

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Statement of UC Sustainability Offices and Staff

“Diversity is a defining feature of the University of California and we embrace it as a source of strength. Our differences — of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, socioeconomic status, abilities, experience and more — enhance our ability to achieve the university’s core missions of public service, teaching and research. We welcome faculty, staff and students from all backgrounds and want everyone at UC to feel respected and valued.” — University of California, Office of the President¹

The Sustainability Offices and their staff of the University of California (UC) are committed to ensuring that UC sustainability programs are diverse in their staff, and representative and inclusive of the communities who are engaged in these programs. In order to achieve this, we will evaluate and improve our efforts around recruitment and retention of underrepresented staff and stakeholders. We will work to directly address racism and all forms of discrimination. We will ensure collaborative and inclusive processes where our sustainability work is driven by the contributions of diverse voices and perspectives. We are at the early stages of doing this work. Please see our list of initial action items at the end of this letter for more clarity on how we intend to start the process of addressing these important issues.

The recent racial violence against Black individuals, including the murders of Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, and Breonna Taylor, among many others; and the sustained work of social justice movements, including Black Lives Matter, inspired deeper reflection among UC’s sustainability staff about our role to advance a socially, racially, and environmentally just future. We feel the urgency to commit ourselves to action, and further position ourselves to be active participants in creating a just and equitable future, for all.

As educators, we have a unique opportunity, and responsibility, to create inclusive spaces that contribute to student success and learning. We also play a vital role in helping *all* students develop as dynamic, global leaders; gain technical skills and knowledge; and understand, appreciate, and advocate for diversity, equity, and inclusion. We cannot advance this mission for students at the UC without investing in our own learning and development.

In 2019, the UC system signed the Global Climate Letter recognizing “the need for a drastic societal shift to combat the growing threat of climate change.”²³ We understand that we cannot work to combat climate change without actively seeking racial justice. We recognize the work that has previously been done by the Black Lives Matter movement, Indigenous groups, and others; acknowledge injustices of the past by the UC system and the environmental movement

¹ University of California. N.D. “Diversity.” Working at UC. <https://ucnet.universityofcalifornia.edu/working-at-uc/our-values/diversity.html>.

² McMillan, Carolyn. 2019. “The University of California Declares a Climate Emergency”. University of California Newsroom. <https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/news/university-california-declares-climate-emergency>

³ “Global Universities and Colleges Climate Letter.” 2021. The SDG Accord, The Alliance for Sustainability Leadership in Education and Australasian Campuses Towards Sustainability. <https://www.sdgaccord.org/climateletter>

as a whole; and support the notion that a societal shift for the systematic inclusion of Black individuals, as well as Indigenous individuals and people of color, is imperative for a resilient future.

We recognize that Black Lives Matter and that the indiscriminate killing of Black people must end. Black lives are devalued in so many aspects of our society as a result of historic and systemic racism. Black people are significantly more impacted by environmental problems than white people in the United States. Black people are exposed to about 1.5 times more particulate matter in the air than white people.⁴ Bus depots, landfills, shipping terminals, and other sites which produce high levels of particulate matter are commonly located in Black neighborhoods. Nationally, population-weighted mean nitrogen dioxide concentrations are 38% higher for nonwhites than for whites.⁵ Busy roadways, power plants, and industrial emissions are often linked with high nitrogen dioxide concentrations. Practices such as red-lining, gentrification, and underrepresentation of Black people in government, have forced Black people into the most impacted neighborhoods and allowed for problematic development in neighborhoods that are already predominantly Black. Further, the health impacts of climate change are likely to be immediately felt by people of color and those who are economically vulnerable.⁶ We recognize that the white supremacy and systemic racism that leads to environmental injustice are the same issues that lead to the killing of Black people by police. Black Americans represent only 13% of the U.S. population, but are killed by police at more than twice the rate of White Americans.⁷

The environmental movement, which we are a part of, has similarly been intertwined with structural and cultural racism, as well as classism, patriarchy, sexism, xenophobia and homophobia. Many of the historical figures which the environmental movement have lauded — John Muir, Madison Grant, Gifford Pinchot, and Theodore Roosevelt to name a few — advocated for the forced removal of Native Americans from their land and many were involved with or leaders in the eugenics movement. It is not uncommon to still see these same people recognized as environmental heroes today, including on UC campuses, their wrongs invisibilized and sanitized. Many national environmental organizations — including those that UC campuses have relationships with, such as the Sierra Club — are beginning to recognize this problematic history after sustained pressure and critique from Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), as well as environmental justice movements. Sierra Club is starting to dedicate funds and resources to address racial justice within its own organization and in its

⁴ Mikati, Ihab, Benson, Adam F., Luben, Thomas J., Sacks, Jason D., and Richmond-Bryant, Jennifer. 2018. "Disparities in Distribution of Particulate Matter Emission Sources by Race and Poverty Status." *American Journal of Public Health* 108(4), pp. 480-485. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2017.304297>

⁵ Clark, L.P., Millet, D.B., and Marshall, J.D. 2014. "National Patterns in Environmental Injustice and Inequality: Outdoor NO₂ Air Pollution in the United States." *PLoS ONE* 9(4). <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0094431>

⁶ Rudolph, L., Harrison, C., Buckley, L., and North, S. 2018. *Climate Change, Health, and Equity: A Guide for Local Health Departments*. Oakland, CA and Washington D.C., Public Health Institute and American Public Health Association. <https://www.apha.org/topics-and-issues/climate-change/guide>

⁷ *The Washington Post*. 2020. "Fatal Force." <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/investigations/police-shootings-database/>.

campaigns.⁸⁹ As UC sustainability staff, our collective silence signals our complicity with structures of violence and racism that exist within the environmental movement and systems of higher education.

The environmental movement has disempowered, dismissed, and alienated BIPOC throughout its problematic history.¹⁰ As a result, the field of sustainability in the U.S. does not reflect the diversity of the nation.¹¹ The Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education's (AASHE) staff survey showed that 88% of sustainability staff in higher education were white in 2017.¹² Data is not available for the diversity of UC's sustainability staff, but it is likely that UC is experiencing similar challenges in lack of diversity. We recognize that while demographic data is a useful indicator, addressing racism in our field requires restructuring and rethinking our work and not just simply focusing on demographics.

As sustainability staff, we recognize that dismantling systemic racism, increasing diverse representation, and advancing equity are critical to building a just and resilient future. However, we also recognize that our progress toward racial justice has not been consistent in every endeavor, nor across the entire UC system. As a community, we are working to better understand our institutions' histories of discrimination and expand our own work on anti-racism. Before we can move forward, we must take responsibility for not assuring that sustainability programs and policies are inclusive, and for the harm and suffering this has caused for students, faculty, and staff who identify as BIPOC, with whom we have worked. Looking ahead, we must build an environment that demonstrates inclusion and allows for thoughtful engagement of diverse viewpoints and approaches. While we have made mistakes along the way, we must challenge ourselves to advance innovative and equitable solutions rooted in racial justice moving forward.

In order for us to maintain a diverse workforce and stakeholder community, we must also ensure that BIPOC are respected and uplifted within our work. BIPOC students on several UC campuses have organized collectives to address issues such as the lack of diversity, microaggressions in environmental and sustainability focused spaces, and the lack of inclusion of environmental justice issues by campus sustainability programs. Some examples of these student leadership groups include:

- [Students of Color Environmental Collective, UC Berkeley](#),

⁸ Brune, Michael. 2020. "Pulling Down our Monuments." The Sierra Club.

<https://www.sierraclub.org/michael-brune/2020/07/john-muir-early-history-sierra-club>

⁹ Hopkins, Hop. 2018. "How the Sierra Club's History With Immigrant Rights Is Shaping Our Future." The Sierra Club. <https://www.sierraclub.org/articles/2018/11/how-sierra-club-s-history-immigrant-rights-shaping-our-future>

¹⁰ Finney, Carolyn. 2014. *Black Faces, White Spaces Reimagining the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors*. The University of North Carolina Press.

¹¹ Taylor, Dorceta E. 2014. *The State of Diversity in Environmental Organizations: Mainstream NGOs, Foundations & Government Agencies*. Green 2.0. <https://www.diversegreen.org/the-challenge/>

¹² Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE). 2017. *Salaries & Status of Sustainability Staff in Higher Education*. <https://www.aashe.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/AASHE-Staffing-Survey-Report-2017.pdf>

- [Environmentalists of Color Collective, UCLA](#),
- Environmental Justice Collective, UC Irvine,
- [Environmental Justice Alliance, UC Santa Barbara](#), and
- [People of Color Sustainability Collective, UC Santa Cruz](#).

We commit to learning from these student leaders, taking their concerns seriously, and working with them to address the issues they have raised. We also understand that as staff we have a responsibility to teach each other, learn from each other, and also to learn from what students who identify as BIPOC have already written and made available. We seek balance in creating spaces for students who identify as BIPOC to be heard while also being mindful of placing the emotional and time burden on our students to teach us about these issues. Through our roles as sustainability staff at the University of California, we are proactively working to address our own personal unconscious biases along with the systemic structural biases to the participation of more diverse voices within the environmental movement and within our UC institutions.

We have already begun to take action on this issue and prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). We:

- Began DEI professional development trainings and discussion groups within the UC sustainability staff community in 2017 to start ongoing personal learning processes;
- Incorporated equity and climate justice into the Global Climate Leadership Council's Carbon Neutrality Initiative's (CNI) pillars of Applied Research, Faculty Engagement and Education, Climate Action Planning and Staff Engagement, Student Engagement, and Communications and Government Relations.
- Committed to require all sustainability policy proposals to include a DEI impact analysis. This measure is being implemented in the 2020-2021 academic year.

We are committed to creating a more inclusive sustainability movement within the University of California by:

- **DEFINITION:** Establishing a working definition of DEI as it relates to our work.
- **LEARNING:** Continuing both our personal learning and professional training about DEI, environmental racism, climate and environmental justice, and anti-racism. We will do so individually, in our teams, in our departments and divisions, with our campuses, and at the systemwide level. As part of this we aim to acknowledge, take responsibility for, and learn from past mistakes.
- **STUDENT AND COMMUNITY VOICES:** Listening to traditionally marginalized and minoritized students, staff, and faculty, ensuring that these voices are present in our decision making, and advocating for the priorities of the communities most impacted by environmental issues. If those voices are not present we will identify and address barriers to participation.
- **POLICY:** Integrating DEI and environmental justice into the existing UC Sustainable Practices Policy and the UC Carbon Neutrality Initiative and developing a process to ensure that DEI and environmental justice are centered in future policy iterations.

- **COMMUNITY BUILDING:** Building inclusive communities by ensuring that sustainability spaces including those across campuses and the UC system such as committee meetings and statewide events are welcoming to all and actively engaging with those who are not present.
- **HIRING:** Reviewing our hiring practices (including assessment of the recruitment, hiring, and retention stages) for professional and student staff at each campus to achieve a diverse workforce. This will be done in partnership with departments whose expertise is in the area of human resources and diversity.
- **ENGAGEMENT:** Reviewing our outreach, recruitment, and retention of student participants (for sites that offer programs for students) to assess how inclusive our programs are. This will be done in partnership with departments whose expertise is in the area of student and financial aid records, Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), and diversity.
- **ACCOUNTABILITY:** Creating a Sustainability and DEI Task Force or Working Group responsible for implementing all actions in this list and to provide ongoing coordination to integrate and center DEI in UC's sustainability policy and programs.
- **TRANSPARENCY:** Demonstrating transparency in all the work that we do and that we are involved with so that we may build trust with our stakeholders and remain accountable for our commitments.

We recognize that we are still learning how to address issues of racism, discrimination, and other forms of bias more broadly. Given this, we will most likely need to shift our approach and goals as we hear from more partners, especially from students, staff, and faculty who identify as BIPOC. We also fully intend to add new goals to this list as we better understand that work which needs to be done.

In order to successfully implement the actions above, we will need to work with our campuses and communities to more clearly define accountability and reporting structures, how we will ensure transparency, the timeline on which these actions will occur, how we will go about these actions, and the scope for each item. We considered whether we should wait to release a statement until we were able to develop a detailed implementation plan that would include this information. In the end though, we felt that it was too important to speak up now and share where we are today, even though we have much more work to do.

Signed by:

UC Berkeley Office of Sustainability and the Student Environmental Resource Center
 UC Davis Sustainability Officers
 UC Davis Health Sustainability Staff
 UC Irvine Sustainability Network
 UCLA and UCLA Health Sustainability Staff
 UC Merced Office of Sustainability
 UC Riverside Sustainability Staff
 UC San Diego and UCSD Health Sustainability Staff
 UC San Francisco and UCSF Health Office of Sustainability
 UC Santa Barbara Sustainability Program

UC Santa Cruz Sustainability Office staff team
UC Office of the President Sustainability Staff
Sustainable Berkeley Lab, Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory