

2016 Expanding Potential Workshop - Ripple Effects

Monica Albe



Monica Jane Albe works as an administrator in the Department of Molecular and Cell Biology ([MCB](#)) on the UC Berkeley campus. Among her duties, she serves as the staff representative on the MCB Equity Committee, and supervises several undergraduate diversity researchers that assist her with data gathering, organizing inclusive community events, and department news and communications.

Monica is also a board member of the [East Bay Association for Women in Science](#), serves on the advisory board for [Science@Cal](#), and is a core member of the [Coalition for the Public Understanding of Science](#).

(A long time ago) she was also a low-income science student at UC Berkeley and benefitted greatly from participating in the UC Berkeley [Biology Scholars Program](#). She is passionate about institutionalizing equity and inclusion, and progressing better representation in the sciences.

I can't say this enough: the 2016 Expanding Potential Workshop was an eye-opening and encouraging experience. Not only was it filled with loads of people that were passionate about science, equity, and inclusion, but a tone was set early to facilitate great conversations and lots of mixing. I got to meet and have quality interactions with highly motivating people who were involved in *really* exciting projects in the Bay Area and across the nation. I felt honored to be among such inspiring figures, and privileged to participate in this workshop.

Not all conversations could be qualified as "great" though -- I only say that because they revealed upsetting experiences and pressing issues, which called for immediate action. These concerned sexual harassment in the field and lab, and inappropriate consensual relationships on campus. A fire was lit in me to do my part to create a safer STEM environment. After the workshop, I looked further into Berkeley campus policies and specific actions the campus takes to help educate its community on these topics.

During my queries, I talked with a bunch of my undergraduate researchers about policies surrounding consensual relationships (i.e. faculty dating their students, and GSIs dating students who they are directly supervising) -- and was very surprised to find that very few of my students were aware that those policies existed! Wow. That's disturbing. How can we address an issue if the people most vulnerable to it are completely unaware that it's a

problem in the first place? In my opinion, it doesn't matter how much training you provide a supervisor -- an offender can continue with inappropriate behavior as long as their mentee is unable to recognize an offending behavior. We, as a university, need to approach this problem from both ends. The university is making efforts towards ensuring all supervisors and staff are trained (great!) -- but we also need to make sure that all students, both undergraduate and graduate, are well aware of our policies.

Policies on inappropriate consensual relationships for faculty at University of California, Berkeley can be found in the [faculty code of conduct](#):

“Whenever a faculty member is responsible for academic supervision of a student, a personal relationship between them of a romantic or sexual nature, even if consensual, is inappropriate. Any such relationship jeopardizes the integrity of the educational process.”

However, the policy for GSIs and their students is much more vague -- it's basically only alluded to within their [training videos](#) (trust me, I watched the whole darn thing). This is disappointing, because if it's not clearly spelled out for GSIs, there's definitely room for interpretation. Happy, healthy relationships where people have shared interests are great -- but relationships where things can easily escalate to harassment or can create a hostile work environment for others are unacceptable. I am hoping that the training for GSIs is soon updated to include a clearer statement like the one in the faculty code of conduct.

How can we reach the student population and empower them with knowledge so that it's clear to them when someone is acting against school policy? My students had a great idea -- why not put it in all classroom syllabi? Students will definitely see it then, and faculty and GSIs will be reminded of it every time they teach. A group of four undergraduates, Magdalena Horvath, Courtney Sarkin, Shana Singh, and Megha Majumder, is working with me on this idea -- we're currently thinking of next steps in our strategy. (Do you have thoughts? Ideas are welcome!) I recently found out that there had been rumblings on campus to place the policy in class syllabi last year. With all that's been going on lately, there's no time like the present to bring it up again!

I can't actually relate ALL of the ways the 2016 Expanding Potential Workshop has affected me. I feel lucky that I'm within a department and in an environment that encourages me to share my ideas and seek improvements. Some things are still percolating ...and I am sure there will be moments in the future where I will draw on some newly made contact, or valuable piece of information gleaned.

While I'm percolating, just a few more things to leave you with: my discussion also led my undergrads to share some great ideas for improvements to my department's website -- I'm

currently working up a plan to make our overall language more welcoming and inclusive. (An EP lunch conversation with some experts from CalTech also helped fuel that!)

And, while I was looking into sexual harassment policies and resources, I found that our Environmental, Health and Safety Department has a “field safety training” workshop that brings attention to harassment issues and draws attention to helpful resources. Sara Souza, the field safety workshop coordinator, was excited to hear from me. I connected her with Virginia Duplessis of the “Office of Sexual Assault, Prevention & Student Advocacy” who provided some updated materials to share in the workshop. (To access these materials, [visit here](#).) Together, we all discussed the possibility of holding a special, separate workshop or luncheon focusing on the issues surrounding sexual harassment in the field. Now that I know about programs at UC Berkeley like [Thriving in Science](#) and the [Unconscious Bias Project](#) (both highlighted at the EP workshop), I have several ideas on how to move forward on this.

After my discussions with Sara and Virginia, I followed up by sharing all information with the undergrads I supervise, and my friends at the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology -- many of whom work with 100s of undergrads. The MVZ staff were happy to receive the information and are considering incorporating some of the training into their program. (Several of their students end up doing field work with mentors each year.) Once I get a workshop/luncheon focused on ‘sexual harassment in the field’ planned out, I’ll send an invitation to the communities within the campus museums, departments and units that have student opportunities in the field.

After the EP workshop, I was also motivated to somehow incorporate a conversation about equity and inclusion at our “science bonanza” [Science@Cal](#) tent area for Cal Day -- Berkeley’s once-a-year open house. I’m happy to report that the [Unconscious Bias Project](#), partly inspired by the UC Santa Cruz Women in Science and Engineering’s [PopUp Museum](#) presentation at EP, is going to have several fun, interactive games and activities at our tent on April 16th.

SO -- ripple effects! The workshop resulted in me feeling empowered and motivated -- there were so many incredible people at that workshop, all taking action, that I wanted to do *my part* too. I’m revitalized and pumped to make change!

Like this? Have some ideas to share with me? Feel free to contact me at mjalbe@berkeley.edu.