

Physics & Astronomy Department Statement on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Physics & Astronomy as disciplines intersect with identity and culture just like any other human endeavor. The racism in society affects our field, so our commitment to justice, truth, and humanity compels us to acknowledge and work to mitigate its effects in the Department of Physics and Astronomy. We are committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion for the sake of the individuals in our department, because they are vital to our basic mission of producing and disseminating scientific knowledge.

Stereotypes about what kinds of people can be a “good physics student” limit the success and scope of our work as teachers and students. The prevalent stereotype of the physicist as a white male skews our classroom communities. It perpetuates institutional racism and sexism and impedes our scientific progress, particularly since diversity has been shown to promote innovation in the field ([Hofstra et. al., PNAS 2020](#)). As a department, we are committed to resisting these stereotype pressures.

Perhaps the most important thing you can do to succeed in this department is to believe that you belong here, because you do! As is true for any skill in life that is worth mastering, proficiency in physics arises from practice, collaboration, and work. We understand that every student who enters the department comes with a different set of experiences and challenges, and not everyone is at the same place in their journey of physics and astronomy learning. We adopt the philosophy of a "growth mindset" ([Dweck 2008](#)), the idea that intelligence is not a fixed trait and that people can grow and improve their abilities.

The Swarthmore Physics & Astronomy faculty and staff invite you to join with us in combating the legacy of elitism and demographic homogeneity that faces our community. Students, professors, funding agencies, and even Supreme Court justices have wrestled with this issue. During the 2015/2016 Fisher vs. UT Austin case, Chief Justice Roberts asked “What unique perspective does a minority student bring to a physics class?” Around 2500 physicists and astronomers responded by signing a letter to the court rejecting the assumptions underlying that question and explaining how a diverse population is vital to physics and to science in general. The presidents of the American Physical Society, the National Society of Black Physicists, the National Society of Hispanic Physicists, and many others have written in support of this view. You can find the open letter [here](#). The world’s largest organizations of physicists and astronomers, APS and AAS, have begun enforcing strict codes of conduct at scientific meetings; and have taken vigorous action, consistent with [their statements](#) condemning institutional racism. Our goal in Swarthmore’s Department of Physics and Astronomy is to be no less vigorous in recognizing institutional biases and to leverage every possible tool in our community to defeat them.