

SES Section Survey Results and Report, 2017

The SES Committee on Racial Equity:

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The Committee for Racial Equity was formed to advise the ETS council on race-related issues, provide recommendations for greater inclusion and support of scholars of color, and engage environmental sociologists in laying the foundation for a more inclusive scholarly community. More specifically, the committee will investigate racial and ethnic diversity within the section, assess the educational and professional climate for scholars of color, recommend changes in section policies and practices, and address other issues related to race and inclusion.

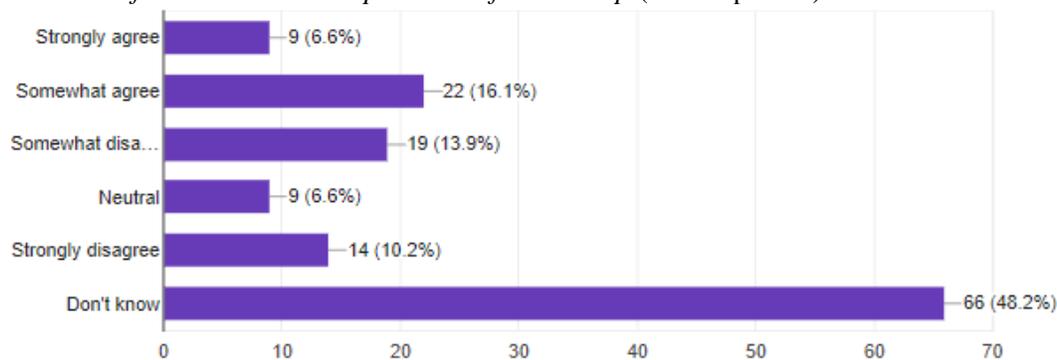
Environmental Sociology Section Racial Equity Committee Survey Results

The goal of this survey was to gauge members' perspectives on racial diversity and equity in our section. During the allotted time period—June 11th to June 30th, 2017—139 of the 486 members responded to the survey, for a response rate of 27%.

The primary response groups were graduate students (25%), Assistant Professors (25%), and Associate Professors (23%). Full Professors comprised 15% of respondents. In terms of gender, 42% of the respondents identified as women and 53% identified as men, while 1.5% identified as transgender or nonbinary. Of those who responded to the survey 81% identified as White, 8% responded as Latinx, 5% identified as Asian, 4% identified as African American, 2% identified as American Indian, 2% identified as Middle Eastern. Other member identities included Puerto Rican (1.4%), Ashkenazi Jew, European Jew, multi, human, British, and mixed race (all 0.7%).

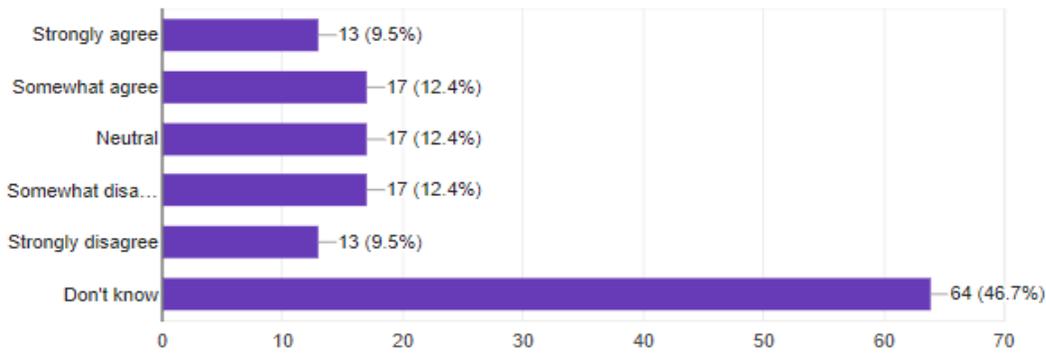
Perception of Equity in Recruitment for Committees and Positions of Leadership

Faculty of color and white faculty in the ETS Section receive equal attention and treatment in the area of recruitment for committees and positions of leadership (137 responses)



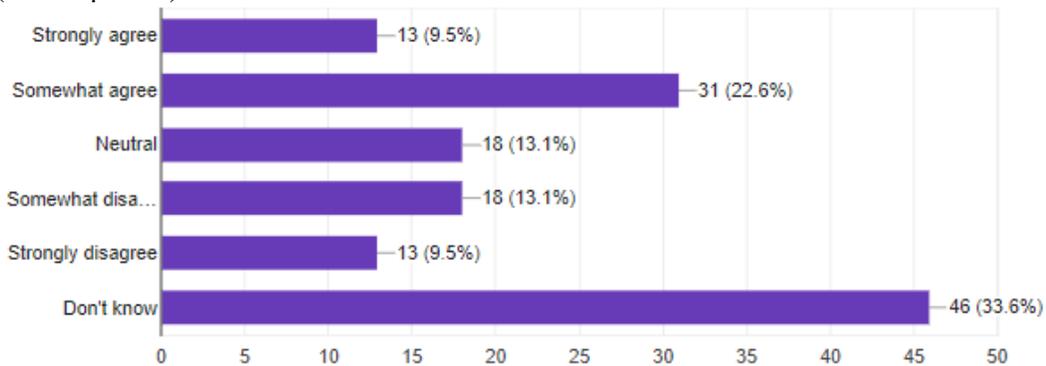
Perception of Equity in Opportunities to Share and Receive Constructive Feedback

Faculty of color and white faculty in the section receive the same opportunities to share and receive constructive feedback from the Section and ETS section members (137 responses)



Perception of Climate

There is a positive climate in support of the work and interests of faculty and students of color in the Section (137 responses)



A majority of section members surveyed said that they are involved in mentoring undergraduate or graduate students of color (73%) and are engaged with contemporary scholarship on race outside of environmental sociology (60%).

Benefits of and Barriers to Membership for Faculty and Students of Color

Nearly two-thirds (64%) of respondents identified professional networking as the primary reason faculty and students of color working on environmental topics become and remain ETS members. This was followed by ASA panel topics (44%) and mentorship opportunities (43%), and lastly access to leadership roles (31%) and themed mini-conference topics (29%).

Respondents identified major barriers to membership for faculty and students of color as follows: research interests not being represented in ETS programming (53%); other ETS members not engaging with topics or literatures of interest (52%); and lack of institutional financial support for travel to ASA (51%). These factors were closely followed by the following: cost of ASA/section dues (46%) and discrimination/microaggressions/feeling unwelcome within section (43%).

Suggestions for making the section a more equitable space

Forty-five percent of respondents offered suggestions for making the section a more equitable space for faculty and students of color. In particular, respondents suggested that to improve equity for scholars of color the section should 1) explore theoretical frames that center non-white perspectives and 2) work to establish leadership opportunities in the section for non-white scholars.

With respect to expanding the core set of theoretical approaches that define the subdiscipline, some respondents recommended a dedicated panel session at ASA for environmental justice topics while others encouraged efforts to develop critical theories of race within environmental sociology beyond environmental justice topics.

With respect to diversifying leadership, respondents noted that the high cost of participation at ASA and the preference for elite institutions makes recognition and leadership opportunities challenging for scholars of color. Efforts to improve leadership diversity in the section may benefit from long-term mentoring strategies that support scholars through their education and promotion to tenure.¹ More involvement with and promotion of the Minority Fellowship Program and efforts to recruit directly from minority serving institutions were also suggested.

Suggested areas of scholarship that could be better integrated into Environmental Sociology

Critical Race Theory, Gender, Embodiment, Rural and non-U.S. focused work, Racism and STS, Urban environment and health, Black Feminist Studies of Science, Queer Studies, Settler-Colonial Studies, Postcolonial Sociology, Intersectionality.

Reflections and Comments

Acknowledgement and Commitment

A majority of respondents (42) to this question expressed gratitude to the committee for pursuing this work, and creating an opportunity for section input on this topic. Respondents' comments on diversity and equity ranged from individual-level questions and commitments to more institutional-level approaches.

Thanks to the committee for undertaking this work. I'm hopeful for the future of this section, but we have a lot of reflecting to do in order to make some structural changes.

This is a serious issue. It's a dark shadow of both mainstream environmentalism and environmental sociology. The emergence of Environmental Justice has helped a great deal, but it clearly hasn't been enough. We need to really get deep and serious about integrating and building on ideas and concepts from racial and ethnic studies into environmental sociology, in order to strengthen our field. Let's face this issue head on and do it with some real fortitude.

One respondent noted that "many of the norms that privilege whites in this space also work to favor masculinity, heteronormativity, and class privilege." Another shared the following comment:

White men and their cultural interaction norms are strongly over-represented in the section. The boundaries of environmental soc are policed through seemingly "objective" criteria which implicitly devalues the contributions of theorists outside the small core (of white men) that makes up environmental sociology. This results in privileging the vantage point of people who already have a sense of entitlement, which makes for a hostile social environment for anyone who disagrees or simply thinks differently.

Deferring Responsibility

A number of white respondents indicated a lack of knowledge about issues of race in the section or an inability to comment on issues surrounding diversity. Some white respondents expressed regret at not being able to contribute more to the conversation.

I am white, and thus do not have experience to answer any of these questions, which should be answered by a person of color.

I don't have a feel for how well or poorly the section does along the lines of racial/ethnic inclusiveness, so I cannot address these questions.

¹ The committee would like to note, however, that significant evidence shows that scholars of color and women are called upon to provide substantially higher levels of service in general, so efforts to cultivate opportunities leadership should be towards well-respected positions that will support and not impede professional goals.

Other respondents explicitly or implicitly placed the onus on scholars and students of color to insert themselves into the field rather than on the field to provide an environment and scholarly community that is more welcoming.

Encourage younger scholars to actively pursue mentorship opportunities and networking with more senior (and other scholars). My hope is that such efforts would meet with positive engagement.

The problem may be one of perception on the part of persons of color. Many may not appreciate the extent to which environmental issues are issues of justice.

Dismissiveness and Resistance

A minority of respondents expressed criticisms of our approach, the survey questions, and attempts to do this work at the section level. They also suggested that ETS is already “ahead of the game” and/or that we’re already “doing race” through EJ work.

Moving Forward

In 2015, Dorceta Taylor received the Fred Buttle Outstanding Contribution to the Field of Environmental Sociology Award. At the ETS business meeting that year, Dr. Taylor observed that our section has remained as white as it was when she first joined the section decades ago.

Based on the membership trends our committee analyzed and published in the ETS newsletter this spring, we know that in spite of growing overall membership in recent years, our section has lost graduate student and faculty members of color. Coupling this data on membership trends with our section member survey results and the valuable information we’ve gathered in two focus groups at this meeting, we are better positioned to understand why it is that our section remains and is becoming an increasingly white space (Anderson 2015).

Our section now has a critical opportunity to evaluate its normative landscape. Nearly half of all survey respondents identified “discrimination,” “microaggressions,” and “not feeling welcome within the section” as main reasons scholars of color choose not to participate in the section. We must take this information seriously. On the other hand, there seems to be little knowledge about the working and learning conditions of faculty and students of color in the section. This speaks to a broad culture of white ignorance that we must intentionally disturb. It also suggests that we must shift our focus from simply recruiting students and faculty members of color to retaining and supporting scholars of color within the section. We have an opportunity – arguably a duty in this post-Trump, post-Charlottesville political moment – to listen to, center, and most importantly *respond to* the experiences of our colleagues of color.

As sociologists who study social movements and power, we know that no progressive change will come about without intentional work. To this end, we will be publishing a more in-depth analysis of this data, compiling suggested interventions. We are grateful to all those who took time to participate and look forward to continuing this work over the next year.

References

Anderson, Elijah. 2015. "The white space." *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* 1.1: 10-21.