



diversity equity & inclusion

# newsletter

Quarter Three, 2025

## in this issue

- iBio 2025 Conference Spotlight
- A Conversation with Erika Roach
- Brief notice/information on the “Real Talk” Column
- Reimagining STEMM Graduate Education
- Toward Fostering Resilience and Well-Being in Academia

## A New Semester in a Complex World

Welcome to the new Fall semester, Berkeley biosciences community! As we begin the academic year under the leadership of the new UC President, [James B. Milliken](#), we do so against a backdrop of significant national events shaping higher education and scientific research. Recent reporting, such as [Science’s feature on the upheavals facing U.S. scientists](#), underscores how policy shifts, funding uncertainties, and broader societal changes are directly impacting the lives and careers of researchers across the country.

In this moment of challenge and change, the commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion can set a great foundation for resilience, innovation, and tending to the broader community and each other. It feels vital to continue advancing discovery, fostering education, and serving both campus and the wider world through research and transformative action.



## iBio 2025 Conference Spotlight

On August 25, 2025, the 4th Annual Inclusive Biosciences (iBio) Conference convened, jointly organized by the Departments of Integrative Biology and Molecular and Cellular Biology. Since its founding in 2017 as Inclusive Molecular and Cell Biology (iMCB) by PhD alumna Lisa Eshun-Wilson and student collaborators, iBio has developed into a yearly event with the aim to “empower the scientific community to address and navigate current diversity, equity, inclusion, belonging, and justice issues, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive and equitable field.”

At last year’s conference, iBio 2024, the role of mentorship and identity in shaping pathways in STEM was explored. This year participants were asked to consider the broader environment in which science is embedded. The theme, “Science & Society: Bridging Communities and Communicating Ideas,” invited attendees to explore the intersection of science, society, and social justice through a dynamic mix of talks, a panel, and interactive workshops. The motivation was clear: to facilitate conversations about science’s role in public and political life while also equipping participants with practical tools for effective science communication and professional development.

The day underscored a central truth: science is

not separate from society, and it both shapes it and is shaped by it. The sessions invited participants to reflect deeply on their roles as scientists: How should we, both individually and collectively, respond to the social forces that shape our work? And how might we use our platforms, practices, and voices to advance equity, accountability, and meaningful change?



The day opened with a reaffirmation of iBio’s purpose: to create a safe and supportive environment for meaningful dialogue on DEIBJ in the biosciences at Berkeley. Openness, respect, and community-building were emphasized with shared community agreements: *move up, move up; notice power dynamics; take the learner’s stance; respect confidentiality; recognize intent vs. impact.*

The morning keynote by [Dr. Bil Clemons](#), Hanisch Memorial Professor of Biochemistry at Caltech, touched candidly upon navigating academia as a Black scientist and the responsibility of institutions to move beyond symbolic gestures toward structural change. Drawing on history and personal experience, Clemons



**“Demand and normalize work that makes our institutions more equitable and inclusive. Diversity requires that we see ourselves and our jobs differently.”**

**Dr. Bil Clemons**



outlined “in a diverse, equitable, and inclusive society/organization, all members have equal access and opportunity and are valued as their whole selves,” and his reflections wove together the technical and the political, underscoring that the pursuit of knowledge and science cannot be separated from the pursuit of justice. “Representative science is better science.”

In “Silenced Science Stories,” moderated by [Dr. Ruth Shoge](#), featured panelists [Dr. Erin Doherty](#), [Dr. Linet Mera](#), and [Dr. Ellen Lumpkin](#) openly shared principles that guide their work and how they have navigated bias, systemic barriers, and advocating for inclusion. Their stories revealed the costs of doing science in environments not designed for everyone, with resilience required to persist when policies, funding, and/or cultural tides shift. In particular, Dr. Mera spoke to the ebb and flow of DEI work across institutions, noting how language and framing can either open doors or harden resistance, and how embedding equity into the very definition of good science and good leadership makes change more durable.

The afternoon shifted toward skill-building with two parallel workshops: In “Message in a Box:

A Tool for Sharpening Your Science Story” with [Dr. Dione Rossiter](#), which guided participants in distilling complex research into accessible, meaningful messages to non-scientific audiences “Science Stories for Social Change” with [Dr. Shannon Behrman](#), which used film and documentaries as a lens for reimagining science communication. Both sessions emphasized that the ability to shape research into meaningful narratives and engage diverse audiences is fundamental to the greater flourishing of science and society.

Leadership reflections from [Dr. Tyrone Hayes](#) and the afternoon keynote by [Dr. Amber Johnson](#), UC Berkeley’s Assistant Vice Chancellor, Division of Equity & Inclusion, brought the day full circle. Dr. Johnson’s talk, “What’s Science Got to Do With It? Misinformation, Truth-Telling, and the Attacks on Higher Education,” challenged attendees to see DEI not as a side project but as central to the defense of higher education itself.

Through their remarks and slides, Dr. Johnson reminded the audience that the work of science and education is inseparable from the work of equity and justice. They spoke to the conditions



**Dr. Shannon Behrman**



**Dr. Dione Rossiter**



**Dr. Shannon Behrman**

that make this possible, including psychological safety and creating space and support for people to arrive fully, to learn, contribute, and challenge; vulnerable leadership, encompassing the courage to be honest about our gaps, growth, inspirations, and needs; and epistemic justice with recognizing lived expertise as knowledge that matters. Dr. Johnson emphasized that leadership is not defined by a title, but by how we choose to show up. Leading by influence, therefore, they noted, is difficult but essential, and it occurs through engagement, shared visioning, and the development of strategic initiatives that inspire others to join in.

They closed with a challenge that lingered in the room: Knowing what we know now, how will you choose to lead?

The DEI Newsletter will continue the conversation in our next issue by featuring interviews with the panelists from Silenced Science Stories. These conversations will seek to offer further insight into the lived realities of navigating science as a site of both possibility and exclusion, and the strategies scholars are using to claim space, build community, and push for change.

## Reflection Questions

1. How do you communicate your science in ways that are accessible and resonant?
2. Where do you notice silences in your field, and how might you help surface those stories?
3. How can you, in your role, contribute to building a culture where diverse voices are not only included but centered?

## Navigating & Reshaping Norms: Code-Switching and Belonging in Higher Education

- A Conversation with Clinical Science PhD Student and Workshop Facilitator Erika Roach

We all do it: shift from one way of speaking and carrying ourselves to another as we move between locations, roles, and expectations. For some, these transitions may feel mostly seamless and an intuitive part of social navigation. But in academia and professional environments, where the stakes are often higher, the norms more rigid, and expectations less transparent, these shifts can demand active calculation - becoming strategic, protective, and at times, deeply exhausting.

This practice of “code-switching” is a recalibration of language, demeanor, and dress to meet unwritten norms. In academic spaces, often shaped by white, upper-middle-class standards, code switching can open doors and

signal “professionalism.” Yet the experience of such adaptation varies widely. It can show up in moments like masking identities in department events and conferences, adjusting one’s way of speaking, or strategically presenting oneself to peers, advisors, and mentors, sometimes in ways that may feel inauthentic. For those holding marginalized identities, switching can blur identity, drain energy, and make belonging feel conditional. Presentation must be convincing and sustained in an “all or nothing” kind of way to be accepted, and vigilance, burnout, and self-doubt are common occurrences.

In fields like STEM where productivity and creativity are highly prized, the cost of fitting in can be steep.





## STEM, Identity, and Holding Complexity

What happens when students, staff, and faculty are asked not only to navigate their disciplines, but also to constantly negotiate the terrain of belonging and social acceptance? Who gets to show up more fully as themselves, who doesn't, and how does that shape satisfaction, burnout, and ultimately the capacity to thrive in demanding fields like academia?

Before joining Berkeley as a PhD student, Erika Roach addressed questions like these as Associate Director of the Office for Inclusion, Belonging, and Intergroup Communication at Stanford University, where she earned her BA in Psychology and Human Biology and her MA in Psychology. Now, as a Clinical Psychology doctoral candidate, Erika's research and clinical work focuses on stress, emotion processes, and psychopathology in racially and culturally diverse families. She integrates empirical research, culturally grounded frameworks of care, and her background as a facilitator to co-develop community outreach workshops with UC Berkeley's Psychology Clinic and Office for Graduate Diversity.

### Breaking the Code [Switch]: A Workshop Rooted in Reflection

In February 2025, Erika co-facilitated the workshop Breaking the Code [Switch] Workshop: Finding a Sense of Belonging and Academic Identity at UC Berkeley with Drs. Nancy Liu and Keanan Joyner. The workshop was co-developed by UC Berkeley's Psychology Clinic in partnership with the Office for Graduate Diversity. The title itself was a nod to both the discomfort and strategy embedded in code-switching. "[In the workshop], we talked about why we code-switch - the benefits it offers, but also the costs. It's cognitively taxing, especially when you're doing it all day, across contexts, with faculty, mentors, peers," Erika shared.

## In conversation, participants explored:

- The mechanics of code switching and why we do it
- Imposter phenomenon, where it comes from, and how codeswitching may contribute to it
- The costs of code switching
- How to make intentional choices around code switching to avoid burnout



Erika Roach

Erika reminds us that graduate education isn't just technical training - it involves identity work, emotional labor, and relationship-building in a culture still grappling with equity. She emphasized that the goal isn't to condemn the practice of code-switching, but to name it, examine it, and equip workshop participants with tools to reflect further on it. She views code-switching as a learned skill like a language. "Code-switching can be adaptive - it's something we learn to do to survive or succeed in certain environments," Erika explained. "But it also comes with cognitive and emotional costs. It takes energy. And when we become aware of that, we can make more intentional decisions about when to engage and when to protect our energy." She explains, "One [aspect of the work-

shop] was helping [participants] recognize when code-switching is necessary - and when it might not be worth it." Erika shared, "For example, choosing not to go to another social event where you'd have to code-switch for two hours after an exhausting week of work can be strategic."

### Agency in Action: Transforming Professional Experiences & Spaces

Erika believes workshops like this are part of the broader mission of reimagining academic culture. "The norms we've inherited in academia don't reflect the realities and strengths of our diverse communities and are often counterproductive. When people are less cognitively taxed by code-switching or questioning their sense of belonging, they can focus more fully on what they came to [institutions like Berkeley] to do - learn, research, build relationships, and contribute to society in meaningful ways. Rethinking academic culture in this way allows students, staff, and faculty to thrive and excel without having to shrink themselves, which increases satisfaction and ultimately benefits institutions as a whole."

### Reflection Questions

1. When do you find yourself code-switching in academic or professional settings? What does it feel like?
2. What environments allow you to be your full self? What makes that possible?
3. What would a space look or feel like where you could bring more of your authentic self?
4. How can faculty and departments create infrastructure for belonging - not just events or initiatives, but everyday practices of support and affirmation?
5. What strategies can faculty and staff implement to create a more inclusive academic environment and reduce the need for code-switching?
6. How can your lab, department, or program cultivate structures of support that go beyond statements - and into daily culture?
7. How can those with positional power make it easier for others to feel seen and supported?

### Tips & Strategies on Breaking the Code

- Recognize when you're code switching. Take note of situations in which you feel the pressure to code switch.
- Understand adaptive code switching as resiliency.
- Identify maladaptive identity minimization strategies you engage in.
- Set boundaries for when/where to code switch (for example, with some faculty but not others, not with peers).
- Keep parts of your authentic self that don't switch.
- Check in with yourself. If you're experiencing code-switching fatigue, it may be a sign to reduce the number of activities/events in which you have to code switch and spend more time in spaces where you can be yourself.
- Ask, "What would happen if I were to present myself authentically in this situation?"
- If it feels safe, bring more of your authentic self into the spaces you inhabit (such as sharing about your interests that don't necessarily conform to the group's).

For research related to code-switching, Erika points us towards the work of her colleague in UC Berkeley's Department of Psychology, Dr. Nirupika Sharma.





# Introducing Real Talk: Share Your Experiences

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We're excited to launch Real Talk, a new column here in the DEI Newsletter where you can anonymously and regularly share your experiences and reflections on navigating campus life. This space is designed for moments when you want to contribute your perspective, even if you don't have the time or capacity to draft a full article. Your stories will be featured in upcoming issues to look to spark meaningful conversations and strengthen our collective commitment to building an inclusive and supportive environment for everyone.

## Why Real Talk?

The phrase real talk has deep cultural roots. As journalist Ellen McGirt has [written of](#), "real talk" emerged as a survival tool in Black communities, a way of naming truths candidly, without pretense, to help one another navigate hostile or unwelcoming environments. Over time, the

term has come to signal honesty, vulnerability, and the courage to speak plainly about lived realities, even when those truths are uncomfortable.

By bringing real talk into our newsletter, we honor that tradition of candor and care. We recognize that authentic stories, whether about mentorship, microaggressions, belonging, or resilience, carry power. They can help us see one another more fully, challenge institutional silences, and imagine new ways of being in community.

## How to Contribute

Whether it's a quick thought, a challenge, or a moment of connection, we'd love to hear from you. You can [submit your reflections to Real Talk anonymously here](#).



# Reimagining STEMM Graduate Education: A National Call for On the Ground Impact

## Reflections from the July 2025 National Academies Summit

In late July, the [National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine](#) convened a two-day summit titled Reimagining STEMM Graduate Education and Postdoctoral Career Development ([recording available here](#)). Against a backdrop of economic uncertainty, shifting political priorities, [shifting conversations in higher education](#), and long-standing structural inequities, researchers, policymakers, and institutional leaders gathered to discuss a central question: **What will it take to build a sustainable, inclusive, and future-ready research ecosystem?**



### Pressures Faced by Early-Career Researchers

In recent years, the spotlight has sharpened on the mounting, critical challenges confronting graduate students and postdoctoral scholars.

**Financial precarity.** A [cost-of-living crisis](#) is one of the most pressing concerns that threaten the future of research. A [2022 Nature survey](#) found that nearly half of PhD and master's students feared inflation would negatively impact their ability to complete their programs, with some reporting then reliance on food banks to meet their basic needs. With daily decisions impacted around housing, healthcare, and whether to stay in academia at all, one postdoctoral researcher shared, "It's hard to feel my value as a researcher when I'm worried about covering my daily expenses and whether there will be job opportunities in the future that actually support a living wage." According to the MIT [Living Wage Calculator](#), the annual income required for a single adult with no dependents in Alameda County is approximately \$64,286 before taxes. In contrast, graduate stipends across at Berkeley [average](#) significantly lower, placing many trainees below the threshold of economic security. This gap not only undermines wellbeing and productivity, but also is a high concern for the diversity and sustainability of the research workforce.

**Uncertain career pathways.** Relatedly, the assumption that earning a PhD is a direct route to a lifelong academic career has been steadily eroding. Over the past decade, the number of doctoral graduates worldwide has risen sharply, yet the growth in tenure-track and research-institution positions [has lagged behind](#) and created intense competition for the small pool of academic roles that are available. For those who become employed outside aca-



demia, many find themselves in positions only loosely connected, or entirely unrelated, to their research expertise. While some thrive in these alternative careers, others report feeling overqualified, undervalued, or unprepared for the transition. This readiness gap is not evenly distributed: first-generation scholars and those from historically marginalized groups often face additional barriers, including limited access to informal networks, mentorship, and tailored career guidance. Without support, these disparities risk compounding inequities in who can fully leverage the benefits of a doctoral degree.

Inconsistent mentorship. The quality of doctoral mentorship is one of the strongest predictors of student success, yet it is highly variable, even within the same department or program. While effective advising can provide both career-focused guidance and psychosocial support, many trainees experience uneven or insufficient mentorship that leaves critical gaps in their professional development. A recent study found that commonly assumed predictors of strong mentorship (including mentor's academic rank, shared gender, or shared racial/ethnic background) were not reliably linked to higher-quality relationships. Instead, two factors stood out: deep-level similarity (alignment in values, perspectives, and approaches to work) and culturally aware mentoring (a mentor's ability to recognize, respect, and engage with a mentee's cultural background and lived experiences).

Layered upon these are also the impacts of shifting immigration policies, volatile research funding, the disruptive social and economic effects of AI, and other forces that shape the day-to-day experiences of both trainees and trainers.

## Six Core Themes from the Summit

With these complex factors, the summit framed its discussions around six interconnected priorities to offer how training can be improved upon to meet the demands of a changing research landscape:

- Evolving learning environments
- Skills acquisition for diverse career paths
- Clarifying roles and responsibilities of trainees
- Mentorship reform
- Career-pathway awareness
- Aligning the postdoctoral workforce with national research needs

Day 1 focused on assessing current tensions, while Day 2 shifted toward solutions, including discussion of effective practices in mentorship, expanding career-development models, and “right-sizing” the number of postdoctoral positions to match available opportunities.



## Key Takeaways

1. Structured, accountable mentorship - going beyond “sink or swim” advising to build systems with clear expectations, feedback loops, and accountability.

## Reflection Questions

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1. How would you define inclusive mentorship in the context of the lab or your program?
2. In what ways could your department strengthen opportunities for meaningful, sustained mentorship connections?
3. What steps could move DEI work from reactive problem-solving toward proactive, intentional culture-building?
4. Where do your skills, influence, and/or passions fit into building a healthier, more inclusive research environment?

2. Broadening career pathways - with only a fraction of PhD graduates securing tenure-track roles, career exploration should be embedded early in training. Industry and alternative-career shadowing, partnering with professional societies, and further normalizing diverse career outcomes should be implemented.
3. Right-sizing the researcher pool - the overproduction of postdocs can strain trainees, as well as erode the training mission of institutions. The summit showcased innovative models for aligning postdoctoral training with the realities of today's job market, while also encouraging fellows to pursue opportunities that integrate leadership, teaching, and industry rotations - providing a more intentional and well-rounded pathway toward diverse career opportunities.
4. Inclusive learning environments - evolving lab and classroom culture to be more inclusive can reduce some of the cognitive and emotional toll of navigating traditionally homogeneous spaces. Numerous studies have indicated that diverse teams can produce more innovative science and higher-impact publications
5. Institutional commitment to belonging - when belonging is framed as a form of infrastructure, requiring policies, practices, and resources (such as affinity groups, mental health supports, and clear reporting channels for when challenges arise), trainees are better able to bring their full talents and capabilities to the table.
6. Policy & funding alignment - as sustainable progress depends on stable, equitable funding, panelists called for federal agencies and universities to co-design funding mechanisms that reward inclusive collaboration and partnerships.





# *Towards Fostering Resilience and Well-Being in Academia*



Resilience is often misunderstood as simply “toughing it out.” In reality, it can be better understood as the ability to adapt, recover, and continue growing in the face of setbacks. Like any skill as well, resilience can be cultivated, and just as importantly, it can be impacted by the culture and structures that institutions choose to foster.

Academic and career journeys in science are often long, uncertain, and often isolating. They are marked by relentless pressures, high stakes with limited opportunities, and the “always-on” culture prevalent in research. Even seasoned scientists often grapple with imposter feelings and an undercurrent of doubt that persists despite achievement. Systemic inequities compound stress, especially for those without strong safety nets or networks. Without intentional support, these challenges can lead to

burnout, attrition, and the lack of diverse voices that are essential for innovation and addressing society’s most urgent challenges.

## **Learning from Personal Accounts: The Power of Reflection**

A powerful tool for resilience is reflection, where pausing to make meaning of one’s experiences can allow for new insights and help situate them in a broader context of experience and circumstance. This practice can be even more impactful when paired with learning from the stories of others. Personal accounts can remind us that behind every CV line, including our own, lies a remarkable human story of uncertainty, persistence through failure, and growth. When shared more openly, these stories can normalize struggle, dismantle stigma, create pathways for others to navigate similar

challenges, and foster authentic and beneficial connections within communities.

More specifically, our own reflections and the stories from others can guide us toward concrete practices that sustain resilience in daily life. They can help us reframe setbacks and adopt a growth lens. A rejected grant or fellowship is not a verdict on our worth, but part of the reality that funding agencies often receive far more strong proposals than they can support; feedback, in turn, can strengthen future applications. A difficult relationship can become a lesson in boundaries, communication, and values. By naming these experiences, we transform them into sources of growth and guidance for our next steps.

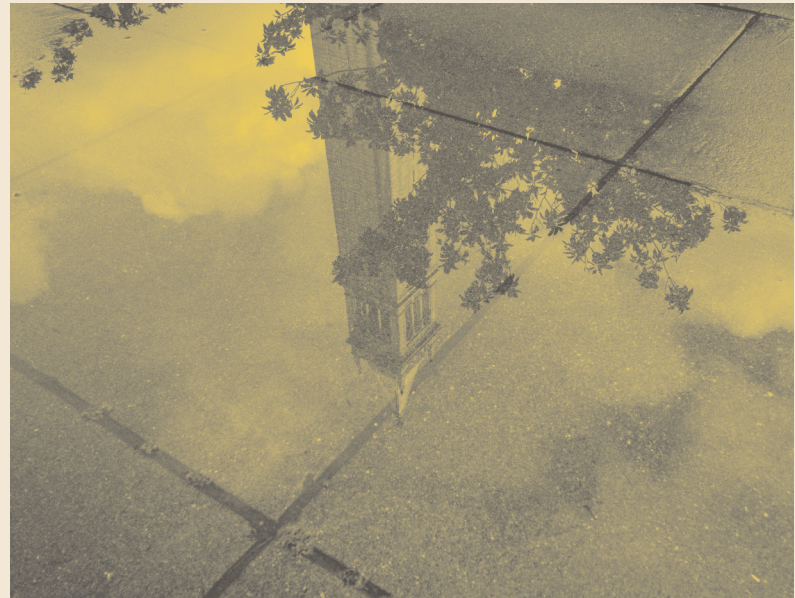
They can remind us to seek out community, through peer groups, mentorship circles, and communities of practice, that can buffer against isolation. They highlight the importance of protecting our limits, recognizing that rest, relationships, and joy are not luxuries but prerequisites for sustained creativity and a healthier quality of life. In this way, reflection can be a compass that directs us toward the habits and connections that allow us to better withstand and persist through challenges.

## The Role of Institutions & Resilience as a Shared Culture

While individual coping strategies and practices are vital, institutions play a decisive role in determining whether well-being is truly possible. Universities, research organizations, and even individual labs must commit resources to cultivating environments where students, faculty, and staff are supported not only in their scientific pursuits but also in their humanity. This means normalizing conversations about mental health and ensuring that resources are visible, accessible, and free from stigma. It means broadening what is valued, recognizing mentorship, teaching, and community engagement as essential contributions alongside

grants and publications. It also requires building structured mentorship programs that emphasize culturally aware practices, preventing isolation and fostering belonging. And it calls for sustained investment in inclusion, through policies that affirm diverse identities and reduce the hidden tax of navigating exclusion.

When institutions take these steps, they move beyond symbolic gestures and embrace true responsibility. And in doing so, they help create and sustain environments where people genuinely feel seen, supported, and valued. Such spaces not only support well-being, but also unlock the creativity and innovation needed to advance science and address pressing societal challenges.



## Why Storytelling Matters

As resilience is strengthened not only through reflecting on our own experiences, but also by listening to and learning from the stories of others, initiatives like this newsletter, and platforms such as [Voices of Academia](#), are so vital. Honest accounts of life in academia and research, from moments of true belonging to navigating [neurodivergence](#), living with [disability](#), and/or [confronting systemic barriers](#), can reveal and remind us that every person's story holds lessons worth learning, moments worth honoring,



and that struggle is a common thread, woven through many journeys, and does not have to be borne alone. Personal narratives can illuminate the often hidden dimensions of academic life, offering lessons in resilience, courage, and creativity. They also invites us, as listeners, to practice empathy, deepen our understanding of the diverse realities within our community, and help lay greater groundwork for a culture of resilience that is not rooted in individual endurance, but in compassion, belonging, and the recognition that all of life, including our own paths within it, is deeply interconnected.

### **An Invitation to Listen & Share**

The DEI Newsletter is committed to amplifying diverse voices and experiences in our community. We invite you to contribute your own reflections and thoughts in any means accessible to you. Your stories, whether about moments of challenge, resilience, or transformation,

can help us collectively better understand and reimagine what thriving in academia can look like. At its core, storytelling models what a culture of resilience can look like: one rooted not in individual endurance, but in collective care, compassion, and the recognition that our paths are intertwined.

### **Reflection Questions**

1. When you think about your own academic or professional journey, what moments of challenge or growth stand out, and how have they shaped your sense of resilience?
2. Where do you currently find community and support, and what additional spaces or practices could help you feel more connected?
3. Have the stories of others (such as mentors, peers, or public accounts) shaped your understandings and ability to persist in research? How so?
4. How might we better foster a culture where thriving is the norm, not the exception?

### **Open Call for Submissions:**

The Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Newsletter invites you to contribute your insights and perspectives on the critical topics that shape our community. If you have an idea for an article or wish to share your experiences related to DEI within the biological sciences, we encourage you to reach out. We are committed to fostering a comprehensive and inclusive dialogue by highlighting diverse viewpoints and experiences. Your contributions are vital to our mission of connecting and empowering the UC Berkeley community.

**Have a story or event you would like to see featured in upcoming newsletters?**

DEI Newsletter is always looking for writers, copy-editors and artists to bring you balanced perspectives on community in the Biological Sciences at Berkeley. Interested in working with us, or have a story or event you would like to see featured in upcoming newsletters? Email us at [dei.news.biology@berkeley.edu](mailto:dei.news.biology@berkeley.edu).

*Supervisors—please circulate this newsletter to lab members and staff who may not be on our listserv.*