



At its spring Board meeting on June 19 in Denver, Colorado, the ASCO Board voted unanimously to approve the creation of ASCO's 17th Special Interest Group (SIG): The Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) SIG. The DEI SIG's mission is to promote the knowledge, understanding, and principles of diversity and cultural competence in schools and colleges of optometry via curriculum reform and experiential learning.

Dr. Gary Chu, New England College of Optometry's Senior Director, Public Health and Community Collaborations, who authored the SIG application, will serve as the group's first chair. Chu, a former chair of ASCO's Cultural Competency Curriculum Guidelines Subcommittee, and a current member of the ASCO Diversity and Cultural Competency Committee, said, "The ASCO Board has shown their commitment to improving diversity, equity and inclusion over the past 10 years. Their approval of the formation of the DEI SIG is the next step in this endeavor."

The SIG's goals and objectives are to:

- promote the value and importance of diversity and cultural and linguistic competence amongst the schools and colleges of optometry
- develop curriculum to educate students and faculty about diversity and cultural competence
- promote diversity, equity and inclusion in the profession of optometry and to
- develop leaders to transform organizational behavior and culture to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion locally and nationally

"We have come a long way to promote the importance of diversity and cultural competence in our individual schools but there is much more to do," Chu said. "The DEI SIG will create a gathering place where we can share best practices, develop a shared curriculum, and learn from one another."

Over the past ten years, ASCO's commitment to diversity has grown under the guidance of the [Diversity and Cultural Competency Committee](#) (DCCC), a standing committee, and through the sponsorship of a variety of DCCC efforts by Walmart, an ASCO Corporate Contributor. The commitment began in earnest with the development of the 2008 ["ASCO Guidelines for Culturally](#)

Competent Eye and Vision Care” and progressed with such programs as the “Cultural Competency Curriculum Guidelines Implementation Workshops,” (held on the campus of the requesting institution); the long-running “Developing a Diverse Applicant Pool in Optometric Education Mini-Grant Program”; and the student-oriented awards program the “ASCO Cultural Competency Case Study Competition.”

While the DCCC’s efforts have addressed the issues of diversity from a macro perspective, the creation of the DEI SIG provides an opportunity for representatives from each of ASCO’s member institutions to be involved in a national forum to help usher in change, share best practices, and develop a shared curriculum. Dr. John Flanagan, Dean of the University of California at Berkeley School of Optometry and Chair of ASCO’s Diversity and Cultural Competency Committee said, “I am delighted at this important development and the ASCO Board’s commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion. It is essential that we grab this opportunity to push this agenda for the good of our profession and the patients we serve.”

Members of the online (“ASCOConnect”) community group of Chief Diversity/Cultural Competency Officers (representing all of [ASCO’s 23 schools and colleges](#)) will form the nucleus of the SIG’s membership, allowing for the knowledge and expertise of dedicated optometric education professionals from different parts of the country — representing a wide array of cultures — to work together to achieve the SIG’s objectives.

Potential DEI SIG programs and activities in the coming fiscal year and beyond include: an annual meeting to be held in conjunction with the yearly American Academy of Optometry meeting; reviewing/sharing programs to promote and prepare students from underrepresented minorities for optometry institution success; the creation of an annual report on the state of diversity in optometry’s student body and faculty, and in the profession; a forum or online webinars to address and understand issues of racism (individual and systemic) and implicit and explicit bias in optometry institutions; and articles, podcasts, blogs, etc. on the value of diversity, equity, and inclusion for the profession of optometry and the corollary of behavioral and organizational culture that unintentionally creates barriers to success.

For more information about this and other ASCO diversity/cultural competence-related efforts, contact Carol Brubaker, ASCO’s Manager, Professional Affairs at cbrubaker@opted.org.