

Diversity & Inclusion Engagement Listening Tour Summary

Time Frame: September 5th – November 14th

Stakeholders: Students (Undergraduate and Graduate), Faculty, Staff, Postdoc Researchers, Staff Outside of SEAS

Methodology: Individual and Group Meetings (46); Attending Events (8); Reviewing Reports (17)

Overarching Themes

- If SEAS is going to be a top school in the field, it needs to be a leader in diversity and inclusion
- The dean and administration need to be very vocal and heavily involved for progress to happen
- Diversity is being talked about but skepticism of genuineness remains
- Initiatives have been student led and there needs to be more coming from administration to ensure the initiatives persist
- Incentivize people to take chances and get out of their comfort zone
- Create more partnerships with HBCUs, MSIs, and HSIs
- There is a lack of community within SEAS and it is felt at all levels
- It is going to require financial support to be successful

Recommendations

- Conduct a climate study at all levels of SEAS (quantitative and qualitative)
- Create an online space for the SEAS community to provide thoughts, concerns, and ideas
- Build upon the benchmarking processes started by the taskforce to include demographics, strategic plans and policies, programs, and financial resources
- Identify 1 or 2 events, programs, or initiatives that SEAS can co-sponsor or support to begin being visible in diversity and inclusion efforts and engage the community
- Create a student diversity committee to engage students, identify needs, and provide a continuous student voice to administration

Recruitment & Access: “People have Great Intentions by they are Clueless”

Strengths

- Diversity (with regard to numbers) is a topic of discussion now more than ever before
- Diversity Admissions Committee
- Prize Fellowship
- SEAS is globally diverse (but this may be masking the issue)
- Open house events for recruitment
- REU Program
- Referrals from other areas for staff hiring
- SEAS Club Fair

Challenges

- Showing it is not just talk but it is sincere and will lead to action
- Implicit bias is an issue but some do not want to have the difficult conversations
- Leadership is “very male and very white” and this does not send a good message
- Cost of living in Cambridge
- Concerns that SEAS will implement a test to determine if a student can concentrate in SEAS
- Stereotype threat in STEM
- Lack of female and URM faculty members
- There are a large number of Latino/a on the cleaning staff but not the academic and administrative staff
- Lack of funding opportunities for graduate student and postdoc recruitment
- Lack of URM postdocs
- Faculty and postdoc hiring is based on who you know, what school they attended, who was their advisor
- Need more diverse research topics that demonstrates the various ways to apply STEM to societal concerns
- STEM, Harvard, and SEAS can be intimidating

Opportunities

- Educate the community on how diverse teams benefit the school
- Training and support around implicit bias
- Greater guidance on incorporating diversity hiring practices into postdoc searches
- Direct outreach to URM professionals that are up and coming
- Allocate resources for staff recruitment and assess effectiveness of current efforts
- Increase housing assistance for junior faculty recruitment
- Increase pipeline for a more robust applicant pool (students, staff, faculty, postdocs)
- Build diversity recruitment efforts into evaluation process
- Create diversity fellowship program
- Partnerships with other institutions to increase visibility and answer questions on the application process
- Recruit more veterans
- More involvement in the greater Boston community and greater visibility of current efforts
- Plan a gathering during freshman visit weekend for female students interested in a SEAS concentration

“Recruitment & Access: “People have Great Intentions by they are Clueless”

Strengths



Challenges



Opportunities



- Students observe the number of female students in courses decrease after first semester of freshman year
- Imposter syndrome
- Some students experience a culture shock and knowledge gap upon arrival
- Perception that completing an engineering concentration in 4 years is impossible if you start at the Math M level
- Female students receiving negative messages around entering STEM (i.e. being told not to take CS50 or suggestions of choosing another concentration)

- Resources on best practices from institutions that have been successful
- A summer program to assist in the transition to Harvard for students interested in SEAS concentrations
- Workshops during opening days or shopping week geared towards prospective SEAS concentrators
- Add commitment to diversity or competency/experience working with diverse populations to job descriptions
- Provide research opportunities for Emerging Scholars students that have an interest in SEAS

Community Engagement & Support: “Move from Numbers to Action and Best Practices”

Strengths

- Student affinity groups are effective and should be provided additional financial and visible support
- Panels conducted by student groups
- Computer Science initiatives to support female students
- Students attending national conferences
- Staff community narratives displayed in Pierce
- Computer Science advising initiative
- Blind Grading by Computer Science faculty
- Friday lunches in Pierce
- Big/Lil Mentoring Initiative

Challenges

- It is the responsibility of females and URM to support diversity initiatives and be the voice of its importance
- Greater trust, support, and communication with direct manager than senior leadership
- Male dominated conversations in meetings and female colleagues being interrupted or thoughts not respected
- Lack of community leads to isolation and cliques
- SEAS is decentralized and each person’s experience is based heavily on their particular area of SEAS
- Career progression at the staff level is unclear and limited which leads to talented individuals leaving for more senior roles at other institutions
- Students do not see others that look like them
- Jokes about diversity and inclusion or the lack of diversity discourage interaction and trust between students and faculty
- Inadequate advising structure
- CWD Leadership programs require manager or HR recommendation
- SEAS website seems to target the external community rather than the internal community

Opportunities

- Training and workshops about best practices for creating an inclusive classroom and curriculum
- Training on how to have difficult conversations and dialogue
- Training on accessibility, mental health, and stereotypes
- Increased communication and advertisement around the initiatives that are taking place for diversity and inclusion
- Training and support around implicit bias
- Formal advisor training for those advising concentrators
- Undergraduate research opportunities need to be more accessible to increase greater representation
- Create a safe space for the community to voice their concerns
- Add a diversity session to the faculty retreat
- Mentorship programs (students, faculty, staff, and postdocs)
- Provide students greater access to and interaction with faculty (coffee, lunch, dinner, ice cream chats)
- Highlight student stories on the SEAS website and ensure a diverse representation

Community Engagement & Support: “Move from Numbers to Action and Best Practices”

Strengths

Challenges

Opportunities

- Greater guidance on benefits of completing a thesis and the process
 - Lack of training for faculty around diversity and inclusion (“We are educators but some of us are not the best educators”)
 - No large touch point other than initial orientation for graduate students and sophomore convocation for undergraduates
 - It is important to remember international students of African descent are struggling with being black in America
 - Graduate students that are also parents need to be considered more
 - Need greater diversity among TFs, ensure equal access, and proper training to work with all students
 - Support for the LGBTQ community
 - Events that address diversity and inclusion are inconsistent or one offs
 - Lack of SEAS tutors at study counsel
 - Lack of visibility of programs and initiatives
 - Some student groups aren’t recognized by the university which creates obstacles when planning events and programs
 - Composition of event speakers is not diverse
- Seminar on Race in STEM
 - Expand the Emerging Scholars Program that takes place in the Math Dept.
 - Add diversity and inclusion topics to SEAS graduate orientation
 - Create a SEAS Fellowship App Bootcamp (similar to Physics)
 - Soft Skills workshops for students (i.e. submitting journal articles, networking, etc.)
 - Highlight the faculty and staff that are both pioneers in diversity inclusion and allies
 - Grants for student organizations to do diversity initiatives or events
 - SEAS version of the Harvard Shoestrings Guide
 - Initiatives should engage everyone and not just URM and females in the conversation
 - Seek partnerships and funding opportunities with corporations
 - Career guidance for PhD students and Postdoc researchers (i.e. workshop on how to write a diversity statement)
 - Provide community resources on the SEAS website

Assessment & Tracking: “It Needs to be SEAS-Wide”

Strengths

- Staff engagement survey
- Grad Council survey includes two diversity related questions

Challenges

- Some areas are already tracking things but it is not consistent across the board
- SEAS has no data to show how the entire community actually feels about diversity and inclusion
- Does SEAS know the ROI and effectiveness of current efforts
- Who is held accountable for the diversity and inclusion efforts?
- Lack of transparency
- Not all data is disaggregated by gender or race/ethnicity

Opportunities

- A climate study to assess the current culture at SEAS and tracking progress
- A staff person that supports female and URM students and holds us accountable
- SEAS should track what % of the community has learned about inclusive classroom design, cultural competence, difficult dialogues, etc.
- Assess economic diversity
- Assess faculty load based on gender and ethnicity using February reports
- Add diversity and inclusion questions to course evaluations
- Have faculty and staff report how they have demonstrated a commitment to diversity and inclusion
- Create a public dashboard