

Association of Environmental Studies and Sciences  
Diversity, Equity, Inclusion Survey Results  
Executive Summary

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# Acknowledgements

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# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	2
Introduction	4
Demographics	5
Demographics - Online Survey	6
Engagement with AESS	7
DEI at AESS	7
DEI in Environmental Studies	8
Recommendations	9
Diversify the membership	9
Engagement with AESS	10
DEI at AESS	12
DEI in Environmental Studies	12
Fundraising and capacity building	13

# Introduction

The Association for Environmental Studies and Sciences (AESS) is an independent professional association that seeks to engage and support scholars, practitioners, and students from all backgrounds and abilities in their contribution to environmental studies and environmental problems. A diverse membership and leadership will help make AESS a stronger organization more capable of serving the needs of a dynamic field. Diverse groups of people with varied perspectives are more successful at solving complex problems, such as environmental (in)justice and the ‘wicked’ socio-ecological problems that confront society.

AESS recognizes that there is a particular shortage of members who identify as Black, indigenous, and people of color, and more can be done to make the organization more inclusive and accessible to people of all backgrounds and identities. This 2021 online survey was designed with the aim of understanding the demographics of the AESS membership, particularly those who are historically underrepresented, and to collect opinions on how to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) within AESS and in environmental studies in general.

Our survey collected information in four areas:

- Demographics (institution, position, race, age, gender, nationality, etc.)
- Engagement with AESS
- Diversity, equity, and inclusion at AESS
- Diversity, equity, and inclusion in environmental studies departments, divisions, and colleges

The survey was sent to the 2000 people on the AESS listserv and 480 on the membership roster. Most of the members are also on the listserv, so there is significant overlap between the two groups. A total of 129 responses were collected, a 6.5% response rate. It is likely that most of the people who responded are active members of AESS. The percentage is calculated as those who responded out of the listserv (2000).

Responded	Total	Percentage
129	2000 listserv 480 members	6.5%

## Demographics

In addition to the survey, we analyzed information available from the AESS membership roster. As of September 1, 2021, when the analysis was done, AESS had 521 members. We sorted the membership by title, geography, sector, student status, and join date. No data was available on race, gender, socio-economic status, which was collected in the online survey.

<b><u>Title</u></b>		
Professor or Dr	276	53.7%
None	291	56.6%
<b><u>Geography</u></b>		
Other	32	6.2%
Canada	8	1.6%
US	477	92.8%
<b><u>Sector</u></b>		
Higher ed	428	83.3%
Private	10	1.9%
No affiliation	58	11.3%
Government	4	0.8%
k-12	4	0.8%
Non profit	10	1.9%
<b><u>Student Status</u></b>		
Student	166	32.3%
Nonstudent	348	67.7%
<b><u>Join Date</u></b>		
2008	45	8.8%
2009	21	4.1%
2010	10	1.9%
2011	9	1.8%
2012	16	3.1%
2013	18	3.5%
2014	38	7.4%
2015	16	3.1%
2016	23	4.5%
2017	23	4.5%
2018	28	5.4%
2019	35	6.8%
2020	67	13.0%
2021	159	30.9%

Analysis of the membership roster shows that half of the membership of AESS are PhD holders in academia as well as other sectors. The vast majority of members are in higher ed, with a few individuals in private sector, nonprofit, government, and K-12. About one third are students.

There was a large increase in the percentage of members who joined the organization in 2020 and 2021, probably as a result of the pandemic and increased engagement online.

## Demographics - Online Survey

The online survey was distributed to members of AESS as well as those in free ESS forum. The results from the online survey suggest that AESS has a strong representation of *women, public universities, liberal arts colleges, faculty*, and those in the *mid to older age ranges*. However, the data suggests that AESS is extremely underrepresented in the following:

- People of color (less than 10%)
- Outside of North America (less than 5%)
- Community colleges (less than 1%)
- HBCUs and minority serving institutions (less than 1%)
- Students, graduate and undergraduates (less than 10%)
- Young people under the age of 25 (less than 2%)
- First generation to go to college (23% compared to 56% nationally)
- Lower class (8.7%)
- Non-academic institutions
- K-12 schools
- Humanities specialties

This information indicates that as of the 2021 AESS Conference, AESS is engaging a narrow segment of people involved in environmental studies. It is not surprising that most of the participants are in academia, since that is AESS's target audience, but within academia, the diversity is much less than expected. Liberal arts colleges are overrepresented, while community colleges and HBCUs are extremely underrepresented. K-12 schools are scarce, as well as nonacademic institutions. Professors outnumber lecturers, adjuncts, staff, and administrators, and there are hardly any students, graduate or undergraduate on the ESS forum, though this group is higher in the membership roster. Most of the respondents are in interdisciplinary departments. The natural and social sciences have healthy representation while the humanities are underrepresented. Almost all the respondents are in the U.S. with very few international. Of the characteristics of the respondents, the group overwhelmingly identifies as white and coming from middle-class and privileged backgrounds. All this means that AESS has a lot of potential to diversify in many dimensions.

## Engagement with AESS

According to survey results, the primary ways that the respondents engage with AESS are through the ESS forum, the AESS conference, and the ESS journal. Regular attendance at conferences is par for course for academics, therefore it is a bit surprising that not many people attended the AESS conference in the last five years. Only 5.4% said they attended five or more, and 32% said they have attended none. Forty-three percent said they have not partaken in AESS's other offerings, including the journal, social media, the webinars, or the podcast. Therefore, AESS could do more to engage its members outside of the listserv.

## DEI at AESS

Respondents were asked to rate suggestions for improving DEI at the AESS conference. Some respondents commented that this was difficult because they saw the suggestions as equally important. "Offer a tiered pricing structure for conferences for differing abilities to pay beyond student vs. professional" was ranked highest, followed by "Offer grants to conference participants who do not have access to conference funding from their institution or organization," "Integrate more diversity, equity, and inclusion into content at AESS conference," and "Increase physical accessibility at AESS conferences." Other recommendations have been synthesized in the recommendations section of this report.

Respondents were asked to rate suggestions for improving AESS membership. Again, some commented that they were all equally important. "Support underrepresented scholars through scholarships, mentorships, and other opportunities" was ranked highest, followed by "Implement a tiered pricing structure for membership for differing abilities to pay beyond student vs. professional," "Support the decolonization of environmental studies and science curriculum," and "Provide diversity, equity, and inclusion training for environmental studies departments, programs, and scholars." Other recommendations have been synthesized in the Recommendations section of this report.

When it comes to inclusion at AESS, 6% of the respondents said they have been witness to or subject to blatant discrimination or harassment due to gender, race, or other identity from staff or colleagues at AESS conferences, meetings, or the ESS forum, and 10% said they have witnessed or been subject to microaggressions from colleagues or staff at AESS conferences, meetings, or listserv. Any incidence of blatant discrimination or harassment is egregious, so it is concerning that more than a handful of people said yes. Microaggressions can be offensive but intentional, and AESS should try to minimize those as well. Respondents were given a space to provide comments after this question. Unfortunately, none described what happened and we don't have a way of following up with them.

## DEI in Environmental Studies

A very high percentage (85%) of the respondents said they very often or somewhat often incorporate equity and justice into their teaching/work. There may be some survey bias in that respondents who decide to take a survey on DEI are likely to already be interested or involved in this subject.

When it comes to departments/divisions/colleges, the responses are more mixed. Seventy-two percent of the respondents said their department/division/college has a committee devoted to advancing DEI. Only 54% said their department/division/college had staff devoted to DEI, 54.4% said DEI is explicitly stated in their department/division/college missions and goals, and 55% said their department/division/college is explicit about incorporating equity and justice into the curriculum. Several of the commenters said that they had these things at the institution level but not at the department, division, or college level.

In terms of hiring and retention of faculty and staff of color, 60% said their department/division/college is making a conscious effort, though comments indicate that sometimes intentions do not lead to results. Fifty eight percent said their department/division/college is consciously trying to increase the recruitment and retention of students of color. As hiring is a high impact DEI action for higher ed, a lot of progress can be made here.



# Recommendations

## Diversify the membership

AESS has huge opportunities for diversity in many areas, with priority to increasing engagement from historically underrepresented groups. The following suggestions we believe have the most potential to increase engagement from historically underrepresented groups:

1. *Recruit more students to join AESS.* This would have the effect of increasing racial and class diversity, and well as age and rank diversity. Students could benefit the most from professional organizations and should be a priority demographic for AESS to engage. Strategies for engaging students include:
  - Ask current faculty and staff AESS members to invite students.
  - Promote AESS to environmental studies and related departments, colleges and universities, and campus career centers.
  - Enable students to join for free or low cost.
  - Create programming for students, such as career development resources.
2. *Recruit more at community colleges, HBCUs, and minority serving institutions.* These institutions tend to serve more students of color, first generation students, and those from low-income backgrounds. Engaging them would increase this demographic at AESS and throughout environmental studies, and help those who need it the most.
3. *Recruit more disciplines.* Currently AESS seems to be representing mostly interdisciplinary environmental studies departments, the natural sciences and social sciences. It should also be a home for environmental scholars and practitioners in the humanities, ethnic studies, as well as business, health, law, and vocational fields.
4. *Recruit internationally.* AESS membership is predominantly U.S., even though environmental studies has no boundaries. More can be done to recruit internationally, perhaps starting with English speaking countries.
5. *Expand beyond academia.* Even if AESS primarily serves those in academia, many members also work in or partner with other sectors. It would be beneficial for AESS to include those who work in government, the private sector, nonprofits, philanthropy, K-12 schools, and more.
6. *Implement tiered pricing.* In order for membership to be accessible to those with financial limitations, tiered pricing should accommodate different abilities to pay beyond student vs. nonstudents.

- a. Free membership for students
- b. Discounted membership for people with lower income like fellows or adjuncts
- c. Higher prices for private-industry or government members
- d. One-year discount for new members
- e. Bundled subscription for departments that allow everyone in the department to have a membership

## Engagement with AESS

In order for AESS to be a vibrant community that is fulfilling its mission, it needs to offer quality programs that members are engaged with. Funding does not need to be a limitation if there is vision and demand for these services. The following recommendations are ways that AESS can improve its programming to enhance engagement:

1. *AESS conference*: The conference is the largest offering that AESS provides to the network. Survey respondents and diversity committee members recommend the following to improve accessibility and engagement:
  - Tiered pricing for conference attendees to accommodate different abilities to pay.
  - Scholarships for students and those whose institutions cannot provide funding.
  - Schedule the conference at some other time of the year, not June.
  - Continue the ability to convene virtually.
  - Choose conference venues that maximize physical and financial accessibility.
  - Rotate the conference location to different parts of the U.S. and also internationally.
  - Determine the location years in advance so people can plan far in advance.
  - Provide childcare or normalize children attending the conference.
  - Provide accommodations for those with visual and hearing impairments.
  - Provide shuttles or coordinate carpooling from airport to conference venue.
  - Attract speakers who are cutting edge and appeal to a diverse audience.
  - Consider partnering with a conference in an adjacent field (AASHE, ASLE, Geography, Academy of Sciences, etc.)
  - Consider “unconference” formats: field trips, regional convenings, participant led discussions, etc.
  - Wider advertising of the AESS and its conference on social media platforms and diverse groups to increase accessibility.

2. *Other programming:* Since conferences are only once a year and take considerable effort to attend, there is a need for other ways to engage with AESS in addition to the listserv. Currently, these include the ESS journal, website, social media, podcast, and webinars.
  - Increase engagement with the ESS journal by inviting guest editors, creating themed issues, and inviting more people to submit and publish articles.
  - Host monthly webinars where members can share their research and work.
  - Create a weekly newsletter sharing info on events, jobs, publications, etc.
  - Engage more on social media
  - Evaluate podcast: is it worth the effort? Is it promoted enough? should it be a webinar series instead?
  - Make sure that programming is promoted to internal and external audiences, cross pollinate with societies in adjacent fields, such as ASLE, Geography, Academy of Sciences, etc.
  - Make sure that the website is attractive, easy to find information, search engine optimized.
  
3. *Career development and networking:* One of the most powerful benefits of a professional network are the opportunities for career development and networking. While the conference, journal, and listserv are great places for sharing information, more can be done to facilitate relationships and networking within AESS.
  - Mentorship program that connects more experienced professionals with students and young professionals.
  - A searchable membership directory.
  - Affinity groups, self organized or organized by AESS, for people in the same discipline, investigating the same topic, or by identities such as BIPOC, postdoctoral fellows, adjuncts, PhD students, etc.
  - Workshops and resources on career development
  
4. *Partnerships:* AESS could serve as a resource in facilitating partnerships between organizations working to solve environmental problems and people in academia, or people in academia looking to partner with one another.
  - Create a searchable membership directory.
  - Introduce AESS to nonprofits, government, and other entities that may benefit from academic partners for their work.
  - Attend conferences of other associations, in trade as well as academia.
  - Create online forums and affinity groups for people studying the same topic or in similar job positions.

## DEI at AESS

We asked survey respondents for their opinions on how to improve diversity and inclusion at AESS, and along with our own deliberations, have the following recommendations:

1. Follow the recommendations for diversifying the membership and increasing engagement and accessibility for AESS conferences and programming.
2. Create a method for members to report instances of discrimination, harassment, and microaggressions at the AESS conference, listserv, and other interactions. Create a platform where stories can be shared anonymously so that the community and the public can learn what discriminatory behavior looks like and how to address it.
3. Address discrimination, harassment, and microaggressions immediately if they happen in contexts that AESS can control. This might mean addressing or disciplining offenders, occasional messages from the Board, or creating meeting agreements to promote inclusive behavior and prevent incidents.
4. Incorporate DEI content into the AESS conference and other programming.
5. Provide more support to the diversity committee and the membership committee to advocate for and implement DEI initiatives.

## DEI in Environmental Studies

As a professional association, AESS can do a lot to promote DEI in environmental studies in higher education and in the profession as a whole. With vision and funding, we imagine AESS could do create the following:

1. Toolkit for incorporating equity and justice into environmental studies curriculum, including syllabuses, bibliographies, and resources on pedagogy.
2. Toolkit for integrating DEI into hiring and operations, drawing on resources outside of environmental studies and academia.
3. Resources on environmental careers and career development.
4. Templates for DEI in mission statements, strategies, and responses to national events.
5. Consider offering an award for advancing DEI in the field.
6. Promote the work of members of color and marginalized groups.
7. Create an affinity group for BIPOC members to connect with each other and advocate for DEI.
8. Conduct advocacy for institutional and governmental policies that advance DEI, environmental justice, and science based decision making.

## Fundraising and capacity building

Many of these initiatives will require additional funding and staff capacity at AESS, which is currently very limited. To enable initiatives that will improve diversity, inclusion, equity, accessibility, and engagement at AESS, we recommend the following.

1. Apply to grants from foundations, government, and philanthropic organizations.
2. Conduct fundraisers to encourage individual donations.
3. Increase paid memberships.
4. Communicate the value and impact of AESS towards solving environmental problems.
5. Write op-eds and LTEs to draw attention to the organization.
6. Partner with universities and individual faculty to engage students in researching and developing programs for AESS.
7. Hire interns to help with operations and development.
8. Partner with associations in adjacent disciplines to share resources.
9. Create a freemium model where certain resources are available for free and certain resources are available for paying members.