

Inclusive Excellence Narrative

Institute of Arctic & Alpine Research

Last updated November 2021

Introduction

The Institute of Arctic and Alpine Research (INSTAAR) is working to build an institute climate that respects and honors the many unique characteristics of its members, including race, ethnicity, color, national origin, socio-economic status, gender, gender expression, and ability. We aim to build an institute that encourages the productive coexistence of a diverse group of individuals working together to achieve a common goal, and we recognize that this diversity is key to scientific innovation and discovery. **We believe that we will only be excellent if we are also inclusive.**

INSTAAR appreciates that our past successes in Earth systems research are clouded by injustice and inequality. We have operated in a system that supports structural racism – this system promotes white scholars, erodes BIPOC scholarship, engages in disadvantageous hiring practices for BIPOC scholars, benefits from scientific colonialism, and discredits service to the broader community. In this way, INSTAAR is far from excellent, and we have a long way to go before we can achieve the level of excellence we desire.

INSTAAR views inclusive excellence as an acknowledgement and also as a commitment to continued action. We **acknowledge** that like many academic institutions, INSTAAR achieved success using exclusive practices and policies. We openly recognize that we cannot achieve excellence until these barriers are dismantled. We **commit** to building an inclusive, actively anti-racist institute where all people from groups underrepresented in science and academia are welcome, safe, and supported. We will rely on our guiding principles of **transparency**, **accountability**, and **long-term support** to reach our goals.

Current efforts and initiatives

INSTAAR is currently engaged in multiple initiatives and activities that will begin to dismantle structural racism at our institute and in the broader Earth sciences community. The principles of Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI principles) are woven into all of our institute activities

1. Develop an equity framework to evaluate and reward excellence

We are redefining our metrics of excellence using two different approaches:

Excellence as student-centered success

In terms of numbers of students impacted, classroom instruction provides the most direct influence on student success at CU Boulder. While most INSTAAR faculty are involved in developing and delivering curricula, classroom instruction is typically viewed as the responsibility of departments. However, INSTAAR's focus on research and mentoring allows us to emphasize other aspects of student-centered learning, including integration of experiences and knowledge; development of professional skills; providing opportunities for collaborative learning opportunities; fostering respect for different ways of knowing and learning; integration and coordination of policy, management, and science; and synthesis of knowledge across the often disciplinary boundaries of departments. The future of INSTAAR lies in centering these values in

our core definition of excellence. In doing so, we will ensure that our research institute will continue to have a positive impact on society through research innovation and by producing capacity by training the next generation of researchers and critical thinkers.

Research activities and goals that align with environmental and climate justice

There are strong relationships between racial inequality and environmental injustice in Colorado, across the U.S., and world-wide. INSTAAR researchers are on the leading edge of climate change and environmental research, and many are skilled in science communication or engaging with communities and regulatory bodies. Historically, these activities have been binned as service and thus have not played prominent roles in tenure and promotion policies or INSTAAR leadership platforms. We are revising our policies and practices to reward, encourage, and celebrate justice and engagement activities, not only under the auspices of INSTAAR service but also as a foundational component of our research and teaching. In doing so, we are changing INSTAAR culture to include justice-based questions and issues that appeal to a broader range of scholars, and we will pave the way to enable their success as these scholars are promoted and seek leadership positions in our institute.

2. Revision of standing rules

INSTAAR's standing rules, which are being revised in AY21/22, will reflect policies and procedures centered in justice, equity, and inclusion including a professional code of conduct and guidelines for inclusive performance management. We are updating annual merit evaluation procedures that value justice, equity, diversity and inclusion (JEDI) work as well as that consider short- and long- term impacts of the COVID19 pandemic on career trajectories.

3. Professional code of conduct

INSTAAR recently created its first professional code of conduct, which articulates the values shared by institute members. All institute members have had an opportunity to comment on the code of conduct through an open comment period and an institute-wide town hall session. The code of conduct also was discussed by the INSTAAR Directorate. In fall 2021, we decided that while our values were well articulated in our document, we needed assistance learning how to operationalize these values. How will INSTAAR members live these values through our professional work and scholarship? The Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance (OIEC) has agreed to work with INSTAAR on operationalizing our code of conduct in spring 2022.

4. Revised onboarding process that focuses on inclusive excellence

The results of the last campus culture survey indicated that INSTAAR students and staff often felt confused about institute resources and their position within the university, and did not feel valued by the institute. We have revised our onboarding process to focus on topics that we believe underpin inclusive excellence. The annual welcome events include discussions of how institute members fit into the larger structure of campus, how members can develop balanced relationships with both their institute and their department, and foster discussions between students, staff, and faculty at various stages of institute work. We developed a handout, that will be provided to all institute members every year, that describes a variety of reporting options in case they experience or witness an aggression. We believe that open and transparent discussions

of sometimes difficult topics helps to build trust and lasting relationships, essential for us to meet INSTAAR's definition of inclusive excellence.

5. Re-invigoration of the JEDI TaskForce

What was previously a 3-person EDI committee has grown into the largest and most important working group at INSTAAR. Leadership of the JEDI TaskForce is shared among four tenure-track faculty, and the AY 21-22 TaskForce has 26 members across all employment categories (students, staff, professional research associates, faculty). The INSTAAR JEDI TaskForce meets monthly during the academic year to build community and discuss new and ongoing initiatives and activities. Each TaskForce member commits their time to at least one (often several) of these initiatives over the course of the academic year.

6. Engagement of directorate members in JEDI

The INSTAAR directorate (tenure-track and research faculty) is positioned to make the largest impact in increasing diversity, equity, and inclusion across the institute, and buy-in to JEDI-related initiatives is key to making progress in these areas.

- a. In January 2021, INSTAAR directorate members were asked to thoughtfully complete a questionnaire and then discuss their answers to the questionnaire with the JEDI TaskForce lead in one-on-one meetings. Directorate members provided answers to the following questions:
 - i. In the past 12 months, what have you done to support efforts in diverse scholarship, to engage with members of underserved communities, or to disassemble the apparatus of privilege that pervades STEM? Please list all relevant activities (INSTAAR-related or otherwise)
 - ii. In the next 12 months, how do you hope to weave JEDI-related work into your research, teaching (if applicable), and service? Please list the specific activities you are hoping to take part in.

We anticipate that this personal reflection activity will continue to increase engagement in JEDI across the directorate, and we aim to include a reflective narrative focused on JEDI commitments and activities in INSTAAR's annual merit review process (#2).

- b. The INSTAAR JEDI TaskForce lead provides regular updates to the directorate on JEDI activities via meeting presentations and email communications.
- c. The INSTAAR JEDI TaskForce lead is a member of the INSTAAR Executive Committee.

7. Incorporation of JEDI principles into weekly seminar series

New guidelines for our weekly seminar series ensure that we abide by JEDI principles. Our invited speaker list includes scholars working on topics that include climate and environmental justice themes. We are emphasizing a just and equitable culture in our seminar series by offering speakers, particularly BIPOC speakers, honorariums as fair compensation. In addition to revising our own seminar series, we used our influence to help create the Joint Earth Seminar Series

(JESS), which is a CU Boulder geoscience seminar series based on inclusive principles. Held once a month, this seminar series will include INSTAAR, CIRES, Geological Sciences, Atmospheric and Oceanic Sciences, and Geography. This inclusive series is now run by a committee that includes representatives and EDI experts across these CU institutes and departments.

8. Efforts in Critical Needs hiring

In AY 20-21 we submitted a proposal for a critical needs faculty hire, but were not selected for a hire.

9. Development of diversity webpages on the INSTAAR website

A new section of the INSTAAR website collects information on our commitment to JEDI, provides people from underrepresented groups and allies with links to specific on- and off-campus resources, and lists actions and leadership of the JEDI TaskForce for accountability. JEDI principles have been centered in INSTAAR's communications plan and inform an ongoing website redesign and presence on social media and other channels.

10. Development of the newSTAAR peer mentoring program

newSTAAR is a peer mentoring program designed to help each person who joins INSTAAR find their place, make connections, and succeed in their academic and non-academic pursuits. New INSTAAR members are automatically enrolled in newSTAAR (they may opt-out if they wish) and paired with a mentor at the same professional level. Mentee and mentor meet at least monthly in the first year and have discussions about navigating INSTAAR, Boulder, academic life, etc. Full-group gatherings for the program occur throughout the academic year to expand connections. newSTAAR holds an orientation program near the beginning of the Fall semester for all program members, and mentors attend a training session prior to serving in the program.

11. Inclusive social activities for institute members and graduate students

Social activities help to build and strengthen our community, but only if they are inclusive and welcoming. INSTAAR organizes and financially supports multiple inclusive social activities each year, including lunches, virtual trivia, bowling, gingerbread house decorating, virtual game night, pizza in the park, and pottery painting.

12. Engagement in underrepresented minority REU programs

INSTAAR members have a history of participating in programs that train undergraduates in research methods and independent discovery, particularly programs that are focused on supporting students from underrepresented groups and underserved communities. In 2021, members of INSTAAR's JEDI Task Force contacted leads from multiple REU programs that serve URMs and students from underserved communities. These include the Summer Multicultural Access to Research Training (SMART), Research Experience for Community College Students (RECCS), Research Experience in Solid Earth Science for Students (RESESS), and Significant Opportunities in Atmospheric Research and Science (SOARS) programs, among others. They then held a town hall open to all INSTAARs, including previous and interested mentors, to brainstorm best practices and past experiences mentoring students in these programs.

INSTAAR had record participation in Summer 2021 across multiple programs, and will continue to encourage participation of institute members in the coming years.

13. Development of the graduate school application mentoring program (GAAP)

INSTAAR JEDI Task Force members formed a graduate student-led program to support prospective graduate students as they apply to CU Boulder departments affiliated with INSTAAR. The purpose of the program is to demystify the graduate school application process and offer tips and support to students who otherwise might have barriers to completing their applications. One-on-one support with trained graduate students may include one or two question and answer sessions, or longer meetings to discuss written research and personal statements. Following the mentorship period, both mentor and mentee will complete an assessment of their experience. In the first year, INSTAAR has over 15 mentors paired with prospective graduate students.

14. JEDI book discussions

The JEDI book and discussion group was started by a small group of INSTAAR members led by Sylvia Michel in June of 2020 as an action in response to the STEM Shutdown, with the scope of reading and discussing ideas learned from the many books available on equality, inclusion, diversity, justice, and history. Today, both Sylvia Michel and Jenifer Hall-Bowman lead this effort. Since then, the group has read and discussed eight books during monthly or bi-monthly meetings, with participation fluctuating ~8-12 people during the first semester, and ~5-6 people more recently. The group is interested in broadening and enlarging the representation and participation of INSTAAR members (particularly graduate students, postdocs, and faculty), which is currently dominated by PRAs and staff, and all women. They are also planning to carry out a survey to gather community information about topics and books that people would like to discuss in the future.

15. Inclusive culture training

INSTAAR contracted with Paradigm to develop an inclusive culture training for the institute. This training took place in Fall 2020 and was mandatory for all INSTAAR members. In 2021, the University of Colorado Boulder took steps to contract Paradigm to make this training available to all campus members.

Future efforts and initiatives

1. Assessment of JEDI efforts

We are in the process of assessing past JEDI efforts via survey, informal conversation, and demographic information. We are also developing plans for assessment of each new JEDI initiative. Recognizing that the diversification of INSTAAR requires a substantial effort over a period of many years, we aim to develop processes to provide continuity in assessment over time.

2. Response to URGE recommendations

INSTAAR members participated in two URGE (Unlearning Racism in Geoscience; <https://urgeoscience.org/>) pods, and delivered a set of recommendations to INSTAAR leadership in summer 2021. We are developing an action plan to address each recommendation, and these action plans with timelines and point persons in the institute will be published on the INSTAAR website in early spring 2022.

3. Development of a bridge program

to support underrepresented students in the summer before they matriculate to CU Boulder to begin graduate research at INSTAAR. Members of the JEDI Task Force will scope a pilot program for Summer 2021 with initial funds from INSTAAR and will seek ways to sustain and grow support in following years.

4. Fieldwork safety plans

It is INSTAAR's responsibility is to reduce field-related risks of sexual assault and harassment to the greatest extent possible, in order to facilitate the academic success of all institute members who choose to perform field work. INSTAAR field teams will be required to develop an Inclusive Field Work Safety Plan that must be discussed and agreed upon by all field team members prior to the initiation of the field work activities. We have developed a guide for what is required as part of these plans, including clear statements of rules, norms, examples of misconduct, resources and plans if misconduct occurs, etc.

5. Further training

We acknowledge that the education of our community is of pivotal importance for producing a long-lasting and effective positive change in our institute's culture. Following our initial training on aspects of anti-racism and bias, we are now planning training to enhance awareness in white privilege and entitlement and their toxic effect on the lives of people from traditionally marginalized backgrounds, as well as to develop strategies for proactive and positive change.

6. Revision of INSTAAR Open House

A subgroup of the JEDI Task Force is currently working on the restructuring of this activity to ensure that we serve a more diverse and less privileged community of students in the Boulder and Denver metro area. We are also considering the possibility of creating a more regular and virtual event (possibly once a month during the semester) to thus reach out to a larger population of students, and to provide more time and in depth overviews of the work that INSTAAR scientists and labs perform.

7. Coordinate INSTAAR JEDI efforts with our sister academic departments on campus

Recognizing that INSTAAR's participating departments are also engaging in JEDI-related priorities and activities, a subset of INSTAAR JEDI Task Force members will coordinate with departmental leads and discuss opportunities to combine and grow efforts across campus. The goals of this effort will include: building a broader, supportive network and sharing resources.