Statement on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)

Department of Electrical & Systems Engineering
University of Pennsylvania

Our Mission

Our department seeks to improve the human condition through research, education, and innovation at the intersection of science, technology, and society. We affirm our responsibility to promote diversity and equity and to cultivate an inclusive environment that reflects our values and allows everyone to flourish. We are a group of people with different perspectives, talents, and ways of thinking that arise from our unique lived experiences and cultures. We come together because we can achieve more in cooperation than in isolation.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion are essential to our individual success, our collective impact, and our relevance to the modern world. Diversity fosters creativity, ingenuity, and a vibrant intellectual culture. Equity is vital for our society and essential to our practice as engineers. An inclusive environment allows each individual to flourish to their fullest potential.

In recognition of these values, we commit to engage, educate, support, recognize, and recruit people based on their work and ideas, independently of - but not in disregard to - their individual characteristics of race, gender, sexual orientation, age, national origin, religion, disability, socioeconomic status, citizenship, and cultural background.

The Challenge

These values are not new. Penn ESE has a long history of research, education, and innovation. Penn engineers share a passion to identify and solve problems that help people and positively impact society. Recognizing the global impact of our work, we engage with people and problems from around the world and aim to make compassionate engineering decisions. Nonetheless, we often fail to live up to our ideals.

We face many challenges as a community, including entrenched bias, both conscious and unconscious; self-reinforcing cycles of preferential treatment towards people with particular characteristics; limited awareness of the impediments faced by our colleagues that stem from racism, sexism, ableism, transphobia, and we disregard of the achievements in surmounting those impediments; reluctance to do the hard work of ensuring inclusion and equity for everyone; and failure to recognize individuals who engage with these hard problems.

These challenges are pervasive. But big problems call for creative ideas, hard work, and persistence. Furthermore, the value of this work needs to be recognized. By tackling these issues within our department, we will improve the experience of current and future members, and we will set an example for our students, staff, and faculty as they engage with other networks and organizations. We are only a part of larger communities at Penn, in academia, and in our professional disciplines.

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion in Action

In affirming our mission to foster a truly diverse, equitable, and inclusive culture in Penn ESE, and acknowledging the many associated challenges, we resolve to take action. The multifaceted issues affecting diversity, equity, and inclusion demand the attention and investment of our entire community, and they must be addressed on multiple levels. Below, we organize activities and example initiatives according to four categories: *1) Education & Engagement, 2) Evaluation & Support, 3) Innovation & Recognition, and 4) Recruitment & Retention.*

Our department's *Committee on Diversity, Equity & Inclusion* will coordinate these initiatives and monitor their effectiveness. A description of ongoing initiatives will be maintained on our [committee website](#). The committee will include representatives from the department at all levels, including undergraduate and graduate students, staff, and faculty, and will work in collaboration with other groups in the department, school, and university.

1) *Education & Engagement*

   We will provide resources - including time, materials, financial support, and facilities - to promote education about diversity, equity, and inclusion within our department and to support our engagement on these themes with external communities. We will work closely with other groups including the SEAS office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, other department DEI committees, and with student groups in order to leverage resources and accelerate our impact. Planned and ongoing initiatives include mandatory training for all community members; curating and sharing materials and references for course instructors and research group leaders; hosting diverse speakers and focused events; reviewing our physical spaces to improve their accessibility and to create inclusive, inspiring environments for all; engaging with groups and organizations that promote diversity in science & engineering; acknowledging our responsibility to the local Philadelphia community and finding ways to support K-12 education and interest in STEM; and incorporating considerations of diversity, equity, and inclusion broadly in all aspects of our educational mission.

2) *Evaluation, Accountability, & Support*

   We must invest our time and resources in actions that will make a difference. With the understanding that bias and discrimination are complex problems intertwined with institutional practice and society, we need to measure the effects of our actions over time. Similarly, we cannot correct problems of which we are unaware. We will implement broad, standardized protocols for data collection and evaluation, including evaluation of student populations and completion rates; climate surveys of students, staff, faculty, and research groups; exit surveys; informal roundtable discussions; and procedures for reporting problems.

An atmosphere of trust and accountability is a prerequisite for complete and honest reporting. Discrimination in academic settings can be subtle and complex, and it is not always recognized immediately. Even when racism, gender discrimination, and harassment are overt, victims can have a legitimate perception of powerlessness to address it. To this end, the Committee will work closely with student groups and other organizations at the school and university level to establish transparent mechanisms for both confidential and official reporting. We will undertake annual reviews of our committee's performance to evaluate our progress, communicate it to the department, and gather feedback. We will endeavor to build trust and accountability by advocating the interests and well-being of our entire community, especially those disadvantaged by hierarchies of power.

3) *Innovation & Recognition*

Our department's greatest asset is its members' brilliance, ingenuity, and diligence to continually educate themselves. We must emphasize everyone's individual responsibility to identify biased behavior and eliminate it. Furthermore, we must recognize peoples' efforts to promote diversity and inclusion both within and outside our community. Too often, such efforts go unrecognized, and they pose an additional burden on marginalized members who are most keenly aware of the problems. To this end, we will use annual surveys and academic activity reports to track the engagement of our students, staff, and faculty with diversity issues, both to affirm their importance and to capture information about new initiatives or activities that warrant wider adoption. We will also design scholarships, awards, merit review criteria, and other ways to recognize work that supports an inclusive culture.

4) *Recruitment & Retention*

The best strategy for recruiting and retaining the most talented and diverse people is to cultivate an equitable, inclusive culture that represents our ideals to the world and inspires all who visit. Hence we must prioritize actions that support the needs of our existing community. At the same time, we will institute focused efforts to increase our department's diversity across all levels. These will include coordination with school and university offices to quantitatively examine the admissions process for undergraduate, masters, and PhD programs, with an aim to quantify and address any disparities between the demographics of applicants and admitted students; targeted outreach to institutions with diverse representation of potential graduate students; engagement with School and University programs such as the [Fontaine society](#) and the [Masters to PhD Bridge Program](#); and formalized procedures for search committees at the faculty and staff levels to proactively *search* for candidates who otherwise might not apply.

The activities listed above are not exhaustive, and they will not solve every problem. Initiatives will evolve based on their effectiveness and our community's needs. We will conduct ongoing evaluations of the department's activities, research best practices, solicit new ideas, and make recommendations for changes as required to support our mission.

Our Pledge

The tenets of diversity, equity, and inclusion are core elements of Penn's Principles of Responsible Conduct,[1] applying to all students,[2] faculty,[3] and staff.[4] The Penn Compact[5] further highlights "radical inclusion" as a "means toward the essential ends of higher education: equalizing opportunity, educating leaders for all sectors of society, and enriching the experience of all members of the University community."

Institutions and committees can track diversity and enforce equity, but inclusion arises from committing to change a historically biased engineering field. *We therefore ask all members of the ESE community to commit to playing an active role in cultivating an inclusive environment.*

We ask that all community members pledge:

- To seek out knowledge on the forms, causes, and impacts of bias

- To acknowledge that we are all susceptible to bias, and to strive to be anti-discriminatory with respect to race, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, age, national origin, religion, disability, socioeconomic status, citizenship, and cultural background

- To engage constructively and respectfully with people of varied backgrounds and perspectives

- To prioritize empathy and consideration, and to avoid making assumptions or judgements

- To be alert for instances of injustice or discrimination, and to intercede by speaking out against injustice.

Other Resources

More information about Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives in the School of Engineering and Applied Sciences and across the University of Pennsylvania can be found at:

> https://diversity.seas.upenn.edu/
> https://diversity.upenn.edu/diversity-at-penn

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[1] https://www.upenn.edu/about/policies
[2] https://catalog.upenn.edu/pennbook/code-of-student-conduct/
[3] https://catalog.upenn.edu/faculty-handbook/
[4] https://www.upenn.edu/affirm-action/eoaa.html
[5] https://president.upenn.edu/penn-compact/inclusion