

Equity & Inclusivity Efforts of the Department of Astronomy at The University of Texas at Austin

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Members of Department of Astronomy at The University of Texas at Austin are leading multiple efforts to engage and enhance participation of women and underrepresented groups in STEM. In this work, we highlight the different events, activities, and discussion groups that department members have organized and led to effectively mitigate the barriers some face as they embark on their STEM journey. We will discuss the founding, structure, and content of our Equity & Inclusion Group, newly founded in the past academic year. Additionally, we will present an over view of the department's Association for Women in Astronomy

Research and Education (AWARE) participation in "Girl Day at UT," an annual STEM festival that brings thousands of elementary and middle school students to campus for hands-on activities and demonstrations. Finally, we will outline the departmental support from graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, and research scientists for the Texas Astronomy Undergraduate Research experience for Under-represented Students (TAURUS) program, a 9-week summer research experience held at UT Austin.

Equity & Inclusion Group

The Equity & Inclusion (E & I) group was founded in 2016 by graduate student Raquel Martinez, postdoc Brandon Bozek, and assistant professor Caitlin Casey to address the systemic societal and professional marginalization of underrepresented groups in our community. Our aim is to support the professional growth, esteem, health, resilience, and recognition of our colleagues from underrepresented backgrounds. Membership in the group cuts across all professional levels in the department: graduate students, postdoctoral researchers, research scientists, and faculty. Members must opt-in to the group and agree to a set of ground rules that ensures the safety, participation, support, visibility and success of members from underrepresented groups.

The E & I group fosters a safe space for members to call meetings to openly discuss topics and issues relevant to social justice. We have discussed a range of topics including the Women's March, the Black Lives Matter

movement, responses to the 2016 election, and more. The E & I group also coordinated with the Gender and Sexuality Center (GSC) at UT to host a two-part Allyship Workshop within the Astronomy department. Following the workshops participants were invited to join the Allies in Action program that serves the goals of promoting allyship and advocating for the affirmation of the LGBTQA+ people and community.



TAURUS

The Texas Astronomy Undergraduate Research experience for Under-represented Students (TAURUS) was founded by Caitlin Casey in 2015. The goal of TAURUS is to prepare highly-motivated students from traditionally marginalized backgrounds for graduate school in astronomy and STEM careers by providing valuable research experience over a 9-week summer program. TAURUS successfully completed its inaugural year thanks to the generous support of over 40 members of the astronomy community in Austin.

Many of the research mentors were postdocs who contributed their own funding to support a TAURUS scholar and graduate student Sinclair Manning organized their bi-weekly seminar series. The seminars included science talks, skill building exercises, graduate school preparation, and future career discussions. This year the



graduate students (left) are expanding upon the previous series by adding an imposter syndrome panel, a Python workshop, and one-on-one graduate student mentoring for the duration of the program.

Girl Day



AWARE was founded in the Fall of 2014 by Prof. Shardha Jogee. One of the group's major goals is to support the broader participation of women and other under-represented groups in STEM. This has been done through organized luncheons, invited speakers, and seminars. For the past two years, AWARE has funded the Department of Astronomy's participation in "Girl Day at UT Austin," a campus-wide outreach event put on by the Women in Engineering Program.

Every year during Engineers Week, over 8,000 elementary and middle school-aged children descend onto campus to engage in the STEM disciplines. Many departments across the Cockrell School of Engineering and College of Natural Sciences lead hands-on activities and demonstrations. Graduate student Raquel Martinez has organized each year's efforts, coordinating over 20 graduate students, post-docs, and research scientists to prepare and lead astronomy outreach activities. Last year's ambitious booth included solar viewing, bracelet making with UV color-changing beads, star chart crafts, spectroscope construction, and mini-pulsar making. About 500 children visit the AWARE Girl Day booth during the four hour event.

