

# Equity and Inclusion in the Chemical Sciences Requires Actions not Just Words

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The following joint Editorial was also published in *ACS Central Science* (DOI: [10.1021/acscentsci.0c00784](https://doi.org/10.1021/acscentsci.0c00784)).

The chronic effects of institutionalized racism in America have been laid bare in recent weeks by murders caught on film as well as by the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on Black and LatinX people. Against this backdrop, last week *Angewandte Chemie* published (and then removed) an article entitled, “Organic synthesis—Where now? is 30 years old. A reflection on the current state of affairs”. It has been heartening to see the near unanimity of the chemistry community in condemning the archaic views about diversity, inclusion, and mentoring as well as the xenophobia expressed in this paper. This condemnation included a statement by *Angewandte* that “the values expressed in this piece do not reflect our values of fairness, trustworthiness, and social awareness”, denunciations from chemical societies around the world, the resignation of a large portion of the journal’s international advisory board, and an outpouring of criticism on social media.

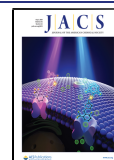
However, from my perspective it is hard not to feel that some of the same people who are loudly condemning this piece are (at best) not doing enough to combat these systemic problems and (at worst) actively contributing to them. I encourage everyone in the field who has disavowed the views expressed in this article to ask themselves what they are actively doing to address them. *Understand that nearly every one of your colleagues who is also a member of an underrepresented group (women, BIPOC) has been told at some point in their career that they only received a position, fellowship, award, or invitation because of their minority status.* Maybe you have even said or thought something like this yourself. Or heard someone else say it without speaking up.

At this stage, words and condemnation are not enough. Actions are needed. If you recognize that a more diverse workforce enhances the field of chemistry, here are some examples of things that you can actually do:

1. Actively promote and advocate for women and underrepresented minority students, faculty, and co-workers. Consider this a priority *in the same way that you consider it a priority to advocate for yourself and your close friends.* For example:
  - Attend their talks and posters at scientific meetings and actively engage with their science. Talk to them about their scientific work, ask questions, and discuss their results.
  - Let them know if you liked their recent paper or presentation. An enthusiastic e-mail or phone call can have a tremendous impact at all career stages.

- Nominate their work for coverage in press (e.g., for journal highlights, *C&E News*, *Chemistry World*, etc.). Women and researchers from underrepresented minority groups are frequently overlooked in press coverage of scientific work. If you see a great talk or read a great paper, let the press know *in the same way that you would for your own work.*
  - Nominate them for awards. Do not just assume that they have already been nominated by someone else. Even if they have, your endorsement and support is still meaningful.
  - Amplify their voices. When they make a point or ask an insightful question in a meeting, explicitly give them credit and repeat their message.
2. Lead by example. If you truly value diversity, work even harder to make sure that your team reflects your values. If you are a faculty member, use seminar visits and conferences to meet and actively recruit talented and diverse scientists to your group and as future faculty colleagues. Follow up and encourage the people that you meet to join your team or department. Proactively advocate within your department for hiring a diverse cohort of graduate students and faculty recruits.
  3. Hiring a diverse team/set of colleagues *is not enough.* Active support and mentoring are crucial for the success of all scientists! Too often, I have heard other professors say that formal mentoring is a waste of time and that truly talented scientists will be successful without it. Scientists from majority groups take for granted the extensive mentorship that they receive from their colleagues just by being “part of the club”. Formal, informal, and meaningful mentoring *for everyone* is crucial for leveling the playing field and maximizing the success of all of the scientists in your group and department as well as in the chemistry community at large.
  4. Speak up when you see or hear discriminatory words/actions or when you hear implicit biases coming into a discussion. Do not rely on members of underrepresented

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- groups to raise these concerns. If they do, listen, support them and amplify their voices.
- Educate yourself and your co-workers on the scientific literature that shows how systemic and insidious bias is in science. Some valuable resources on both explicit and implicit bias can be found here: <https://advance.umich.edu/stride-readings/>. Use these data to refute claims that science is purely a meritocracy, that the playing field is inherently equal for everyone, and that scientists are being hired/promoted solely on their merits.
  - For scientific editors (including those of us at ACS publications like the *Journal of the American Chemical Society* and *ACS Central Science*): realize that you often play a critical role in propagating inequities in science. **Do not be complacent because your journal was not the one that published this specific piece.** Carefully consider your procedures and processes with the following questions in mind:
    - What papers are being triaged, reviewed, and accepted in your journal? For example, what is the representation of women and underrepresented minority authors and reviewers at each stage? In many cases, these data will reveal that your journal and process is not as objective and unbiased as you think. Be transparent about these data and consider ways to fix any inequities that are revealed.
    - Who is appealing your editorial decisions, and how are you deciding whether to reconsider their manuscripts? In my own Associate Editor office at *JACS*, senior white male authors are among the most aggressive in appealing negative decisions. This has the potential to play a significant role in whose papers ultimately receive reconsideration and/or appear in a journal.
    - What articles are you recommending for press coverage? How do you choose which articles to highlight? Are specific authors (or demographics) disproportionately represented in press coverage from your journal?

This list is meant to provide a starting point for all of us as we work to support and promote the careers of diverse members of our community. I know that there are many other good ideas, and I welcome an open and continuing discussion of these moving forward. Again, **actions not just words** are required to tackle systemic inequities, and we all can and should be doing more. Now is the time to channel this Global outrage to ensure that the chemical sciences benefit from the contributions, talents, and creativity of all humans.

Melanie S. Sanford, Associate Editor, *Journal of the American Chemical Society*  [orcid.org/0000-0001-9342-9436](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9342-9436)

## ■ AUTHOR INFORMATION

Complete contact information is available at:  
<https://pubs.acs.org/10.1021/jacs.0c06482>

## Notes

Views expressed in this editorial are those of the author and not necessarily the views of the ACS.