

**Report on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the Department of Asian and Middle Eastern
Studies, UNC-Chapel Hill**

July 1, 2022

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT: We acknowledge that the land on which the University of North Carolina stands is the ancestral homeland of Eastern Siouan-speaking Indigenous peoples (Yesàh, “The People”). We honor and acknowledge a commitment to serve the citizens of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, the Coharie Indian Tribe, the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina, the Haliwa-Saponi Indian Tribe, the Sappony, the Meherrin Nation, the Occaneechi Band of the Saponi Nation, and the Waccamaw-Siouan Tribe, who, along with citizens of other tribal nations, comprise the largest population of Indigenous people in any state east of the Mississippi River. This report represents one small attempt to move beyond mere acknowledgment by working to achieve racial equity for Black faculty, faculty of color, and Indigenous faculty, and to fulfill the mission of our department and university.

Introduction

In June of 2020, following the killing of George Floyd on camera and the rapid spread of Black Lives Matter protests across the nation and indeed globally, the need for universities to explicitly address systemic racism and white supremacy gained urgency. UNC students, faculty, staff, and alumni engaged in various forms of activism to promote conversations about the university's own struggles with structural racism and to highlight means by which the administration could begin to fight white supremacy. Three accomplished scholars of race and faculty of color—Professor Kia Caldwell, Professor Sharon Holland, and Professor Malinda Maynor Lowery—collaborated to draft the Roadmap for Racial Equity at UNC Chapel Hill, presenting it on June 22 to the UNC Faculty Executive Committee after collecting more than 1,200 signatures in support of its bold and visionary plan to “guide future decision and policy-making at the University.” The Roadmap informs the DEI efforts of DAMES, as well as this report.

DAMES has a long history of engaging with the issues raised in the Roadmap. One early champion from within our department was Professor Gang Yue. In 1995, in response to a request from the Asian Students Association, he developed and taught ASIA 82, “Asian American Literature” followed by ASIA 89, “Asian American Experiences” in 1998, providing courses on the culture and diverse experiences of Asian Americans for the first time in the history of the university. He worked tirelessly to support Asian American students' organizations in various formal and informal capacities, including as faculty adviser for AAS and CUSA, in a period when few faculty on campus focused on Asian American studies or recognized Asian and Asian American members of the university community using terms such as “diversity.” After 2004, as department chair, Gang was instrumental in launching Korean language programs in response to

the requests of respective student organizations. In 2004 Gang became chair of the department, one of the few Asian chairs at that time, and pushed the leadership of the College to recognize the distinctive forms of diversity that the Department of Asian Studies—as we were known at that time—both taught and represented. He liked to make the point that this department taught language and culture representing about sixty percent of the world population. Gang also made the point that our department’s faculty, made up of diverse international experts in language and literature from across Asia and the Middle East, embodied a distinctive form of diversity.

Jan Bardsley, another active faculty member who served as chair of Asian Studies after Gang Yue, was similarly committed to DEI, drawing attention to issues related to gender and race in Japan and the U.S. in particular. In 2000-01, Jan and UNC Women’s Studies Professor Joanne Hershfield co-directed and produced the 52-minute documentary, *Women in Japan: Memories of the Past, Dreams for the Future*. In the summer of 2001, they screened the film and held discussions at several community centers, women’s groups, and schools in Japan. Audiences were surprised at the diversity of the “women in Japan” interviewed; the lives of the interviewees had extended past national boundaries and a single language. Jan also organized a variety of speaker series and symposia related to diversity. The first one took place in 1999 when Jan and English Department faculty member Michael Petit organized “Desiring Asia: Gender, Identity and Sexuality in Contemporary Asia.” This seven-week speaker and film series was funded by the Williamson Committee for Gay and Lesbian Studies. In fall 2004, Jan hosted Professor Hiroko Hagiwara, Osaka Women’s University, as a Visiting Scholar at UNC, funded as part of the university’s large Freeman Grant at the time. Jan arranged for her to hold discussions at other NC campuses, including Spellman College in Greensboro. In spring 2004, Jan arranged for 10 members of the Japanese women’s entrepreneurial group INANNA to visit

Chapel Hill for a workshop with local teachers, conversations with students, faculty, and community leaders.

Jan's scholarship similarly engaged with issues of race and gender, such as her recent book *Maiko Masquerade: Crafting Geisha Girlhood in Japan* (UC Press, 2021), which explores ethno-nationalist assumptions about Kyoto's geisha community and its geisha apprentices (maiko), discussing the lack of recognition of the diversity of ethnicities within Japan. This work extended into the classroom as well. Starting in 1998 Jan taught the first-year seminar, "The American Life of Japanese Women," which explored representations of Japanese women in American popular culture from the late 19th through the 20th century.

Another faculty member who has been deeply committed to DEI work in teaching, scholarship, and activism is Mark Driscoll. Since 2008, Mark has been teaching one of the most visible critical race studies courses at UNC, "Global Whiteness." From 2014-2019, Mark was an active participant in the UNC Seminar on Race, run by Dr. Most Ifantugi in the Sociology Department; this seminar was transformative for many participants, and helped lay intellectual foundations for much of the DEI work of the past several years. Mark was invited to participate in the "Reckoning: Race, Memory and Reimagining the Public University" effort launched by Senior Associate Dean Rudi Colloredo-Mansfeld in 2019. As part of this effort, Mark's "Global Whiteness" course was highlighted; he also invited the director of the film "Wilmington on Fire" to UNC for a showing and discussion. From 2015-2019, Mark was the co-convener of the Carolina Seminar on Racial Literacies with Jennifer Ho (English) and Renée Alexander Craft (Communication Studies). It became a matrix for discussions among undergrads, graduate students, and faculty about how best to rid UNC of Silent Sam. The Carolina Seminar on Racial

Literacies helped to foster a network that contributed to the non-violent act of civil disobedience that led to the removal of the confederate monument.

More recently, DAMES faculty Dwayne Dixon and Robin Visser were invited by the student groups UNC International Business Club and HOX-UNC (East Asian professional fraternity) to speak on April 9, 2021 on the topic of Asian Hate Crimes in the wake of the spa murders in Atlanta. Dwayne gave remarks addressing systemic structures of white supremacy and Robin historicized anti-Asian hate crimes in a talk titled “‘Yellow Peril’ Pandemic Racialized Discourses of Disease and Anti-Asian Racism in the US.” The talks were livestreamed and posted on YouTube for public viewing.

Many other current faculty, including but not limited to Nadia Yaqub, Claudia Yaghoobi, Afroz Taj, and Pamela Lothspeich are also deeply invested in DEI-related work. Several DAMES faculty are participants in the Indigenous Faculty and Faculty of Color working group. The summary above is thus only a small slice of the DEI-related activity of our faculty, who have engaged these issues in various contexts as teachers, as scholars, as campus leaders, and as activists.

Demographics

The faculty in the department is diverse in predictable ways considering the racial/ethnic and gender trends in our fields. The department has just one underrepresented minority faculty member, with 1 Latina faculty, 14 Asian faculty, and 16 white and Middle Eastern faculty, according to standard demographic metrics. Yet if we consider the nuances of these broad categories the picture becomes somewhat more variegated, with the following breakdown by nationality and/or ethnicity: 1 Arab-Israeli, 1 Argentinian-Israeli, 5 Chinese, 1 Egyptian, 1

Indian, 1 Iranian, 1 Iranian-Armenian, 4 Japanese, 3 Korean, 1 Palestinian, 1 Taiwanese, 1 Turkish, and 10 White American faculty members. The lived experience of diversity in our department thus manifests in micro-cultures around language use, program affiliation, country of origin, and many other factors in addition to race and gender.

65% of our faculty are women. (We recognize that the reporting of gender identities using the binaries of male and female reproduces a restrictive understanding of identity. We embrace non-binary and other gender identities and report these statistics only to aid in discussions of equity in terms of salary and rank.)

7 (or 23%) of our faculty are at the assistant teaching professor or assistant professor rank (4 women and 3 men). 18 (58%) are at the associate teaching professor or associate professor rank (12 women and 6 men). 6 (19%) are at the teaching professor or full professor rank (4 women and 2 men). 55% of our faculty are teaching track (13 women and 4 men), and 45% are tenure track (7 women and 7 men).

As a department, we are committed to increasing the diversity of our faculty as suggested in the *Roadmap* through hiring underrepresented faculty and staff.

Recent activity:

The Department of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies has engaged in a series of new DEI-related activities, some outward facing, and others internally directed, since 2019.

Internal Department Activity

Internally, we have worked both to address biases within our own departmental structures and processes and to highlight ways of strengthening our commitment to DEI in the classroom.

On October 4, 2019, we hosted a workshop by Tiffany Bailey, Director, and Simon Bloor, Associate Director, from Accessibility Resources and Services on the principles of Universal Design in the creation of courses. The workshop was helpful for thinking through techniques for designing courses that could eliminate the need for special accommodation. This was followed on December 5, 2019 by a presentation to the DAMES faculty by Dr. Carmen Huerta-Bapat (Global Studies) on first-generation students, microaggressions, and the promise of microaffirmations.

On October 28, 2019, we sent an official request to the College to change our department's name to Asian and Middle Eastern Studies to better represent the diversity of our faculty, curriculum, and programs. This proposal was approved and has guided the launch of our new MA program as well as the evolution of our relationship to the area studies centers.

In June of 2020, chair Morgan Pitelka, with input from the faculty, created the DAMES “Anti-Racist Toolkit” and broadly disseminated it online: <https://asianstudies.unc.edu/antiracist-toolkit-department-of-asian-studies/>. In August of 2020, Morgan launched a survey of the DAMES faculty on DEI issues, and on September 9, hosted a Faculty Meeting to discuss the survey results.

In February 2021, the department began the implementation of a new faculty meeting schedule to create more opportunities for all of our faculty to take part in departmental governance: 1) limited faculty meetings, which tenure-track faculty are expected to attend, and teaching-track faculty are welcome to attend; and 2) whole-faculty meetings, which all faculty are expected to attend, and staff are welcome to attend. (Previously, faculty meetings were for tenure-track faculty only. Teaching-track faculty participated in occasional pedagogical workshops and program meetings.)

In the fall of 2021, the department launched a new, experimental mentoring program, in which all faculty (regardless of rank or track) can request mentoring in different formats: individualized “traditional” mentoring with a single faculty member of higher rank; mentoring by a committee of faculty of higher rank from both inside and outside of your program and track, and potentially, from outside the department; or co-mentoring in an independent committee of peers. At the time of the writing of this report, approximately half of our faculty are involved in these new mentoring configurations. We will continue to collect feedback about these different options and attempt to provide helpful and sustainable mentoring options in the years ahead.

External Activity

On September 22, 2020. The department launched a new speaker series titled “Blackness in Asian and Middle Eastern Studies.” The first speaker was Eve Troutt Powell (University of Pennsylvania), “Posing Slaves for the Camera: Race and Photography in 19th century Khartoum,” moderated by William Sturkey (Department of History, UNC). This series was conceptualized in 2019 in response to conflicts on campus over the confederate monument, and we launched it with support from the Carolina Asia Center, the Center for Mideast and Islamic Civilizations, and the Institute for African American Research.

On October 6, 2020, Claudia Yaghoobi hosted and moderated “Black and Afro-Iranians in Iranian Cultural Imaginary,” a Panel Discussion with Sima Shakhsari (University of Minnesota), M. Shadee Malaklou (Berea College), Amirhossei Vafa (Shiraz University), Ms. Priscillia Kounkou Hveyda (Human Rights Lawyer), and Parisa Vaziri (Cornell): “Black and Afro-Iranians in Iranian Cultural Imaginary.”

October 22, 2020, the second speaker in the “Blackness in Asian and Middle Eastern Studies” series, Timothy Daniels (Hofstra University), presented “Blackness in Malaysia and Indonesia: Stories from the Field,” moderated by Dr. Kevin Fogg (Associate Director, Carolina Asia Center, UNC). On January 21, 2021, the third speaker in the “Blackness in Asian and Middle Eastern Studies” series, Paige Cottingham-Streater (Executive Director, Japan-US Friendship Commission), presented “Black Americans and U.S.-Japan Relations,” moderated by Morgan Pitelka (Department of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, UNC). On February 3, 2021, the fourth speaker in the “Blackness in Asian and Middle Eastern Studies” series, Nadia Kim (Loyola Marymount University), presented “Black American Relations with South Koreans: Historical Origins and Present Trajectories,” moderated by Morgan Wilson (Ph.D. candidate, UNC Department of History).

On March 18, 2021, the fifth speaker in our “Blackness in Asian and Middle Eastern Studies” series, Taylor Moore (UC Presidential Postdoctoral Fellow, UCSB), presented “Down to the Bone: Dissecting Blackness in Early-Twentieth-Century Egypt,” moderated by Shreya Parikh (Ph.D. candidate, UNC Department of Sociology). On April 8, the final speaker in our “Blackness in Asian and Middle Eastern Studies” series, Marvin Sterling (Indiana University), presented “On the Politics of Presence: Afro-Asia in the Age of Black Lives Matter,” moderated by Diandra Dwyer (UNC alumna, animator, and filmmaker in Tokyo).

In November of 2021, Pamela Lothspeich collaborated with the Carolina Asia Center and the Asian American Center to organize several events related to race and representations of South Asians, titled “From Dave Carson to Apu: Global Circulations of Indian Brown Voice and Brownface.” On November 11, organizers screened the film “The Problem with Apu”; on November 12, Shilpa Davé presented “Narrative Accents and the Legacy of Apu: South

Asian/Americans in Hollywood.” On November 15, Kellen Hoxworth presented “Dave Carson’s Brownface Empire” followed by a major event at the Carolina Union: Hari Kondabolu in conversation on “Global Circulations of Indian Brown Voice and Brownface.”

Next Steps

Faculty diversity liaison Afroz Taj attended a DEI workshop on February 25, 2022 and brought back the following suggestions as a result of the presentations and his participation in writing and reviewing this report. These provide some helpful potential next steps for our department:

- DEI in the departmental governance structure: Political Science has a departmental DEI committee. The DEI chair gets a course reduction. Also, a representative of the DEI committee serves on the department’s graduate admissions committee. Political Science is discussing strategies for recruiting BIPOC students and analyzing whether department hiring, review, and promotion policies reflect DEI efforts. These are useful models for DAMES to consider.
- Establishing a DEI committee: Several departments have recently established DEI committees, and we might consider doing the same. We could include undergraduate and graduate students, and we could review departmental policies, teaching, and programming with DEI issues in mind.
- Syllabus content survey: Political Science did an anonymized survey of course syllabi with respect to the number of readings by women and minority authors. Would a syllabi survey be possible/useful for DAMES content courses?

- Curriculum: The Department of Music just completed a three-semester curriculum reform project. Would a similar process be useful for DAMES?
- Webpages and Toolkits: History has a DEI webpage within the main website: it provides tools for faculty to “decolonize” their syllabi. Could something like this be integrated with our Anti-racism Toolkit page?
- Incentives: Some departments provide incentive funding for undergrads and grad students to write/present on diversity topics.
- Staff and students: This report is almost entirely focused on our faculty. Future DEI work needs to include both staff and student perspectives. We also need to include adjunct faculty in our DEI work, as one of the most structurally disadvantaged populations in higher education.