

NEWSLETTER



EXTERNAL REVIEW

An external review of the chemistry department was conducted this past fall by five esteemed faculty members from other institutions. They were given 1.5 days to meet with faculty and students, after which they submitted a report detailing their findings to the LAS Dean, Department Head, and faculty members. These are the key recommendations made by the committee.

1. Graduate student climate is the key issue facing the department.
2. Departmental governance is unclear and defining roles between the department head, advisory committee, and other departmental committees need to be created.
3. Faculty recruiting, specifically amongst the organic and analytical chemistry areas, needs to be prioritized.
4. TA budget for graduate students must increase, and less undergraduates must be used for TAing undergraduate laboratories.
5. College leadership should investigate faculty/graduate student relations.

The department submitted a formal response/action plan to the external committee this past April, including expanding the PTO policy, hosting more department town halls, surveying departmental climate, and attending a conference entitled "Transforming Challenged Units." Ongoing efforts include reorganization of departmental leadership, and other actions discussed below.

LAS CLIMATE SURVEY

The University of Illinois conducted a Climate Survey in spring 2023, with results released to the administration during late summer 2024. As in past years, these results will be publicly posted this fall. Compared to the rest of LAS, the Chemistry department performed below average in DEI, civility, and student happiness. Another climate survey will be given next year, and we urge people to respond due to a low 40% response rate in 2023.

FACULTY HIRINGS

This upcoming fall, we will have 62 new graduate students in the department in addition to 3 new faculty hires.

Dr. Mayuko Isomura

Dr. Xiaotang Lu

Dr. Joomyung Vicky Jun

GET INVOLVED

SWC -- meets first Friday of month, 4 pm
in CLSL-C 605, email lukepw2@illinois.edu

DCGSAC --meets first Thurs of month, 11 am
in Noyes 356, email dloving@illinois.edu

TOWN HALL SUMMARY

The May 2024 town hall was filled with discussions about changes to the department. Tepora Su'a left the university this summer, so we are currently hiring a new director of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). Prof. Cathy Murphy will be returning as Department Chair in August. Additionally, the department is taking these steps outlined below to improve culture.

First, reiterate that graduate students are firstly members of the department and university, and therefore such institutional policies (PTO, leave, retaliation) supersede any group guidelines. Please contact department head or DGS about any violations.

Second, make it mandatory that each research group to have a manual/expectations document starting this August, with brand-new faculty being given 6 months to write one. Additionally, these lab expectation documents will be published on the chemistry department website where they will be accessible on Box to anyone with a NetID.

Third, The active department head, Prof. John Sweedler, and additional student representatives will meet with each research group to discuss lab culture and if the department's policies are being followed. These meetings will be conducted this fall.