

# Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Strategic Plan

Graduate Degree Program in Ecology

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*Living document – updated August 4, 2023*

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## Overview:

The Graduate Degree Program in Ecology (GDPE) is committed to providing an environment in which our diverse community of graduate students and faculty can thrive. We plan to invest efforts into fostering a more equitable and inclusive climate and culture between and among graduate students and faculty, as well as improving diversity, equity and inclusion in recruiting and admissions. Language around diversity, equity, and inclusion is dynamic and evolving. Here, we use “marginalized” to describe populations that have been either historically excluded or who have had relatively less agency in academia than others. These populations include first-generation college students, student-parents, international students, LGBTQIA+ student, BIPoC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color), Latinx and Asian students. While people in these broad groups are incredibly diverse and face unique challenges, changes can be made to improve the program as whole and are of benefit to all.

Our plan is in accordance with Colorado State University’s [Principles of Community](#), our definition of diversity is [inclusive](#) and we are following the guidance provided in the Multicultural Organization Development framework, which includes commitment from leadership, forming an inclusive change team, conducting a comprehensive cultural audit, identifying promising practices, and developing and implementing a strategic plan that includes accountability. The following diversity strategic plan is a product of this process and is designed to be a living document that will change over time to reflect best practices and the goals and values of the community. Colors indicate priority time frames for action. **Near term** indicates steps that are feasible and impactful in the near term, **mid term** indicates steps that may take more time or resources before they can be implemented, and **long term** shows action items that will take substantial additional time or funding. These suggested timelines are not tied to specific time periods. It will be up to the discretion of the GDPE Director and Executive Committee to determine what is most feasible (based on available resources and commitment) as these actions are undertaken.

**FOUNDATION:** COLLECT AND ANALYZE DATA TO UNDERSTAND TIME TO GRADUATION AND RETENTION BY STUDENT IDENTITIES TO IDENTIFY THE ISSUES AND BE ABLE TO TRACK PROGRESS.

*Status:* **Initiated: IR data on non-protected groups (gender and international status) gathered**

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**COMMITMENT 1:** CREATE AND FOSTER AN ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH EVERY GRADUATE STUDENT CAN THRIVE AND SUCCEED

**Goal 1.1:** Faculty members should provide advising and mentoring for graduate students to identify strengths, address barriers, and set and meet retention goals (e.g., reduce disparities in time to graduation or retention rates among students with various identities).

**Action 1.1.1:** Facilitate the adoption of Individual Development Plans (IDP)

*Description:* A communication tool that helps to clarify student goals and helps with adviser-advisee

communication and mentoring.  
**Measure of Progress:** GDPE provides templates for IDPs and encourages adoption by Spring 2022.  
**Priority:** Near term  
**Status:** DONE. A GDPE Individual Development Plan template was created and is available on the website. The community (faculty members and students) have been encouraged to use it.

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**Action 1.1.2: Improve the efficacy and information content in exit interviews.**

**Description:** Gathering frank reflections on and assessments of the program from our students at graduation to identify ways to improve the program.  
**Measure of Progress:** GDPE DEI committee synthesizes information on best practices for exit interviews, and reports back to Ex Com to recommend changes to current approach.  
**Priority:** Near term  
**Status:** AY23 DEI Committee created plan to bring to Ex Com in AY24

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**Action 1.1.3: Facilitate the adoption of mentor/mentee statements.**

**Description:** A communication tool that helps to clarify expectations and communicate between adviser and advisee.  
**Measure of Progress:** GDPE provides templates for advising statements to all GDPE faculty and encourages adoption by Fall 2022.  
**Priority:** Mid term  
**Status:** DONE. Incoming students and their advisors are given the mentor/mentee expectations document

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**Goal 1.2: Emphasize the importance of a living wage for all students throughout their graduate degree program; recognize that marginalized students can experience outsized impacts.**

**Action 1.2.1: Share target pay rates for GDPE students**

**Description:** Advocate that faculty meet these pay rates (and include them in grant proposals) as well as factoring in regular pay increases to maintain a competitive wage for our students.  
**Measure of Progress:** Survey graduate students to evaluate potential disparities in pay. Work with Grad Worker Organizing Cooperative (GWOC) to advocate for increased student stipends and pay increases. GDPE should share target pay rates that account for cost of living in Fort Collins annually, and encourage adoption.  
**Priority:** Near term  
**Status:** A survey revealed no consistent trends in pay disparities by identity, but clear trends by Advising Department. Target pay rates have not yet been provided beyond the graduate school minimums.

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**Action 1.2.2: Advocate for the removal of student fees for GRAs/GTAs**

**Description:** Reduce financial stress and increase income equity.  
**Measure of Progress:** Work with GWOC, other interdisciplinary programs, the International Student Scholar Services, and the Graduate School to advocate for this change in policy/practice at the University level.  
**Priority:** Mid term  
**Status:** DONE by the Graduate School, which is managing this university-wide, with fees being removed over the course of several years.

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**Goal 1.3: Create and maintain a welcoming environment where students and faculty can interact and learn from each other in informal settings, including opportunities to learn about and act to advance diversity and inclusion.**

**Action 1.3.1: Create a standing GDPE diversity, equity and inclusion committee**

**Description:** This committee, co-led by a faculty member and graduate student and consisting of GDPE

graduate students and faculty, could play a leadership and coordination role in implementing action items in the strategic plan, as well as advising Ex Comm on DEI topics. The committee would meet with the director once/semester and will report to the Executive Committee once/year.

**Measure of Progress:** GDPE Ex Com forms a DEI committee in Fall 2021.  
**Priority:** Near term  
**Status:** DONE.

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**Action 1.3.2: Lay out clear behavioral expectations for students and faculty**

**Description:** Review and revise the Graduate Program handbook and website to lay out expectations for respectful and responsible conduct. Orientation materials should highlight these expectations.  
**Measure of Progress:** GDPE DEI committee to reviews and proposes updates to the handbook and website.  
**Priority:** Near term  
**Status:**

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**Action 1.3.3: Create and maintain a mentoring & support network**

**Description:** Provide opportunities for networking and connection among people with different backgrounds.  
**Measure of Progress:** Distribute survey to query students, faculty members and staff interested in joining such a co-mentoring group and form groups.  
**Priority:** Near term  
**Status:** **DONE DIFFERENTLY.** A peer mentoring program was created, that started Fall 2022 with a focus on first year students. Placing additional burden on particular faculty members did not seem appropriate. This Action Item should be examined to evaluate if the program adequately addresses the issue, and what additional actions might be needed.

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**Action 1.3.4: Offer Inclusive Community Fellowships and other opportunities for leadership**

**Description:** Use Program funds to support 1-2 graduate students to foster community and inclusion in GDPE. Be transparent about how to apply for these and other leadership opportunities (e.g., representation on Ex Comm, FRSES, social chairs, etc.), term limits, and who is serving in these roles.  
**Measure of Progress:** The fellows could run a discussion group and organize an event or two each semester. Develop recruitment, expectation and compensation plan in 2021 and implement in 2022. These fellowships could also replace the Science Communication fellow or be funded in alternate years.  
**Priority:** Mid term  
**Status:**

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**Action 1.3.5: Publicize bias reporting mechanisms and seek ways to access and act upon data**

**Description:** Encourage graduate students, faculty members, and staff to make use of CSU's central bias reporting system (<https://biasreporting.colostate.edu/report-a-bias-incident/>).  
**Measure of Progress:** If Director receives a report, they will act accordingly, in consultation with the VPD and the Administrative Oversight Committee as appropriate. Work to design and implement appropriate interventions and track progress over time.  
**Priority:** Mid term  
**Status:**

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**Action 1.3.6: Assess changes in climate and culture over time**

**Description:** Implement transparent and regular tracking of the climate and culture surrounding diversity and inclusion in GDPE to track progress on DEI goals, and offer a chance for widespread feedback.  
**Measure of Progress:** Coordinate with VPD, Institutional Research and the Graduate School to confirm that GDPE membership is being tracked on the climate survey and explore potential for including GDPE specific questions in their regular climate surveys of faculty, staff and graduate students and to understand our ability to extract and interpret GDPE-specific survey results.

**Priority:** Mid term  
**Status:** PARTIAL. GDPE participates in the Graduate School Survey as well as the campus-wide climate survey. GDPE-specific survey results were shared after the first Grad. School Survey, and will be shared again soon.

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### **Goal 1.4: Create and maintain training that reduces barriers, addresses bias, and supports students from a wide range of backgrounds in key research skills.**

#### **Action 1.4.1: Expand and deepen DEI foundations readings**

**Description:** The GDPE Graduate Foundations class should employ a variety of mechanisms to introduce students to issues of equity and diversity in the field, including readings that emphasize contributions from scientists all over the world, and encourage participation from students with a variety of perspectives to ensure everyone's voice is heard. Other courses (such as ECOL 592 seminar courses) or workshops can follow up on issues introduced in Foundations by further exploring norms, model systems, and structural issues within academia and ecology that are not fully supportive of achieving a diverse, equitable and inclusive scientific community.

**Measure of Progress:** GDPE DEI committee (or subgroup of Ex Com) review current coverage of DEI in foundations course and make recommendations by Spring 2022.

**Priority:** Near term

**Status:** PARTIAL. Some recommendations were made, but not quite in time for Fall 2022 inclusion. Fall 2023 a sabbatical replacement instructor is using some of them.

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#### **Action 1.4.2: Demystify the written and oral exam**

**Description:** A panel of more senior PhD students discuss the written exam with 2<sup>nd</sup> year students early each fall semester and hold an open session to answer questions about both the written and oral exam.

**Measure of Progress:** GDPE staff select a diverse cohort of senior graduate students to hold this session one each year

**Priority:** Near term

**Status:** DONE ONCE. The DEI Committee organized a session at FRSES Spring 2023. We need to figure out a way to make this a consistent event. Additionally, materials have been added to the website about the preliminary exam.

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#### **Action 1.4.3: Provide a space for self-reflection and learning around DEI topics**

**Description:** The GDPE DEI committee should create a graduate student space for self-reflection and discussion surrounding discrimination in STEM.

**Measure of Progress:** Recognizing that the first step to action is learning, the primary goal of these discussions is to reflect on our own privilege and positionality in STEM in regards to race, sexual orientation, and gender. The group can use readings, guest speakers, and discussions with faculty to improve our own understanding and literacy about the many ways that discrimination permeates our lives, academia, and the fields of ecology, as well as gain experience having constructive conversations about these issues.

**Priority:** Mid term

**Status:**

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#### **Action 1.4.4: Provide diversity and inclusion training**

**Description:** Everyone is at a different point in their education, and we need to create a safe space for the messy process of learning and unlearning.

**Measure of Progress:** Make trainings on implicit bias, active bystander, sexual harassment, inclusive pedagogy, etc. available to all faculty members and students in GDPE. Most of these trainings are already offered on campus through the OVPD or college programming. GDPE could provide links to these trainings on the website or via the newsletter and strongly encourage participation. Students could be incentivized to participate by being asked to describe a demonstrated commitment to DEI self-learning in GDPE small grant proposals (however, new students should not be penalized for not having yet had the opportunity to engage in such trainings).

**Priority:** Mid term  
**Status:** PARTIALLY. Some trainings have been highlighted. Need to figure out a consistent way to do this.

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## **COMMITMENT 2: IMPROVE GRADUATE STUDENT RECRUITING AND ADMISSION**

### **Goal 2.1: Recruit people equitably to the program.**

#### ***Action 2.1.1: Remove metrics with a known bias against certain groups from admissions***

**Measure of Progress:** Review current metrics (e.g., GRE, TOEFL, IELTS, PTE), compare to best practices, and work with Graduate School and GDPE faculty from diverse colleges/departments to remove, revise, or put metrics in context as appropriate. For example, GDPE does not require GRE scores, but still allows them to be submitted, which is not consistent with best practices, and the graduate school website indicates that GREs are missing. These websites should be updated. Discussions pertaining to TOEFL may take additional research and time before recommendations can be made.

**Priority:** Near term

**Status:** Need to double check this. GREs should no longer be indicated as missing.

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#### ***Action 2.1.2: Work towards financial transparency (salary, fees)***

**Measure of Progress:** All students offered a position in GDPE will receive a letter that specifies the type and amount of expenses covered by CSU (GRAs or GTAs) and those that will be the student's responsibility (e.g., student fees, health insurance, summer funding) beginning fall 2022.

**Priority:** Near term

**Status:** DONE. Offer letter has been updated and posted.

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#### ***Action 2.1.3: Send GDPE graduate student and faculty representatives to conferences, colleges, and universities (regionally and nationally) that serve marginalized populations***

**Measure of Progress:** Two faculty members or graduate students are supported to attend two different conferences or visit two institutions each year.

**Priority:** Mid term

**Status:**

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#### ***Action 2.1.4: Commit to the creation a collaborative community with shared recruitment goals***

**Measure of Progress:** A) GDPE faculty members share approaches they have used to recruit and support a more diverse community in a yearly informal forum in early-mid fall semester (e.g., exchange experiences with recruiting at conferences, or applying for funds to recruit diverse students).  
B) GDPE faculty members are encouraged to include text on their websites communicating their commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, as well as how they recruit students (e.g., targeted recruitment, national call for applicants, maintain open pool as space and funding become available).

**Priority:** Mid term

**Status:**

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#### ***Action 2.1.5: Demonstrate to prospective students that CSU is working to become a place where excluded and marginalized students can thrive***

**Measure of Progress:** A) Include explicit discussion of GDPE's DEI values and actions into the recruitment week programming and all other recruitment materials no later than Fall 2025.  
B) Highlight research and accomplishments of GDPE students and faculty with historically excluded identities, and GDPE's diverse disciplines on website and/or during the recruitment process.

**Priority:** Long term

**Status:** **DONE.**

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**Action 2.1.6:** *Seek funds to support a more diverse GDPE graduate community*

**Measure of Progress:** A) A subset of GDPE faculty/staff members apply for external funding to recruit and support marginalized students to GDPE at least once every five years and/or include such skills/priorities in descriptions for new GDPE staff positions.

B) GDPE encourages faculty to integrate these efforts into their respective separate grant proposals by providing suggested language for main text and budget justifications.

**Priority:**

**Long term**

**Status:**

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