Life Sciences Anti-Racism Taskforce Executive Summary

The Life Science Anti-Racism Taskforce (LS-ART) was convened in August 2020 by Deans Victoria Sork and Tracy Johnson in response to listening sessions with Black members of the Life Sciences community. The goal of the Taskforce was to identify how racism, in all manifestations, prevents Life Sciences from fulfilling its mission: providing all members of our community, especially Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), an environment wheret hey can thrive and be productive, making us the best institution possible. Taskforce membership included undergraduate and graduate students, postdoctoral scholars, staff, and faculty, providing an essential diversity of professional and lived experience. While not exhaustive, the Taskforce recommendations lay the groundwork for becoming a more effective and impactful Division and provide a roadmap where Life Sciences can display leadership that can help transform UCLA as an institution. Life Sciences has already made significant strides in advancing equity and inclusion, providing a solid foundation on which to build, positioning our Division to succeed in developing an anti-racist culture. However, much work remains to be done.

Racism is the product of ideas, practices, and policies that produce, normalize and preserve racial inequities. Even as explicitly racist ideas wane, it is possible for policies and cultural norms to perpetuate inequities. Professor Ibram Kendi, a noted scholar on anti-racism from Boston University, states, *"A racist policy is any measure that produces or sustains racial inequity between racial groups. By policy, I mean written and unwritten laws, rules, procedures, processes, regulations, and guidelines that govern people."* (p. 18). As such, the LS-ART explored the culture of Life Sciences and our written and unwritten procedures and processes with an eye towards identifying and correcting those that sustain racial inequities, with the goal of creating a culture of anti-racism. Anti-racism is a state of mind. It is an active process where individuals and institutions engage in empowering all racial and ethnic groups, placing them in roles of leadership, eliminating policies that perpetuate oppression and racial injustice, and working to remedy the transgenerational impacts of structural racism, historical oppression and racial injustice.

The LS-ART explored five key themes. Although presented individually, there are broad areas of overlap among these themes; recognizing and capitalizing on these intersections will be essential to success. 1**) Culture and Climate** highlights the ways in which all members of our community, but particularly faculty, need to build a deeper understanding of the real-life challenges faced by our students from diverse and marginalized backgrounds, and develop tools and resources that can

foster their success. It also highlights the need to reduce and diminish hierarchies within Life Sciences and re-evaluate the power dynamics implicit in our norms to become actively anti-racist. 2) **Recruitment and Diversity** outlines strategies for enhancing diversity among students, postdocs, staff, and faculty, both by increasing diversity within our recruitment pools and through better supporting the success of diverse individuals once they join our community. 3) **Mentorship and Training** highlights the need for improved mentorship of BIPOC students, postdocs, and faculty to better support their success, and discusses how training of faculty and staff can help catalyze this change. Additionally, while there are multiple successful programs within Life Sciences focused on increasing the pipeline of BIPOC students into STEM careers, better integration and coordination of these programs would maximize their impact. 4) **Data** emphasizes the need for quantitative and qualitative tools and metrics so that we understand where we are presently in terms of supporting the success of BIPOC individuals within Life Sciences, but to also track and evaluate the impact of anti-racism efforts so that we can refine strategies for maximum effect. Lastly, 5) **Funding and Resources** addresses the need to evaluate how current resources are allocated in ways that advance antiracism, highlights the opportunities for leveraging extramural funding to support BIPOC students, and underscores the need to incentivize more significant engagement in activities that help develop anti-racism within Life Sciences specifically, and UCLA broadly.

For too long, a small number of individuals, typically BIPOC, have shouldered the bulk of Life Science and UCLA EDI efforts. For us to succeed in creating an anti-racist environment where all members of the Life Sciences community can thrive and excel, all members of the Life Sciences community must be willing to engage in cultural transformation. As such, a key recommendation of the Taskforce is that units within Life Sciences develop an EDI plan as part of their strategic planning, so that anti-racism can be integrated, collectively, into departmental culture. The extensive list of recommendations that follow provides a starting point, highlighting areas where individuals and organizational units can productively engage in ways that take into account where they are on this journey, and maximize their unique resources, skills, and talents. Although many of these recommendations focus on students and faculty, staff are indispensable members of the Life Science community, and they play a critical role in shaping our culture— they need to be engaged as equal partners in our cultural transformation.

To facilitate the development of EDI plans, we summarize the recommendation of the five themes, above, into three broad categories based on types of actions they

represent: 1) recommendations that can be accomplished through efforts focused on *Training/Education*, 2) those that require *Policy* changes, and 3) those focused on *Data/Evaluation*. Within these broad categories, we identify actions that can be accomplished in the near term, as well as others that are medium and long-term goals. Some of these recommendations can be accomplished at the individual level, while others will require coordinated, collective action. Creating an inclusive, anti-racist Division is an active process; all in the Life Sciences community have a role to play. By working together towards this goal, we can progress towards transforming Life Sciences into a Division where every person, in every department/unit, at every organizational level, can achieve their potential, necessary for our Division to achieve our highest level of excellence, and serving as an example for other Divisions at UCLA to follow.

The recommendations of the Taskforce are many, and achieving these aims will take time. However, beginning this process and committing to the goal of an actively anti-racist Division is the key to our success. There will be obstacles and institutional constraints, but if we work creatively and collectively, we will continue to move forward. Moreover, successes within Life Sciences (e.g., making the GRE optional, making Equity, Diversity and Inclusion statements part of the academic personnel process) can catalyze change across UCLA, creating an institutional environment more conducive to change.