

Woods Hole Diversity Initiative

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 25, 2012

Six Woods Hole Science Institutions Refocus Diversity Efforts, Renew Memorandum of Understanding to Create ‘Pathways of Opportunity’

The leaders of the six scientific and educational organizations in Woods Hole renewed their commitment to building a diverse and inclusive scientific community by signing an updated Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) June 25 at a ceremony at the Sea Education Association. The MOU was first signed in July 2004, and while the leadership at all six institutions has changed since then, the group’s commitment to support the Woods Hole Scientific Community Diversity Initiative has strengthened over time.

The Woods Hole Diversity MOU was the first MOU signed by the six scientific organizations on any topic. Its renewal reaffirms the institutional commitments to work together to attract and retain a more diverse workforce, one that represents the changing demographics of the nation and the international community.

“We believe that we must create ‘pathways of opportunity’ that will attract people from underrepresented groups by showing that the Woods Hole scientific and educational community has opportunities beginning with primary education and leading to higher education, post graduate work, research and lifetime careers, both in Woods Hole and in the global scientific community,” the agreement states in part. “We believe that homogeneity among people is self-perpetuating and that in order to increase diversity, we will have to increase our efforts beyond what they are now.”

The group acknowledged that significant barriers lie between them and their goals but reaffirmed their determination to identify those barriers and assemble the necessary resources to overcome them.

The signatories to the MOU are the Marine Biological Laboratory, the Woods Hole Laboratory of NOAA’s Northeast Fisheries Science Center, the Sea Education Association, the Woods Hole Coastal and Marine Science Center of the United States Geological Survey, Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, and the Woods Hole Research Center.

Dr. Susan Avery, president and director of the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution and current chairman of the Woods Hole Diversity Initiative (WHDI), presided at the signing ceremony, attended by the leaders of the six institutions. Also in attendance were members of the Diversity Advisory Committee, comprising representatives from each of the WHDI member institutions, and the 2012 Partnership Education Program (PEP) students.

The PEP program is a project of the Woods Hole Diversity Initiative. Sixty students from 39 colleges and universities in the United States have participated in the Woods Hole PEP program, now in its fourth year. Thirteen students are enrolled in this summer's program which runs May 31 through August 10; they represent six colleges and universities that have not participated in previous years as well as four institutions that have previously been represented. Students had an opportunity to speak with the lab directors about their summer projects, how they learned about the PEP program, and why they chose to study science.

The MOU signing was then announced to the SEA Board of Trustees, which was holding its annual meeting in a nearby room.

A surprise presentation was made at the meeting as John Bullard, outgoing president of SEA, was honored by his fellow lab directors as the first recipient of an award named in his honor, The John K. Bullard Diversity Award. John Bullard was recognized for his leadership, vision and commitment to diversity in the Woods Hole science community and for his role in forming the Woods Hole Diversity Initiative. The award will be given every other year to an individual in the Woods Hole community who plays a significant role in making the community more inclusive and more welcoming to people of all backgrounds. Bullard was presented a plaque, and a second plaque with the name of all the recipients will be kept at the current recipient's institution.

The goals of the Woods Hole Diversity Initiative are to provide advice to member organizations about developing diversity activities, to sponsor activities, and to serve as a resource for employees, students and postdoctoral researchers within the community's research, learning, and work environment regardless of their race, religion, color, creed, gender, age, national origin, citizenship status, sexual orientation, physical or mental ability, socio-economic status, or veteran status.

A particular focus of the WHDI is to increase participation of underrepresented minorities as defined by the U.S. government, which includes African Americans, Native Americans and Pacific Islanders, and Hispanics and Latinos, on the staff and in the education programs of the WHDI institutions.

Another major goal is cooperatively to undertake recruitment, retention and mentoring programs that will result in a diverse group of students, employees and postdoctoral researchers in ocean sciences, biological sciences, geosciences, ocean engineering and marine and environmental policy activities undertaken by the Woods Hole scientific and educational organizations.

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