

“Environmental Justice for Sustainability”

Environmental Justice Working Group (EJWG) Coordinating Council briefing memo 11/14/20

1. Key Questions for SoSaC (School of Sustainability and Climate) Leadership Discussion and Feedback:

- What could be a strong and inclusive **institutional home** for advancing environmental justice teaching and research look like in the new School? What kinds of institutional frameworks would benefit the school & work?
- How can we **align the EJWG mission with SE3’s and Stanford’s goals** to hire more diverse faculty?
- How can the EJ Working Group **be an effective resource** to SoSaC leadership and committees in planning?
- Can we receive additional information on **timelines and next steps in the process**? What are the opportunities for students to engage with SoSaC leadership and relevant committees as we are noting the following from the town hall: “The BAC plans to present concrete options, with commentary, in December.”
- TBD: We are currently discussing **outstanding questions around the number of faculty, staff, structure, and funding support that we need to succeed**, and look forward to discussing this further with leadership.

2. What We Offer SOSAC:

Solving the sustainability challenges of the 21st century requires solutions that are grounded in equity, collaboration, and positive impacts for all people and societies -- including Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) communities. We can achieve this goal by aligning sustainability research and programs at SoSaC with established principles for [environmental justice](#), [universal human rights](#), and [UN sustainable development goals](#), and also by growing our commitment to EJ scholarship alongside current efforts to diversify Stanford’s faculty.

As described in detail below, most peer institutions already have programs and commitments to EJ. These include Duke University’s [Environmental Justice Lab](#). Yale University’s School of the Environment provides a [Master’s of Environmental Management](#) that includes the specialization: [People, equity and the environment](#). The University of Michigan has a [Masters of Science in Environmental Justice](#) and [Graduate Certificate Program in Environmental Justice](#). UC Santa Cruz offers a concentration in [Global Environmental Justice](#) and houses the [Science and Justice Research Center](#). And UC Santa Barbara runs the [Global Environmental Justice Project](#).

By applying EJ frameworks, methodologies and [scholarship](#), EJ Working Group members can contribute meaningful and complementary approaches to Climate and Sustainability work at Stanford that include:

Complementary contributions from EJ...	Real world example...
Cutting-edge sustainability research that examines the deep links between histories of racialized violence and oppression and environmental degradation	e.g., Hurricane Katrina as an example of how institutionalized racism intersects with climate change impacts.
Teaching and research that engage directly with BIPOC communities and other underrepresented groups, who are not typically included in research, teaching, planning and decision-making	e.g., co-designed research <i>with</i> as opposed to research <i>on/for</i> communities, through meaningful consultation and early engagement.
Adding a strong social justice component into existing DEI hiring and research goals	e.g., hiring a climate scientist coming from a BIPOC community, who also engages with issues of structural racism and community-engaged methodologies in their research approach.

<p>Building capacity to respond to EJ and sustainability problems in ways that emphasize community agency and intersecting movements</p>	<p>e.g., moving beyond categories of “vulnerable victims” suffering from climate disaster, to examining community leadership in climate adaptation actions.</p>
<p>Creating meaningful impacts improving human and ecological well-being in our local community and region by conducting research, education and outreach with EJ impacted communities surrounding the Stanford University campus and in our region -- building reciprocal relationships with community partners to ensure the work being done answers their most pressing problems</p>	<p>e.g., centering the leadership and concerns of farmworker communities just to the south of Stanford, partnering with schools from neighboring underserved communities like East Palo Alto, etc. in our community collaboration, research and teaching.</p>
<p>Applying an EJ lens to sustainability research across a wide range of disciplinary areas to address structural inequities embedded within environmental and sustainability problems</p>	<p>e.g. attending to health disparities that are linked to disproportionate exposures to environmental and social stressors occurring across racial and class lines through epidemiology and public health research, and also through research in critical geography and urban studies.</p>
<p>Contributing to scaffolds for a new interdisciplinary research department linking local and global EJ issues</p>	<p>e.g. attending to global issues like disparate community health impacts of international mining, local issues such as disparate impacts on Central Valley communities, and transnational flows e.g. nuclear waste, GHG emissions connecting local and global across developed and developing nations.</p>
<p>Linking our current strengths in interdisciplinary environmental research that draws on both biophysical science and social sciences, and is rooted in strong community engagement</p>	<p>e.g. linking critical scholarship in history/anthropology with Dr. Gabrielle Hecht, to environmental monitoring and analysis in climate science with Dr. Rob Jackson, to knowledge co-creation with Indigenous and local communities with Dr. Rodolfo Dirzo.</p>
<p>Building EJ knowledge production capacity for social impact through data by partnering with relevant libraries, data centers, and archives on campus and beyond</p>	<p>e.g. by linking data and analysis resources at the Stanford Geospatial Center, Center for Population Health Sciences, Stanford main library resources for learning and outreach and also in Sociology, Psychology, & Qualitative Data, and/or community-driven archives being created through EJ partnerships between Stanford researchers and the local community.</p>

In building an impactful school, we can more effectively understand and respond to social-environmental problems through [cross-cutting EJ scholarship](#) engaging with a wide range of intersecting disciplines and fields, including:

Social-environmental sustainability problems of...	Considered through scholarship and research on...
environmental health inequities	medicine, public health, epidemiology
knowledge co-creation & democratizing science	philosophy of science, science & technology studies, ethnic studies, urban studies, Indigenous studies, political ecology, racial and ethnic studies, anthropology, education
just transitions in economies that affect food, energy, and climate systems	geography, urban studies, food studies, engineering, political ecology, political economy
environmental racism, structural inequities, and social movements	history, philosophy of science, law, education, sociology, geography, urban studies, Indigenous studies, humanities, human rights, global studies, political ecology, racial and ethnic studies
toxic siting decisions that disproportionately affect communities of color at local and transnational scales	geography, geosciences, urban studies, history, chemistry, biology, restoration ecology, global studies, public policy
theories and history of justice and governance underpinning structural racism and social justice movements	law, history, philosophy, racial and ethnic studies, geography, political economy, sociology, education, organizational management

3. What has the Stanford EJ community and EJWG accomplished to date (2012 - present) in research, teaching, and community engagement from: <https://www.ejstanford.com/> (some examples below).

Teaching:

- Teaching the Intro to EJ course (3 yrs to date), as the first comprehensive EJ course at Stanford and obtaining additional funding from Haas and PWR to support this effort.
- Pivoting with COVID to teach an online version of our Intro to EJ frontline community lectures, which has attracted 100-120 participants each week, and our annual EJ symposium with 232 participants.
- Creating multiple new EJ courses (Shades of Green, Liberation through Land, Climate Justice).
- Collaborating on the creation of a new Environmental Justice minor for undergraduates (in process)

Research:

- Establishing the Environmental Justice and Human Rights Lab, led by Dr. Emily Polk and Dr. Sibyl Diver (operating for 3 quarters thus far), advising undergraduate and graduate students on EJ research and building a strong EJ research community at Stanford.
- Collaborating with humanities colleagues, impacted communities, and Haas on EJ research on toxic exposures and community response in SF's Bayview neighborhoods with Dr. Gabrielle Hecht & local NGOs.
- Training faculty and students on EJ research methodologies through focused workshops and presentations in classes and at the faculty club.

Community:

- Formalizing the Environmental Justice Working Group Coordinating Council with co-leadership from faculty, staff, and students to coordinate across campus on multiple EJ initiatives (20 different organizational affiliations).
- Supporting and amplifying BIPOC student-led EJ events, partnerships, & educational initiatives.
- Creating and operating the EJ listserv, ejstanford.com website, and social media to facilitate information exchange among hundreds of individuals.
- Building an EJ Network with like-minded colleagues across 8+ Bay Area academic institutions.

Serving a broad community over 300+ members, the **EJWG Coordinating Council brings together about 20 different organizational affiliations to our leadership team with faculty, staff, and student coleads:** Rob Jackson (ESS), Rodolfo Dirzo (Bio), Emily Polk (PWR), Sibyl Diver (EarthSys), Ayode Balogun (ASSU), Chris Tan (SSS).

- Earth Systems Program
- The Woods Institute for the Environment
- Program in Writing and Rhetoric
- The Haas Center for Public Service
- Department of Earth System Science
- Stanford Educational Farm
- Jasper Ridge Biological Reserve, Environmental Education
- Department of Biology
- Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, Stanford Earth
- Emmett Interdisciplinary Program on Environment and Resources
- Students for a Sustainable Stanford
- Students for Environmental and Racial Justice
- Stanford Food Recovery
- Stanford Climate and Health, Stanford Medical and Pre-medical Student Association
- ASSU, Environmental Justice and Sustainability Committee
- Stanford Hui o Nā Moku, The Pacific Islander Coalition of Stanford University
- Stanford Environmental Law Society

4. How is environmental justice included in degree programs and research at peer institutions? We see an opportunity to offer an EJ Program/Center/Hub at the new Climate and Sustainability School similar to that of our peer institutions:

UC Berkeley's Department of [Environmental Science, Policy and Management](#) includes a [Division of Society and Environment](#) offering a [PhD](#) program, and an [Undergrad program, Society and Environment](#) with a "Justice and Sustainability" focus.

The University of Michigan's [School for Environment and Sustainability](#), has a [deep history in EJ scholarship](#). Michigan provides a [Masters of Science in Environmental Justice](#), as well as the [Graduate Certificate Program in Environmental Justice](#), and undergraduate training through the [Doris Duke Conservation Scholars Program](#).

Brown University's [Institute at Brown for Environment and Society](#) conducts [EJ relevant research](#) in climate science, environmental health, and institutions and human behavior. Their undergraduate program Environmental Studies and Environmental Science, includes an ["Environment & Inequality" Track](#).

Yale University's School of the Environment provides a [Master's of Environmental Management](#), which includes a Learning community/specialization: [People, equity and the environment](#).

Duke University's Nicholas Institute for Environmental Policy Solutions has a [State Policy Program](#) that addresses Environmental Inequality through the [Environmental Justice Lab](#).

UC Santa Barbara has an [Environmental Studies Program](#) with an [Ecology and Society Cluster](#), and also houses the [Global Environmental Justice Project](#)

The University of Washington's School of Public Health includes a [Department of Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences](#), which includes research on Sustainable Communities and [Environmental Justice](#).

UC Santa Cruz's [Environmental Studies Program](#) offers a concentration in [Global Environmental Justice](#), houses the [Science and Justice Research Center](#), and partners with the [Doris Duke Conservation Scholars](#) program.

UC San Diego and [Scripps Institution of Oceanography](#) include a Climate, Ocean and Atmosphere program that supports focus on [environmental justice](#) at the master's or PhD level.

San Jose State has an [Department of Environmental Studies](#) that is offering an [EJ Minor](#).

5. How does environmental justice align with best practices and innovation in sustainability education today? Our EJ work is in alignment with the new National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine report on strengthening sustainability education and can offer the new Climate and Sustainability school a way to achieve the priorities listed below.

A new [National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine report on strengthening sustainability education](#)* states: "Societies that **prioritize and intentionally connect healthy natural environments and social justice** are likely to sustain their institutions, people, and ecosystems in the face of large changes that challenge their status quo." (p. iv)

For this reason, "sustainability students and graduates need a common baseline understanding of content areas that include the history of sustainability, **ethics and social justice**, data analytics, business administration, sustainability science, **diversity and justice, and Indigenous knowledge** and culture." (p. 6)

"Sustainability education programs should prioritize attracting and supporting students with varied backgrounds and lived experiences, supporting them for success in a variety of sustainability careers. This also requires **attracting and retaining faculty from diverse backgrounds** in sustainability education programs, with additional **attention to equity, inclusion, and local and Indigenous knowledge** in the content of the curriculum and the institutional setting." (p. 10)

"The employment figures above, combined with the changing demographics of the United States, have led to the **need to strengthen diversity, equity, and inclusion in sustainability education and employment**. The current faculty and student populations in most interdisciplinary environmental, sustainability, and energy programs do not reflect the demographic changes underway in the country, nor do the staff and boards of employing organizations." (p. 33-34)

"Bridging disciplinary silos" can occur through involving programs and undergraduate students in collaborative research where "helicopter" research is avoided, and where students encounter "sustainability research as more than knowledge generation: it should be problem based and solutions oriented, **effectively engage stakeholders in authentic and supportive ways**, and be undertaken with an **explicit attention to diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice**." (p. 128)

"Key to promoting workforce diversity in sustainability careers is the **integration of inclusiveness and equity in student educational experiences**. To support sustainability actions across different communities and regions,

identify and address global scientific or equity issues, and collaborate effectively with communities of all types requires a diverse workforce and network of professionals. Additionally, **reducing inequality is embedded** in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.” (p. 130)

“Sustainability is a normative science, meaning it explores not just possible futures but desirable futures (van der Hel, 2018). With a commitment to well-being across generations (Matson et al., 2016), sustainability **must tackle issues of fairness, difference, inclusion, and justice embedded in notions of well-being**. The normative or values-thinking sustainability competency urges students to think what the present and future should be, to negotiate different and potentially competing values systems, and to search for **solutions that are inclusive, just, and fair** (Wiek et al., 2011). . . .For students wishing to transform organizations, it is important they understand how **values-thinking, including around diversity, equity, and inclusion, are important motivators** of behavior and change (Frisk and Larson, 2011).” (p. 139)

Sustainability educators are urged “to incorporate relevant history into the curriculum. . . . students graduating with sustainability degrees should have an **understanding of the role that processes such as colonialism, conquest, land ownership and appropriation, segregation, and racism play in contemporary sustainability challenges**. It is critical for sustainability students to understand the **legal and public policy systems that underlie inequities**.” (p. 139)

*National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2020. Strengthening Sustainability Programs and Curricula at the Undergraduate and Graduate Levels. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/25821>.

6. What does Stanford need to effectively grow our environmental justice work in the new school?

For our EJ work to thrive and grow:

- We need a **strong institutional “home” with sufficient resources** to support research, teaching, and administrative needs for a growing EJ community, and the ability to support off-campus research partners.
- We need **EJ faculty**, including faculty coming from the social sciences and humanities & senior hires, **whose research and broader intellectual contributions will be valued in their home department**.
- We need **EJ staff**, providing a **cross-campus coordinating role to link EJ initiatives across schools, departments and centers**, providing expertise to support faculty in community engaged research and teaching, and sustaining community relationships over time.
- We need a **gathering space for building community** where students, staff, and faculty from different backgrounds can find each other through EJ and connect outside of disciplinary silos.
- We need a **meaningful consultation with students, staff, and BIPOC communities in the planning process** at the ground level, and meaningful EJ/BIPOC student engagement on racial justice issues in **school governance and operations**.

If we can build a resilient and thriving home for EJ at Stanford, we can contribute:

- A strong and authentic **link to the humanities & social sciences** through EJ research and teaching.
- Support for **achieving DEI and IDEAL goals**, especially in building an inclusive community and improving school climate.
- A **complementary, team-based approach** facilitating inter-generational EJ initiatives across campus and synergistic collaborations with other universities.
- **Curriculum development** that attends to unmet student demands for EJ teaching.
- **Deep disciplinary knowledge/expertise and excellence** in EJ research, climate justice, community-based research, and knowledge co-creation, as part of a highly limited group of people on campus who **engage with scholarly work on EJ and related fields** (leadership brings combined 40 years of experience).

- **Established experience and expertise** in EJ curriculum development that will attract students & **ability to engage with the Farm and Jasper Ridge**, as unique spaces for education and community building.
- **Relevance & timelines** in supporting research and teaching on social justice issues to provide **an inclusive entry point** inviting a diverse set of students, staff, and faculty to engage with the new school.
- **Advising** on EJ research and teaching for a wide range of students at all levels.
- **Improved retention through community building on campus** by supporting diverse sets of EJ students & faculty, and **off campus by engaging with frontline EJ communities** through the resource and community that we cultivate as an EJ community.