

**Departmental BPC Plan
Department of Information Science
Cornell University (Ithaca, NY)**



Effective dates of Plan: 01/03/2024- 01/03/2026

Contact: Phoebe Sengers, Director of Broadening Participation,
phoebe.sengers@cornell.edu

1. Context

Cornell University is an Ivy League university in Ithaca, New York. As the land-grant institution of New York State, Cornell has a special responsibility to serve and advance the lives and livelihoods of New York residents. In 2014, our department began significant efforts toward increasing diversity and inclusion through college-level and departmental programs; in 2020, our college added a dedicated office for DEI support. Our programs are now reasonably gender-balanced, ranging from 57% (undergraduate) to 62% (PhD) female. While our faculty is fairly gender-balanced (41% female, compared to 42% for i-Schools nationally), there is a significant skew in gender between our Ithaca and New York campuses (66% female in New York; 35% in Ithaca). The number of Black, Latinx, and Native American students (whom we refer to here as “students from underrepresented groups” (URGs)) is 20% (undergraduate majors, compared to 25% overall for Cornell), 2% (master's) and 17% (PhD - both numbers compare to 9.7% of graduate and professional students overall for Cornell). We currently have three faculty members from URGs (7% of the faculty). Our undergraduate, master's, and PhD programs are now fairly gender-balanced, but we are underperforming with respect to students from URGs, especially at the master's level. We believe our master's program composition to be skewed because of its high cost; it has 83% international students, far higher than our other programs. We continue to work on increasing representation of students from URGs in our PhD program, and have seen continual improvements over the past eight years for the proportion of students from URGs in incoming PhD cohorts. As the diversity of our student body has grown, however, we have become aware anecdotally of climate issues in how students relate to each other, to faculty, and to students in allied programs (like Computer Science, with which we share a building), particularly among graduate students, and have begun to track these issues through annual systematic data-gathering. These problems include sexual harassment, racial bias, microaggressions, disrespect, and feelings of isolation.

2. Goals

G1: Each year, address problems related to climate by collecting data and implementing programs to systematically assess climate, and implement changes to policies and practices to improve climate.

G2: Enhance outreach and recruitment of students from URGs at each stage of the pipeline, from undergraduate to faculty, leading to increases in faculty participation each year.

3. Activities and Measurement

A1a (G1): **Climate survey** [ongoing; led by Rene Kizilcec]: We are systematically collecting data related to broadening participation in our community, including an anonymous PhD survey to identify key issues in climate. Faculty can participate by helping to develop new data tracking mechanisms. Implementing this survey annually will allow us to track progress on climate issues over time.

A1b (G1): **Creation of central communication resources** [ongoing; led by Phoebe Sengers]: We are creating central web- and email-based resources to transparently inform faculty, students, and staff about Broadening Participation activities, plans, and goals at the department and college level, and to direct them to campus resources available to support diversity and inclusion. Faculty can participate by contributing toward the creation of these resources (for example, providing advice for non-traditional

students). We will track the creation of these resources and the number of faculty who participate in creating them.

A1c (G1): **TA training** [ongoing; led by Kyle Harms]: We provide mandatory half-day trainings for undergraduate TAs that include diversity-related topics ranging from implicit bias and consensual relations to more constructive and inclusive forms of grading and feedback. We also plan to support graduate TA training on such topics, with the aid of resources from Cornell's Center for Teaching Innovation. Faculty can participate in the training and can offer supplementary trainings on particular topics related to inclusivity. We will keep track of the number of TAs undertaking such trainings and collect feedback on its efficacy via surveys.

A1d (G1): **Support faculty and student training to create an inclusive climate** [ongoing; led by Phoebe Sengers]: We are supporting community education on topics like inclusive pedagogy and course design, conflict resolution, intergroup dialogue, and responsive advising by leveraging Cornell's centralized training resources. We provide opportunities for resource sharing and exchange via a biweekly newsletter and Slack channel designed to support our community inclusivity; faculty can commit to contributing toward this resource by creating, sharing, and making use of the resources offered. Cornell assesses centralized training, and we will assess the amount of faculty participation in training and resource-sharing (e.g., percentage of faculty who participate in trainings and help to create resources).

A2a (G2): **Sponsor attendance at diversity-related events** [ongoing; led by college Dean for Diversity & Inclusion]: We annually organize a large group of students, faculty, and staff to attend the Tapia Conference and Grace Hopper, where we recruit graduate students and answer questions about our department. These events allow us to recruit new students and provide support for current students. Faculty can participate by attending the conferences and having recruiting conversations with students from URGs. We evaluate these events by tracking faculty participation and surveying participants.

A2b (G2): **Augmented data collection** [ongoing; led by Rene Kizilcec]: We are creating structures for regularly updated data collection on recruitment and retention of undergraduate, master's, and PhD students (broken down by gender, race/ethnicity, and first-generation status) and faculty hiring, as well as students' performance in coursework. Faculty will participate by assisting in the design, visualization, and presentation of data collection, and in using these data to reflect on mentorship and teaching practices. We will track the number of faculty engaging in these processes and using the data.

A2c (G2): **Hiring outreach through formal and informal channels** [ongoing; led by David Mimno] We are increasing outreach to potential faculty who are women and members of URGs, through formal contacts such as iAAMCS, attendance at Tapia, and the Rising Stars program, and through informal personal contacts. We are setting up a structure for faculty and graduate students to identify and reach out to potential applicants. We will evaluate these efforts by tracking the number of faculty contacts to assess whether we are broadening our network, and by assessing the proportion of women and candidates from URGs in our pool across the hiring process (applicants, interviewed, offer made, offer accepted).

A2d (G2): **Summer School for PhD students addressing issues of URG communities** [ongoing; led by Phoebe Sengers] To increase the pipeline of faculty from URGs to our own and other institutions, and to offer our own PhD students additional support, we run a biannual one-week research workshop targeted to students from rising seniors to those at the end of the PhD who are addressing issues related to URG communities, many of whom themselves come from URGs. Faculty will participate by assisting with event organization, offering support for student travel, and serving on research panels / meeting with small groups of students during the event. We will track faculty participation in the event. We have a formal assessment plan in place for the summer school to track impact on participants.