Thursday, June 11, 2020

Dear Professor Greenberg,

We the Fishell lab write to share and disseminate tangible steps we commit to undertake within our laboratory to help fight racism and increase diversity. We hope that other labs will join us in responding with action to raise awareness of the injustices committed to Black communities across our country, including the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Tony McDade. Silence is compliance with an inherently racist system that was built on promoting whiteness and disenfranchising black, indigenous, people of color (BIPOC) communities. Our letter is a call for immediate and long-term action to dismantle this system. Being non-racist at this time is not enough, we need to be anti-racist.

First, we support the measures laid out by the Underrepresented Scholars in Neuroscience (USN) in their letter to the Neurobiology community.

Second, we the Fishell lab pledge to increase our community outreach through the following measures. We hope that our colleagues in the Neurobiology department will join us in these efforts:

1. Host student researchers through the SHURP program. The Fishell lab has previously participated in the Broad Summer Research Program, which is a summer internship program for underrepresented minority (URM) students.
2. Mentor URM college students through the Morehouse College mentorship program and students belonging to the Northeastern College of Science Student Diversity Advisory Council (COSSDAC).

Third, we urge the Neurobiology department as a whole to engage in community outreach by instituting the following long-term programs, either virtually or in person:

3. Host an annual open house for people from the community to come learn about neuroscience in a department-wide “Brain Day”.
4. “Day in the life” programs where URM high school and college students shadow researchers for a day at HMS.
5. Outreach programs led by researchers at local high schools and colleges with high percentages of URMs.
Finally, after hearing diverse and moving perspectives from our broader community during the USN Town Hall we support these additional measures for HMS:

6. Negotiate reasonable schedules and salary for custodial staff during the Covid-19 pandemic. Working between 10:30 pm - 6 am is a grueling schedule to keep our community safe and should be re-negotiated if not absolutely necessary. If necessary, it warrants a raise in salary to compensate.

7. Custodial, security and cafeteria staff are overwhelmingly people of color and we need to protect their positions. As such, we ask that HMS commit to no layoffs of custodial, security, and cafeteria staff members during the pandemic.

8. Measures to make our community a safer space for current BIPOC students and staff. These goals are modified from the recommendations from the Harvard University Presidential Task Force on Inclusion and Belonging “Better Together Plan” (2020)
   a. An anonymous helpline where BIPOC students/staff can report incidents of racism, followed by an independent task force that can investigate those claims. We need to hold community members accountable for the many covert and overt forms of racism they perpetuate in the community.
   b. A committee group that is committed to recruiting, mentoring, developing URM students and staff (from entry level to faculty positions). This group should work closely with established groups like USN in HMS Neurobiology.
   c. Resources to provide enhanced mental health services for BIPOC students and staff, particularly from professionals who are trained in dealing with issues regarding racial trauma and diversity. One option being to hire a dedicated mental health counselor for biomedical PhD students and postdocs, following the example of UNC Chapel Hill.

We will be paying close attention to this conversation and are committed to seeing the present momentum turned into decisive action. We are encouraged by the groundswell of support but we have many years of work ahead of us. We are committed to making Fishell lab, HMS Neurobiology and HMS an anti-racist place of work.

Thank you,
Gordon Fishell

Professor of Neurobiology,
Stanley Center for Psychiatric Research,
Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard

On behalf of the entire Fishell Lab