

THE MERKERT CATALYST

Brought to you by the Diversity and Inclusion Committee



THIS MONTH'S FEATURE STORY:

Diversity in Teaching

TEACHING AS AN ALLY

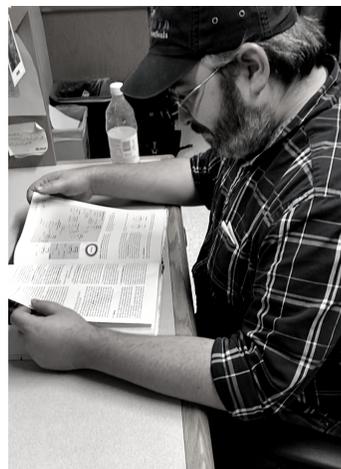
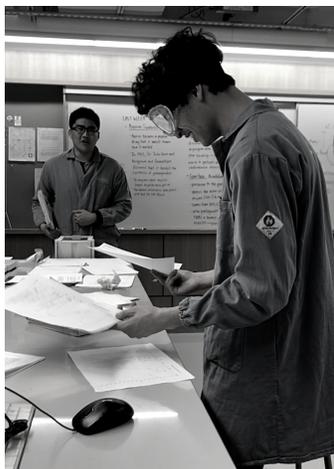
Written by Alex Vendola

With the start of a new academic year fast approaching, Boston College recently hosted a Graduate Student Teaching Conference to provide teaching fellows and assistants with tools and resources for the upcoming year. A seminar titled "Teaching as an Ally" was held as a part of the conference and focused on creating an inclusive and safe learning environment.

Recognizing one's own educational background is fundamental when creating inclusive teaching methods. Being taught consistently by someone of one's own race or gender may shape one's pedagogy in a way that is biased. In an effort to address potential biases, one should be open to ideas and constructive criticism by students. Welcoming and encouraging student feedback can make students more comfortable to speak up about their past experiences and help one develop more inclusive methods.

There are many ways that an instructor can begin class on the right foot and help students feel comfortable in their environment. One way to do this is by stating one's pronouns (ex. She/Her/Hers) on the syllabus or during one's classroom introduction. This is an easy way to demonstrate that you respect student's pronoun choices and are providing a safe space to use them.

The Diversity and Inclusion Committee recognizes the importance of inclusivity and is working on developing a seminar series to further discuss these topics within our department.



DIVERSITY IN TEACHING

Written by Sarah Canarelli and Elise Ficaretta

Over the past several years, diversity in STEM has become a hot topic of discussion. Motivated primarily by the continuous diversity deficit and more recently by the publication of the Hudlicky perspective article, many professionals are becoming more vocal about the importance of diversifying the STEM fields. Throughout our careers we have all unfortunately heard opinions similar to those expressed in the Hudlicky paper. While we hope that one day these views represent those of a small minority, we have a lot of work to do to encourage diversity in the field.



But, before we discuss the ways that we can promote diversity, we must first look at how we define diversity. While diversity has been traditionally defined by observable traits including race, sex, and ethnicity, we should recognize that sexual orientation, disability status, perspectives, culture, religious affiliation, and socioeconomic background also contribute to diversity [1].

[1] ACS Cent. Sci. 2020, 6, 8, 1241–1247

<https://doi.org/10.1021/acscentsci.0c01027>

[2] J. Chem. Educ. 2018, 95, 189–192

<https://doi.org/10.1021/acs.jchemed.7b00510>

In order to promote diversity and inclusion in STEM, we need to adopt more diverse and inclusive teaching methods so that no student is left behind. This idea was recently addressed in “Taking Advantage of Diversity within the Classroom” [2]. The authors encourage us to embrace diversity in the classroom and adopt “culturally relevant pedagogy” where student perspectives are incorporated as part of the lessons and learning materials [2]. As an instructor, you can promote and encourage diversity in the ways that you assess student learning. By incorporating more free response questions, anonymous response questions, and group-based answers, you are giving students the platform and freedom to express their different ideas.

"... WE FIND IT MORALLY UNJUSTIFIABLE TO REMAIN SILENTLY COMPLICIT WITH A SYSTEM THAT HAS HISTORICALLY DISENFRANCHISED MULTIPLE SUBGROUPS WITHIN OUR COMMUNITY [1]."

Diversity and inclusion can also be promoted in the way that you present course content. There has been a lot of discussion about this in the organic chemistry field in terms of name reactions. Many argue that the traditional methods used to teach organic chemistry reactions tend to put emphasis on the inventors, historically white men, which perpetuates the idea that these are the only people who can succeed in the field [1]. Moving forward we should highlight contributions from underrepresented groups to abolish the preconceived ideas of who can succeed. To hear what various professors including Prof. Eric Jacobsen have to say on this topic, consider listening to the C&EN's *Stereo Chemistry* podcast (Ep. 32, linked in email).

MEET OUR COMMUNITY



**"EVERY CHALLENGE IS A NEW
OPPORTUNITY SO KEEP ON
BREAKING BARRIERS"**

Meet Elton Kativhu! Elton is a rising third-year graduate student originally from Harare, Zimbabwe. He earned his Bachelor's degree from Goucher College in Maryland, which he calls his second home.

Elton is a member of the Morken lab and his current project is on carbohydrate and copper catalyzed enantioselective transformation of alkenes. Outside of the lab, you can usually find Elton playing soccer, watching soccer or thinking about soccer. And when he is not doing those things, he's probably buying sneakers (he has over a hundred pairs).

Elton says that he chose Boston College because he fell in love with the chemistry that Professor Morken presented at the accepted students' weekend. Apart from that, he enjoys the city of Boston and all of its scenery.

After graduation, Elton hopes to find a job where he feels fulfilled, whether that is in industry or academia.

RESOURCES

UPCOMING EVENTS:

*BMS Women in Chemistry Outreach Event,
Monday November 2nd
Register by September 18th using the link below:
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/BMSWiC2020>*

For more information, please visit the Boston College chemistry webpage. We are still working on updating the webpage to include a diversity tab, which will provide additional resources and link to the Diversity and Inclusion website. Stay tuned for more details on the launch!

Want to be featured in our next "Meet Our Community" story? Email us at diversity.chemistry-ggroup@bc.edu and we will be in touch!

NOTES FROM THE EDITORS

Sarah Canarelli and Elise Ficaretta

While the first two issues of the Merkert Catalyst have been written entirely by the Diversity and Inclusion Committee, we would like to give the members of our community the opportunity to participate. Each month, in this section, we will announce the theme for the next month's issue. Given that October is LGBTQ history month, our next issue will focus on LGBTQ representation in STEM.

If the theme/topic is something you are passionate about and you would be interested in writing a piece, please email us at diversity.chemistry-ggroups@bc.edu.