?

As well as the university's [Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion](#), each department or school has a faculty equity adviser. In addition to chairing the EDI Committee at GPS, I also serve as GPS' faculty equity adviser. I get to meet with my counterparts across campus to discuss how GPS is contributing to EDI efforts and bring back ideas from other areas. It helps me know how we could be doing better, and I'm so thrilled and honored to be a part of it.

Can you talk to me about your own research as it relates to EDI?

I have studied how different underrepresented groups may face barriers to productive participation in innovation, entrepreneurship and collaborative

problem solving, and what might be done to overcome some of these barriers. In particular, I have published evidence that entrepreneurship training [significantly increases the rate and success of entrepreneurship for females and ethnic minorities](#), but not for white males who are able to accumulate networks and knowledge that supports successful entrepreneurship outside of formal entrepreneurship training programs.

Relatedly, I have an ongoing study that suggests female entrepreneurs use digital tools differently than male entrepreneurs, and in a way that is consistent with these tools helping them overcome the higher demands on their time from their home lives. I also have research on the [challenges associated with diverse team communication](#), and how managers can help workers overcome these communication challenges to successfully solve problems.

The theme in most of what I've found is that gaps in participation and performance in entrepreneurship and innovation between non-minority males and other groups are not all that difficult to overcome when we have a commitment to doing so and an understanding of what might be driving them.

What can people at GPS do to get involved with the EDI efforts?

The committee is working to provide additional opportunities to become involved, but I encourage our faculty, staff and students to [reach out to me](#) if you have an idea, or even if you don't have an idea but want to do something. For students specifically, our EDI Fellows Belinda Panelo and Adrian Rodriguez-Valdez are a great resource.

2021-2022 EDI Committee members:

- John Ahlquist
- Renee Bowen
- Jen Burney
- David Fortunato
- Stephan Haggard
- Gordon McCord
- Agustina Paglayan
- Victor Shih
- Jakana Thomas
- Elizabeth Lyons (chair)

- Meredith D'Angelo
- Nancy Gilson
- Sonja Steinbrech
- Belinda Panelo (GPS EDI Fellow)
- Adrian Rodriguez-Valdez (GPS EDI Fellow)