

march-april 2024

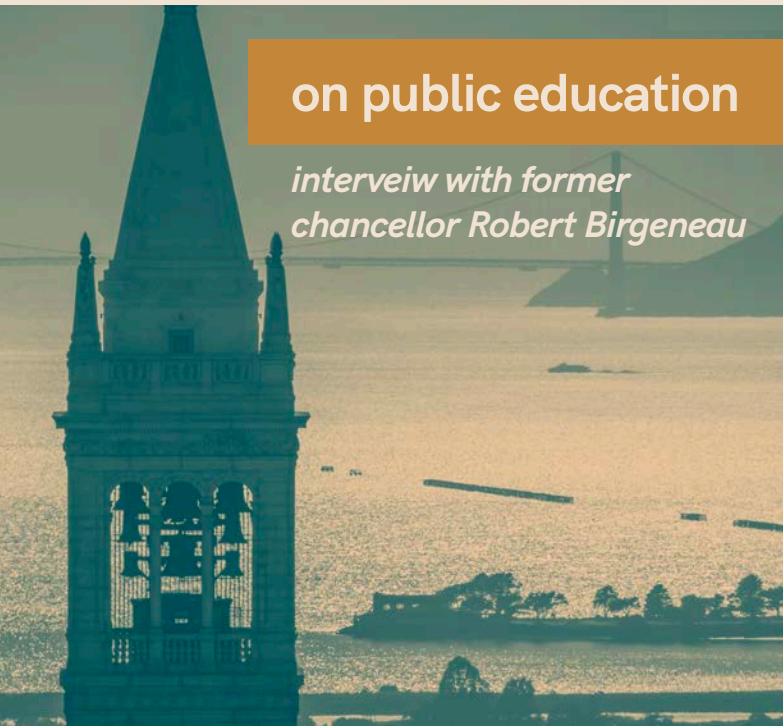
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interview with former
chancellor Robert Birgeneau



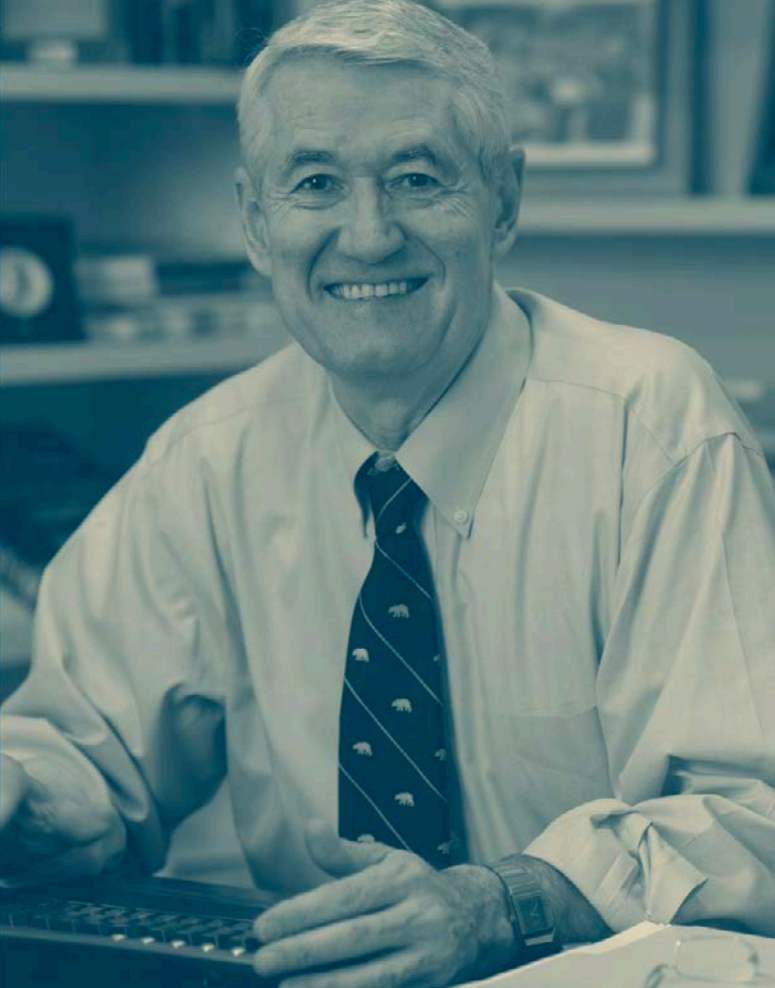
by Gregory Arena
Graduate Student, IB

After a long academic career, Dr. Robert Birgeneau still instructs 100's of undergraduates, each fall, through the introductory physics course, 7A. And, he continues to mentor postdocs while busy with his research into phases and phase transition behavior of novel states of matter. But for long standing members of the campus community, the name Birgeneau is more sooner associated with a very different job. For nearly a decade, between 2004 and 2013, Dr. Birgeneau helmed the

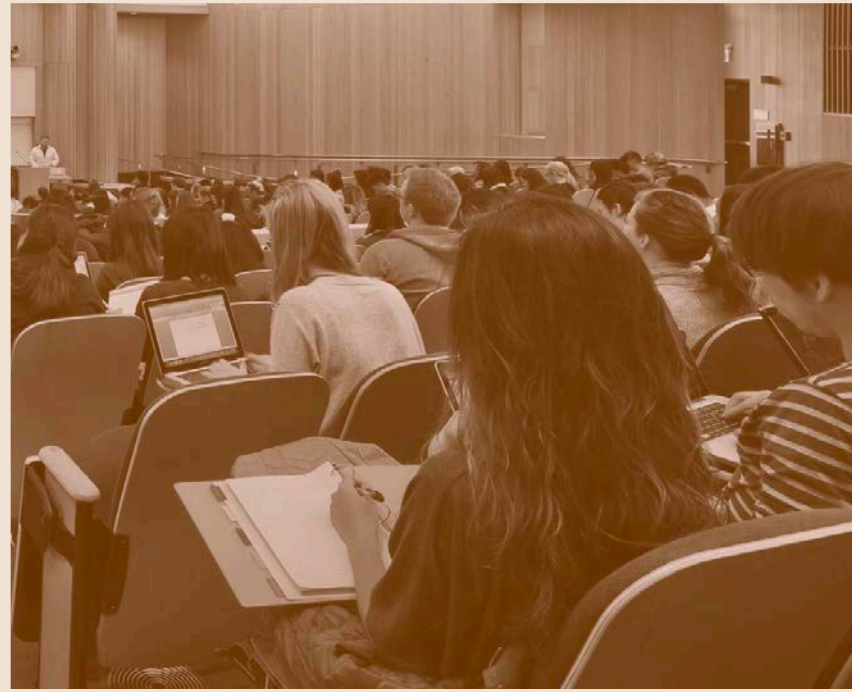
flagship campus of the University of California. As Berkeley's 9th Chancellor, Dr. Birgeneau guided the university through the difficulties of the 2008 financial crisis while expanding access to financial aid for middle class and undocumented students. An internationally renowned physicist and fellow of the U.S. National Academy of Science and the Royal Society of London with a long career in higher education, he is a recipient of the Carnegie Corporation Academic Leadership Award as a Champion of Excellence and Equity in Education. With the retirement of current Chancellor Carol Christ in June, we wanted to discuss with Dr. Birgeneau his perspective on the myriad objectives and considerations that must be balanced in ensuring the future and public spirit of one of California's foremost universities.

You grew-up in what you have described as an ultra-low income Toronto household, where none in your extended family had completed high school. Your way out of poverty came in the form of a priest, who covered your tuition costs, allowing you to attend and graduate parochial high school. How did these experiences shape your values and policy goals as an educator and later as Chancellor?

Not surprisingly, my values and goals were fundamentally affected by the environment in which



left: Dr. Robert Birgeneau was UC Berkeley chancellor, 2004-2013. Each fall, he teaches Physics 7A.



I grew up. My mother, who was the one who raised me, came from a working class Irish background. My father was mixed racial, part French Canadian and part First Nations. In Canada, such people belong to a separate indigenous group called the Metis Nation. This means that I am Metis as well although I was raised in the Canadian Irish culture. As you commented, before me, because of a combination of poverty and culture, no one in my extended family had ever finished high school. We were all expected to quit school as soon after reaching the age of 15 1/2 as possible. Indeed my older brother and sister, who were every bit as talented as me, if not more so, had begun working by age 16. I was on track to do the same.

It happened that I was an altar boy at the local church, St. Helen's, an inner city parish in downtown Toronto. The parish priest, Monsignor O'Connor, who had been helping my older sister through a difficult period, came to my mother and said that the same must not happen to me. Specifically, he said that I should go to an elite

Catholic boys high school, St. Michael's College School, and the church would pay my tuition. This turned out to be enough to move me from one track to another. I might point out that I was literally the only student from my grade school to complete high school. This is what poverty does to people. I am forever indebted to the Monsignor. I have often said that getting a Ph.D. from Yale was much easier for me than completing high school.

Of course, my values and goals as an educator have been fundamentally affected by my upbringing. I understand first hand that talent is not determined by wealth and privilege, it is broadly distributed across the population. Our challenge as educators is to assure that we provide opportunity to the entire population, not just a certain sector of it. It is in our own interest, not just that of society as a whole, that we do this.

One side observation that I might make is that in my own case, once I had made the transition to a completely new life, I realized that as a research scientist I was now advantaged rather than disadvantaged. Specifically, I was confident that I could overcome any barrier put in front of me. I also had the ability to think about research

problems in an unconstrained, original way, more so that many of my colleagues from more conventional backgrounds.

I have worked hard on accessibility issues throughout my academic career. At MIT I was in charge of a program for African American Physics Ph.D. students. Our most significant success was in 1989 when we literally graduated one-half of the Black Physics Ph.D.s in the United States. I wish that we could reproduce that success here at Berkeley.

During my time as Chancellor we worked hard to make UC Berkeley as accessible as possible. Our most significant success was with undocumented students. Very early on, I was fortunate to meet a number of our undocumented students; they were facing challenges in their lives that were unimaginable and they were overcoming them. I was in awe of them. I vowed to do whatever I could to help these extraordinary young people, specifically to make a Berkeley education accessible for as many of them as possible. With the help of LA state assemblyperson Gil Cedillo, some extraordinary donors like the Haas family, and Gov. Jerry Brown himself we managed to make Berkeley the first major university in the United States to offer comprehensive financial aid

to undocumented undergraduate students. This spread rapidly throughout California and then on to many other states. Separate from this, we also developed the first financial aid program for middle class students in a California public university. Assemblyman John Perez quickly introduced a statewide middle class financial aid program which mimicked ours and this program exists to this day.

In DEI Newsletter's January 2023 interview with Dr. Khalid Kadir, Dr. Kadir correlated a growth in both administrative payroll and spending on non-academic services in the University of California system with a shift toward university leadership that does not have a background in academia and therefore does not prioritize education. Both you and Chancellor Carol Christ have enjoyed long careers as scholars and educators outside of your roles as Berkeley's top administrator. Do you feel like the growing focus on non-academic expenses are well justified? Are these expenses a reaction to a changing paradigm in what services students expect as part of their university experience?

Let me say right up front that I believe very strongly that research universities, both public and private, should be led by people who excel



Hearst Memorial Mining Building

in what we do, namely teach and do research. Of course, university leaders must balance budgets etc. but first and foremost they must ensure that the university is made up of outstanding faculty deeply committed to research, teaching and service. These faculty will attract equally talented students and staff. This model has proven itself over and over again. Of course, large universities like Berkeley have enormous budgets, about \$3 billion annually for us, extraordinarily complicated infrastructure which is always in need of repair or replacement, IT systems which sometimes seem infinitely complicated, etc. etc.. Managing an enterprise of this scale requires a broad range of expertise. The President/Chancellor could not possibly possess all of this expertise themselves. Rather, it is their responsibility to put together a leadership team that does. I certainly know that I was privileged to have an outstanding group of people around me while I was Chancellor and I believe that this group of people served our university well.

Invariably, there are continuous pressures to increase the size of the administrative staff. Some of this pressure comes from state and federal governments who are unrelentingly increasing reporting requirements for any public monies spent in universities. I do believe that students also are expecting improved services compared with what students received in the past. During my time as Chancellor we worked very hard to reduce administrative expenses. Interestingly, there was often strong resistance to such changes from faculty who had grown to be dependent on local administrative support. The stereotypical view was that all of the administrative waste was in the center. That simply proved not to be true. It is not just administrative support. Experimentalists like me need well outfitted machine shops and electronics shops; we need plumbers, electricians etc. etc.. All of this cost money which therefore is not deployed directly in the classroom. This tension between administrative and academic payrolls is likely to go on forever. We must monitor the balance carefully but, in the end, we need both.

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"I understand first hand that talent is not determined by wealth and privilege, it is broadly distributed across the population. Our challenge as educators is to assure that we provide opportunity to the entire population, not just a certain sector of it. It is in our own interest, not just that of society as a whole, that we do this."



In 2010, you opined that it is “a matter of social justice that students from affluent families should pay fees because a policy of zero fees represents a transfer of income from the poor to the rich.” For Pell-grant eligible students, tuition costs can be entirely offset through the Blue and Gold Plan. But amenities included in university room and board and insurance are not covered through this financial aid. These costs now exceed 60% of total household incomes less than \$70,000. Nationally, middle-class and affluent high school seniors increasingly factor the experiential/extracurricular amenities offered by university into their college decision. Are you concerned that in the US this trend may lead to the subsidy of affluent lifestyles at the expense of the underprivileged?

My statement that free tuition represents a transfer of income from the poor to the rich, besides being self-evident, has been well documented by economists who are experts on such things. You are, however, correct that the total cost of an undergraduate education goes far beyond the bare tuition. Here in the Bay area, the cost of housing typically dominates over everything else. There are, as well, university fees which can be quite considerable. That is especially true at public universities.

These extra costs are why we have 1/3 set aside of increases in tuition to be deployed as financial aid for low income students. Revenues from this 1/3 set aside are an increasingly important component of our financial aid packages. At the minimum, they compensate for inflationary increases in the student expenses beyond tuition. Student protesters often argued against tuition increases on the basis that they would have a disproportionately negative effect on accessibility for low income students. However, here in the UC system because of the Blue and Gold Plan which covers tuition in its entirety, increases in tuition actually help low income students because of the concomitant increase in the size of the 1/3 set aside. This is counterintuitive but true. I wish that both our student protesters and legislators in Sacramento could grasp this simple fact.

While I was Chancellor I chaired a committee looking at the UC-wide financial aid system which, by the way, is arguably the best in the nation. We advocated for a progressive increase in the tuition set aside from 33% to at least 40%. Unfortunately, this recommendation was not adopted by the Regents. You are correct that without the 1/3 set aside our low income students would be severely handicapped especially in an

era of high inflation. This may well be the situation in other states. Fortunately we have a more enlightened financial aid system here in California.

The recent closure of campus libraries and a growing student to instructor ratio are often pitted against well-funded athletics programs, and capital investments. Do you see academic and non-academic investments in competition or synergistic in the goal of providing Californians with quality education?

It is now more than 10 years since I was Chancellor and I have not kept up with all of the fine details of the budget. If I remember correctly, in 2013 the academic part of the budget was about \$1B. It could be as much as 50% more now. This budget is spent on countless things. An increase in expenditure in one area rarely transfers directly to a decrease in some other specific area. All of us in the trenches have been disappointed by the reduced support of the campus libraries. My own department's library is one that was closed. However, it is very unlikely that reducing the central support of the Intercollegiate Athletics (IA) budget would have saved our library.

I would like to clear up one myth about the IA budget. When I was Chancellor, the central support of IA was between \$7M and \$10M per year, about the same as that at MIT and much less than that, for example, at Princeton where it was \$24M. If you included philanthropy for our academic programs which came from alumni supporters whose strongest ties to the university were through IA then we ended up making a net profit, contrary to popular mythology. I cannot say anything about the current IA situation which has been seriously damaged by the combination of Covid and the collapse of the PAC-12.

In June, the US supreme court ended race conscious admissions at universities. Six years before you began your Chancellorship, proposition 209's ban on affirmative action officially took effect in California schools. As Chancellor, you radically expanded access to Berkeley for in-state students of varying economic backgrounds, as well as undocumented students. In 2022, the UC system spent roughly \$.5 billion on recruitment of minority groups to boost representation of black, indigenous, and latino scholars. Yet these demographics have never fully recovered at campuses like Berkeley. How hopeful are you that nationally, equal opportunity in higher

Dr. Birgeneau speaking in support of striking AFSCME in 2005.





"The supreme court did leave the door open by allowing universities to take into account the reality of the lives that people live in judging applications for college. But this cannot be just about family income."

education will persist in the absence of affirmative action, considering the challenges California state schools have faced over the last 25 years? What lessons can UC Berkeley offer universities when it comes to the recruitment and enrollment of minority students, post affirmative action?

When I first arrived at Berkeley in the fall of 2004 I learned that in the freshman class in Engineering out of 800 new students there was not a single Black person. I found this absolutely shocking. I have always been a strong believer in affirmative action. Indeed, as I discussed earlier, my own entire career was made possible by an affirmative intervention in my life by Monsignor O'Connor necessitated by both the financial and cultural (that is racial) disadvantages that my family faced. Upon learning about our challenges here at Berkeley, I published an Op-Ed in the LA Times trying to explain why aggressive affirmative action programs in universities are necessary for the future of California. I also worked

with leaders from the Black Student Union, Raza and progressive Asian students to get affirmative action back on the ballot. The sad reality is that these efforts by ourselves and others did not achieve their desired end. The fact seems to be that at this time in history the majority of Californians do not support race or gender based affirmative action programs. This is the reality that we must deal with if we want a just society.

This was confirmed at the national level recently when, as you note, SCOTUS ended race-based admissions at U.S. universities. However, in my view, all is not lost. The supreme court did leave the door open by allowing universities to take into account the reality of the lives that people live in judging applications for college. But this cannot be just about family income. We have already learned this here at Berkeley, as you note in your question. We must be able to take into account all of the challenges that young people face in their youths and this, by definition, must include their race and/or their gender. I believe that SCOTUS has left this door open.

Of course, we have more control over the make-up of our faculty and staff. Here, there is no shortage of candidates who could enrich our university and make our faculty and staff more representative of the society that we serve. It primarily requires that individual search committees make this a high priority in the search process. There is significant room for progress here. In my view, a more representative faculty and staff would make Berkeley more attractive to a diverse student body.

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In your time as chancellor you were a vocal opponent of California's Proposition 8 (which would have banned same-sex marriage), you lobbied congress to pass the DREAM Act, and have been open about your poitics. What is the responsibility of the campus communities and administrations at public institutions to advocate for public policies that can improve access to higher education?

Clearly, my view here is that as a public institution we are obligated to serve the entire population of the state, not just one segment of it. This means that inevitably one must advocate for public policies that can improve access to higher education. However, as we have been discussing, this inevitably becomes political when the variables include race, citizenship and sexual preference. In fairness, one must recognize that decent people can have very different views on these matters. As you note, during my time as Chancellor, I was not shy in expressing my views on these often highly charged issues. In general, as a university leader, one must be careful to make clear when one is speaking on behalf of the university and when one is expressing a personal viewpoint. I am not sure that I always did that as well as I might have.

No matter what, I believe strongly that our society is badly in need of moral leadership and university presidents and chancellors are one set of people who can provide that leadership. In choosing our leaders, we must make sure that they have well developed moral compasses. Otherwise, they will be lost every time they face a complicated moral issue. Chancellor Christ has excelled in that regard.

reflection questions:

1. Dr. Birgeneau describes the importance of institutional policies and practices in shaping opportunities for our students. What policies at Berkeley have had the biggest impact in your work/learning experience?
2. What role do you think academics, including scientists, should play in shaping public opinion?
3. What role do you think academics, including scientists, should play in advocating for policies that can improve workplace and learning at Berkeley?





the evolution of iBio from iMCB

by Héctor L. Torres Vera
Graduate Student, MCB

I joined MCB in 2020 amidst the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Masked, excited, and scared, I traveled from humidity and heat-laden Puerto Rico to the foggy, orange-skied Berkeley (wild fire times) back then. The decision to join Berkeley came easily to me—the scientific pursuits of the faculty were outstanding, and the graduate student community was warm and welcoming. However, the true standout for me was the determination in the community to develop initiatives to make Berkeley a better place for all.

One initiative that made its mark was inclusive Molecular and Cell Biology (iMCB), a graduate student-led group focused on promoting diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB).

Today, iMCB has shapeshifted, joining forces with the Integrative Biology department to form a larger initiative: inclusive Biology (iBio).

This retrospective will look at iMCB's history, its continued journey, and its ongoing mission as iBio to introduce evidence-based strategies for improving diversity, equity, and a sense of belonging on campus. We will also hear from key figures about their experiences and thoughts on the initiative.

left: Li Ka Shing Center
right: Valley Life Science Building

a drop makes waves

The iMCB initiative was founded in 2017 by Dr. **Lisa Eshun-Wilson**, an alumna of MCB's PhD program who was advised by Professor Eva Nogales and is currently a National Science Foundation Postdoctoral Fellow in the lab of Dr. **Gabriel Lander** at The Scripps Research Institute in La Jolla, CA. Eshun-Wilson launched iMCB to enhance every student's sense of belonging. She believed that implementing evidence-based, sustainable strategies to improve campus diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts could transform the institutional culture and alleviate the diversity tax on marginalized students." DEI work is not just for people of marginalized backgrounds," she emphasized, "it's really for everyone. It needs to be central to any program because it reflects leadership. How you treat your most vulnerable groups reflects your values."

The beginnings of iMCB were inspired by Eshun-Wilson's studies in science and policy and first-hand experiences in initiatives in her community in Los Angeles, such as the Big Brothers Big Sisters Program and the Fulfillment Fund. "I could stitch together all the best aspects of

these programs to develop this new program at Berkeley,” she explains. Initially, she drafted a curriculum for the first-ever iMCB conference in 2018, inspired by conversations with Professors Claude Steel of Stanford University and Rudolfo Mendoza-Denton, a leader in the Psychology Department at UC Berkeley.

After the first iMCB conference, the event was institutionalized and adopted into the New Graduate Student Orientation Week. Carina Galicia, Assistant Director of Student Services, and Hannah Bloom, MCB Graduate Student Advisor became a recurring and crucial backbone for the organization. Their work is pivotal to the continuation of iBio to this very day.

Eshun-Wilson also worked closely with department staff and leadership to ensure iMCB would become a cornerstone of the department’s DEIB efforts, such as the Chair of the Equity Committee, the MCB Equity Advisor, the Biological Sciences Graduate Diversity Director, Deans, and faculty. From grant writing to fundraising to speaking at faculty meetings, Eshun-Wilson was determined to see iMCB become a cultural mainstay in the department. She believes that “if you want to bring more diverse individuals into the program, you must have the infrastructure to support them.”

All these measures were monumental for MCB and remain relevant for the department’s future.

According to the National Science Foundation’s latest **report**, Black, Hispanic, American Indian, and Alaska Native and people with disabilities broadly remain underrepresented in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics compared to their overall distribution in the U.S. population. Even more worrisome, the representation of people with disabilities in the STEM workforce (only 3%) has remained unchanged from a decade ago.

it takes a village

Throughout the following year, Eshun-Wilson began working closely with then-graduate student



photo: Eshun-Wilson

Dr. Michelle Reid to further the reach of iMCB. Reid was a PhD student in Professor Stephan Brohawn’s lab and is currently an Environmental Scientist at CalRecycle. Reid reflected on this period: “We wanted to build upon Eshun-Wilson’s foundation and take iMCB to the next level. We designed programs, collected data, made surveys, recruited students, and met with the students and those who volunteered to teach or mentor. We were doing it all.”

How were Reid and Eshun-Wilson doing all of this in the nuanced context of graduate school? Understanding the complexities of any given academic department was crucial. “We had to integrate all of these different inputs—staff, faculty, trainees, students—and then synthesize them to have very clear outputs,” explained Reid. Together with Eshun-Wilson, they set the groundwork for iMCB by negotiating, strategic planning, and curriculum building. Their work was vital to ensure the lasting presence of iMCB.

As time passed, the leadership torch was passed to Reid and Dr. Kyle Tucker, who also worked on his thesis with Professor Brohawn and is currently a Research Scientist at Septerna. Under this new leadership, iMCB continued to thrive,

four pillars of iMCB

expanding its reach and influence. Reid and Tucker built on the foundation of iMCB, focusing on using evidence-based approaches to create a supportive climate for all trainees.

Tucker explained, “It always started with papers and data—iMCB took a lot from research. We had a research group who would help inform how we’d design programs.” One such program was the First Year Mentorship initiative, in which graduate students of the entering class were paired with a faculty mentor (in addition to their rotation advisors) and met regularly to discuss the student’s perspectives and experiences during their first year.

This approach would prove invaluable, as it was empirical. Tucker explained that the research group “ensured we had developed measurable outcomes before implementation.” The resulting data would further prove why iMCB was essential and bring more buy-in from different university resources.

Reid elaborated further, “We were also very hypothesis-driven. We could contrast existing programs, whether we’ve participated in them or read about them, because we were generally very interested in what made them successful.” Using this hypothesis-based approach, they could experiment with iMCB’s programs, collect data, and use it as feedback to improve the programming. One shining example of this was the iMCB Affinity Groups program.

Spearheaded by Michelle Reid and fellow graduate student Madeline Arnold, the iMCB Affinity Groups aimed to address a community need shared in the 2019 iMCB feedback survey for personal growth and DEIB-related community building.

The pilot involved single-session affinity group discussions, encompassing over 14 identities, spanning over 34 discussions the following year. Feedback revealed that 87% of the 167 participants found the program moderately to very impactful, with a notable positive impact on participants’



conference

raise awareness, offer training workshops



mentoring

one on one mentoring for first years with faculty advisors



teaching

post-doc TAs for first year cohort classes



research

committee researchs best practices



sense of belonging. Furthermore, for underrepresented minorities (URM) in science, the impact was statistically significantly higher (94% moderately to very impactful). This success led to recognition and funding, including the Dean's Diversity Innovation Fund, making the Affinity Groups program the first long-term initiative to foster cross-department collaboration, attracting over one hundred participants from diverse STEM graduate programs. These programs included Chemistry, Neuroscience, IB, Physics, Chemistry, Chemical Engineering, and Biophysics.

The high standard Eshun-Wilson, Reid, and Tucker fomented in the program resulted in four main components: the annual conference, an aforementioned first-year mentoring program, a post-doc teaching assistant program, and the research group. Each of these was developed and managed by a team of over 20 graduate students, post-docs, and staff that would assure the continuing success of the program's goals. An additional assessment team ensured feedback was considered at every step of the programming process.

This large group of people were committed. Throughout the program, Reid noted that "everyone held themselves to a very high ethical standard." Tucker, alongside MCB graduate

"(The program) helped me feel more comfortable in science. I realized that there were other people with very similar upbringings in communities similar to my own."

—Response from the iMCB Affinity Groups feedback survey

students Madeline Arnold, Michael Ly, and Hannah Weaver, modeled iMCB's standards of ethics based on the best available resources, such as UC Berkeley's Internal Review Boards for research on human subjects.

two departments are better than one

The transformation from iMCB to iBio marked a pivotal moment in the initiative's history, especially in championing diversity, equity, and inclusion. Fusing with the Department of Integrative Biology's initiative, inclusive IB (iIB), brought together two influential forces, creating a synergy that promised even more excellent opportunities for promoting a diverse and inclusive scientific community.

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Green is a much-welcome addition to the iBio team, as initial conversations with the iMCB team foretold the necessity of such a role in the Department. “You need a staff member because one size does not fit all. Each department has different needs.” Eshun-Wilson reminisced on her senior thesis work at Grinnell College. She emphasized that “it’s very important to have these departmental figures—they help decentralize power by complementing the centralized existing infrastructures. That’s how you get true, sustainable, strong leadership.”

This year marked the second annual iBio conference, a testament to the initiative’s growth and success, especially in advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion within the scientific community. The conference brought together students across all the MCB divisions in the spirit of learning and kindness. Keynote speakers Professor Rudolfo Mendoza-Denton and Professor tyrone B Hayes shared research and personal experiences regarding DEIB, and student organizer Lepore guided a Universal Design for Learning workshop.

The evolution of iBio, from its inception within iMCB to its current collaboration with iIB, is a testament to its founders’ and leaders’ passion, dedication, and vision, consistently championing diversity, equity, and inclusion. In scientific research and academic pursuits, initiatives and organizations often arise from the vision and determination of passionate individuals. Eshun-Wilson, Reid, and Tucker’s efforts reflect the transformative power of initiatives that unite like-minded individuals with a shared commitment to making academia more inclusive and equitable.

As iBio continues to grow and thrive, it remains focused unwaveringly on diversity, equity, and inclusion. It serves as a reminder that remarkable things can happen when passionate individuals come together to ensure everyone has a seat at the table. The future of iBio is bright. Student leaders of the past leave a rich, meaningful legacy that promises even greater achievements and contributions to our community in the future.

The first inaugural conference of iBio, in 2022, was spearheaded by a team of graduate students—Sara Herrejon Chavez, Jessica Aguila, Valeria King, Khansaa Maar, Jaemin Lee, and myself—and staff Monica Albe, graduate student services advisor for the Department of Integrative Biology, Carina Galicia, and Hannah Bloom. This year’s conference brought on graduate students Alyssa Gimenez and Taormina Lepore and professors Ellen Lumpkin and Diana M. Bautista.

The team also recently welcomed Aubrey Green, DEIB Program Manager for the MCB department, who joined the department just a few months ago. He will be working to support the department in building an inclusive culture by focusing on programming and opportunities that help us recognize, engage, and benefit our MCB community members.

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outside VL5B

Stay tuned for more upcoming news regarding next year's iBio conference and new, exciting programming. If you want to contact Aubrey Green to learn more about iMCB or iBio, discuss MCB DEIB-related topics, or get involved, book an appointment [here](#).

Lastly, in the words of Isaac Newton, "If I have seen further [than others], it is by standing on the shoulders of giants." In this spirit, we thank the trailblazers of iMCB, and commend them for their work, consideration, and kindness.

Assessment Team: Hannah Weaver (Lead), Kyle Tucker (co-lead), Michael Ly, Madeline Arnold, Mark Stepaniak, Alicia Gowans

Mentoring Team: Valerie Vargas-Zapata (Lead), Cara He, Anna Rogers, Emilio Soto Soto

Research Group: Danielle Spitzer (Lead), Molly Brothers, Amanda Gonzalez (lead), Sonali Mali, Maia Reyes, Anthony Rodriguez-Vargas, Sophia Friesen, Tess Branon, Christiane Voufu, Adriana Mendizabal, Kent Gorday, Maura McDonagh

Postdoc Liaisons: Adam Yokom (co-lead), Katheleen Pestal (co-lead), Jessica Witchley, Gabrielle Sterne,

Flora Rutagarnia, Tina Sing, Coral Zhou, Suifang Mao, Michael Tellas, Thomas Graham

MUGS (Mentoring for Undergraduate and Graduate Success): Adam Yokom (co-lead), Coral Zhou (co-lead), David Kern (co-lead), Jesse Castillo, Ellen Lumpkin

Conference Team: Michael Ly (co-lead), Hannah Nilsson (co-lead), Madeline Arnold (co-lead), Tram Nguyen

Affinity Groups: Madeline Arnold (co-lead), Hannah Nilsson (co-lead), Kyle Tucker (co-lead), Michelle Reid (co-lead), Michael Ly, Lorena Grundy, Dariya Bakshinskaya, Frankie Cunningham, David Emory Brown, Madeline Klinger.

Special thanks to Héctor L. Torres Vera for his permission in reprinting this article. Learn more about Héctor's work as a scientist and science communicator on their [website](#).



learning aligned employment

create paid undergraduate research experience even with limited funds

by *Maya Samuels-Fair*
Graduate Student, IB

Only two years ago, California created the Learning Aligned Employment Program (LAEP), which provides funding to the state's colleges and universities to create more paid undergraduate research experiences for students from low-income backgrounds. Paid undergraduate research opportunities are an important way to provide equitable access to scientific careers. Student demand for such research positions far exceeds the supply. As a graduate student, I was frustrated that the small grants I am eligible to apply for are not enough to create good jobs, until I discovered LAEP.

Through LAEP, the research supervisor is only responsible for paying 7% of student wages, and the rest of the wage is supplemented by the state. This means that to pay a student the current minimum wage of \$18.07/hour, the supervisor is only responsible for \$1.26/hour. Federal work-study, by comparison, only supplements 50% of wages. Suddenly, common graduate student small grants such as Sigma Xi (\$500), are enough



to create part time jobs for multiple undergraduates. LAEP is a game-changer, but due to a lack of awareness, faculty and graduate students are not utilizing this funding source to its full potential.

Creating LAEP positions only requires a small funding source and a job description. Job postings can be made through the department HR

Generalist. Another benefit of posting a LAEP position is that the job listings reach students who may not otherwise come across research positions. To be eligible for LAEP employment, undergraduates must be full-time students, California residents, and work-study eligible. Furthermore, students can concurrently be paid through LAEP and receive course credit through a program such as URAP. By request, the URAP program can even fund \$350 towards simultaneous LAEP employment for URAP students,

which is enough for 270 paid work hours. To learn more about LAEP and spread the word, here are some links:

UC Berkeley Financial Aid
LAEP FAQ
LAEP Home Page
URAP Program

all unattributed photos in this issue courtesy of UCB archives

upcoming events + campus resources

- 1 Mar.—**A Camp, a Campus and a Disability Revolution**, (all month) Bancroft Library
- 4 Mar.—**Start Sewing: Learning the Machine**, 1.00-4.00pm, Doe Library (free with registration)
- 5 Apr.—**BAMPFA Student Committee Film Festival**, 7.30pm, BAMPFA (free)
- 21 Apr.—Community Care Block Party, 12.00pm-6.00pm, Berkeley Student Coöperatives (free)

Have a story or event you would like to see featured in upcoming newsletters? Email us at dei.news.biology@berkeley.edu.

Museum of
Vertebrate
Zoology



Supervisors—please circulate this newsletter to lab members and staff who may not be on our listserv.