URGE Demographic Data for MBL

Pod report on demographic data, MBL-Ecosystems Center pod, Marine Biological Laboratory

- **Demographic data for our organization:**
  - The Marine Biological Laboratory (MBL) does not present demographic data publicly, although demographic data are requested of all employees, visiting faculty, and students.
    - A limited snapshot of MBL resident staff diversity for 2018 was: 52% of MBL staff identified as women and 48% men. 85% identified as white, 5% Asian/East Asian, 4% Hispanic/Latino, 3% Two or More Races, 2% African American/Black; 1% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander.
  - Few data are widely distributed internally, but demographic data are used, for example, in grant applications to NIH and HHMI to support summer “discovery” courses for graduate students, postdocs, and early career researchers. These courses attract students from the US and abroad. These courses have largely biological focus so are not closely related to Geoscience, but the statistics reflect an MBL attention to diversity:
    - From 2016-2019, an average of 29% of admitted students for these courses (range 26% - 33%) were POC.
    - From 2016-2019, students were from 50 countries on average (range 38 – 57 countries).
  - Demographic data for US students are gathered for the MBL’s Semester in Environmental Science (SES) run each fall for undergraduates. SES is the course most closely related to Geosciences at the MBL. Between 2008-2019, SES averaged 11% of students from underrepresented groups, with a peak of 21% in 2017.

![](chart.png)
○ PEP – For over a decade, the Woods Hole Diversity Initiative has hosted the 10-week Woods Hole Partnership Education Program for undergraduates from underrepresented groups who are interested in marine and ocean sciences. Educators and mentors for the summer program are drawn from six Woods Hole institutions including the MBL. PEP program review reports and demographic information can be found at https://www.woodsholediversity.org/pep/program-reports/. As noted in the report on the first 10 years of PEP,

“In ten years (2009-2018), PEP has brought to Woods Hole 153 students from 92 colleges and universities, including 29 Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs), and public and private colleges and universities representing all geographic areas of the United States. Just over half (79) of the 153 PEP students are from MSIs. PEP graduates include 80 females and 51 males from groups underrepresented in science.... PEP students’ ethnic identities (as self-identified), 2009-2018: African (2), African-American/Black (72), Asian/Chinese/Thai (4), Bi-Racial/Mixed (11), Cape Verdean (1), Caucasian/White (14), Filipino (2), Hispanic (23), Indian (1), Japanese American (1), Latino (2), Mexican or Mexican-American (4), Native American (5), Native Hawaiian (1), Pacific Islander (2), Puerto Rican (1), West Indian (2), Declined to identify (5).”

○ During summer months, the MBL’s “Friday Evening Lecture Series” is the major public-facing seminar series for the institution. Lectures are recorded, and recordings are available at https://www.mbl.edu/friday-evening-lectures/ for years 2012-2020. Perusal of the recorded lectures provided a rough estimate of number of lectures each year given by POC.
How does your organization compare to others, or to the field as a whole?

  - The percent underrepresented minorities among 2018 MBL staff (15%), SES students (11%), and Friday evening lecture participants (average 17% 2012-2020) is lower than the percentage of underrepresented minorities among environmental scientists and geoscientists identified by AGI (20%).
  - In the last three years the percentage of underrepresented minorities presenting Friday Evening Lectures (2018-2020) increased to 28%, and in SES to 15% (2017-2019; 2020 was cancelled due to COVID).

- Creating and Promoting Gender Equity and Diversity in Professional Geological Societies - https://eartharxiv.org/repository/view/2060/
  - The % MBL staff who are women (52%), and the %women presenting MBL’s Friday Evening Lectures (40% average), are higher than the percentage of women (30%) in the AAPG Executive Leadership Committee (2011-2020).

Public goals on demographics or increasing representation:

- Are there general goals stated at your organization for achieving representation?
  - The MBL has established an active Diversity Advisory Committee and has made a public statement (https://www.mbl.edu/diversity/) of dedication to diversity and inclusion. The web page links, for example, to MBL’s affirmative action policy, and research opportunities, courses and fellowships for minorities. The web page also links to MBL’s public statement of support for a Woods Hole community effort to rename Agassiz Road to instead honor Dr. Jewel Cobb.
  - Through its affiliation with University of Chicago, MBL has drawn on the expertise of Assistant Provost Dr. Regina Dixon-Reeves, whose official duties include providing leadership and advice on diversity and inclusion programs. Dr. Dixon-Reeves has provided guidance and insights for establishing more inclusive and fair practices for interviewing potential faculty and staff, and for attracting and selecting students for the MBL’s advanced training courses.

- Are there measurable goals stated at your organization for achieving representation?
  - No quantitative metrics for assessing and achieving representation are publicly stated. Several MBL personnel we interviewed noted that a major stumbling block for establishing robust metrics is that particularly faculty (including visiting faculty) decline to provide demographic information when it is requested. The problem is substantial and makes tracking and evaluating progress from demographic data challenging.
However, another important idea emerged from conversations around demographic data. Certainly, they are valuable to have and are one metric by which improvement can be assessed. Also, though, it is important that the focal goal remains improving inclusivity. If time and resources are limited, it may be that rather than emphasizing tracing demographic numbers, time and effort may be better spent on concrete steps working to make MBL a clearly inclusive environment, where diverse people will feel supported in their education and research. Invitations for high profile lectures (in the Friday Evening Lecture series) and conference keynotes and research seminars, and efforts to cast a wider net during recruiting, will build toward improving the overall sense of inclusivity of the MBL community that is critical for recruitment and retention of diverse community members.

Suggested additional goals for your organization:

- **Goal 1:** Though very good guidance is available through Dr. Dixon-Reeves at University of Chicago, consider establishing a local position (e.g. a Diversity Officer) with an explicit job focus on diversity and inclusion. This does require financial commitment, and in the current climate, a more realistic approach might be to partner with e.g. the Woodwell Climate Center or another local scientific institution to jointly hire a consultant who could serve both entities. The groundwork for such cooperation is already laid via the Woods Hole Diversity Initiative. The current Diversity and Inclusion committee is constituted from MBL personnel who have many other activities drawing on their time. Improving inclusivity is very challenging. Integration of inclusivity-focused communications, strategy, and research/education program development would be strengthened by supporting a person dedicated to the issue.

- **Goal 2:** Continue offering workshops on e.g. recognizing and mitigating implicit bias, creating inclusive environments, and dealing with conflict.

- **Goal 3:** Continue to increase diversity of speakers in MBL-organized seminar series, workshops and conferences. Set a goal (whether public or internal) of bringing the %POC in event leadership/participation to reflect %POC in the US population as a whole: ~30%.

- **Goal 4:** MBL has a great opportunity to demonstrate its commitment to Diversity and Inclusion as a major design feature during development of its new website. Diversity and Inclusion information should be integrated more seamlessly into the website, not just listed in a separate section. A concerted effort should be made to feature POC contributions to research and education on multiple, front-facing, public, dynamic web pages highlighting the MBL’s current activities.
Goal 5: Programs geared specifically to underrepresented groups (e.g. fellowships, scholarships) should be easy to find, making it clear everyone is welcome and supported at the MBL. For example:

○ The web page “https://www.mbl.edu/diversity/programs/” indicates fellowships are available, including e.g. “the William Townsend Porter Minority Summer Research awards...” However, the “Fellowships” link provided does not lead to an easy way to find these fellowships or information about them.

○ Similarly, the “Scholarships” link under Diversity and Inclusion/Diversity Research and Education Programs (https://www.mbl.edu/diversity/programs/) is broken.

Goal 6: Consider establishing diversity percentage targets or something like the Rooney Rule, increasing diversity of interviewees.

- **Policy or proposed policy for collecting demographic data at your organization:**
  - Given the apparent reluctance of some MBL visitors (particularly faculty) to provide demographic information when asked, consider strategies for improving the quality and usability of the MBL demographic data. One basic approach would be to explain the purpose of collecting the demographic data when requesting it. This approach could also be used to highlight the MBL’s goal of increasing diversity and inclusion in research and education divisions.

- **What did you learn about other organizations (or in general) while investigating demographic data?**
  - It was shocking that time and again, in multiple metrics, it was clear that there has been very little progress over the last 40 years toward improving diversity within Geosciences. Bernard and Cooperdock’s paper in Nature Geoscience (11:292-295, 2018) was particularly sobering. Though participation by women in earth, ocean, and atmospheric sciences has clearly improved over the last 40 years, remarkably little has improved for involvement of POC.