



WE ARE for Science advocates for diversity and inclusion in science

<http://sites.psu.edu/weareforscience>

WE ARE for Science (WAFS) is a coalition of members across The Pennsylvania State University (Penn State) and Centre County communities in Pennsylvania that support the accurate representation of science in policy, education, and society, while promoting the success of a diverse generation of scientists. They include three primary working groups that focus on

- Security, safety, and promoting inclusion of a diverse community
- Science communication to the general public (K–12 and the voting public)
- Science advocacy and policy.

The group originated with geoscience PhD candidates and the Association for Women Geoscientists (AWG) at Penn State. “We wanted to start an organization where we could advocate for science in a variety of ways in order to engage the community,” says Jamesa Stokes, Diversity and Inclusion Working Group chair for WAFS.

Penn State is a top research university with departments that could be strongly affected by the current and future political climate. With connections in both rural and urban communities, they are uniquely poised to change the standard practices for educating scientists. Some of the allied organizations that have collaborated with the group on previous events include Graduate Women in Science, Science Policy Society, AWG, and

the Office for Educational Equity.

“WAFS tries to create events that can be reused in multiple contexts. We aim to bring a wide representation of STEM fields to these events (both grad students and professors participate) and offer outreach activities for children as well,” says Helen Gall, co-president of WAFS.

Three working groups comprise WAFS, and each has initiatives and projects they promote. For instance, the Diversity and Inclusion group just held a “Faces of Science” campaign (<https://www.realfacesofscience.com>) aimed at highlighting the diversity of scientists, and they feature profiles of several scientists on their website. They also hold diversity in STEM panel discussions, Instagram campaigns, and mixers for diverse/minority graduate students, faculty, and staff.

The Communication and Outreach group is creating a website with helpful STEM activities and resources for graduate students across all disciplines at outreach events. The “Ask a Scientist” booth was created as a place for local community members to ask scientists anything they want to know. The booth has been featured at many of Penn State and State College community events (e.g., Sister Climate March, Earth Day). K–12 opportunities were held in local schools in collaboration with Discovery Space, AWG, and the American Association of University Women.

The Science Policy subgroup has held phone-bank events to call local and state representatives, and they distribute pamphlets with relevant information. The group has plans to begin a Big Ten (assemblage of 10 universities located primarily in the Midwest United States) collaboration by bringing WAFS to STEM



departments at these universities. They have also held a forum on “Engaging with Policy Makers and the Public.”

More recently, WAFS participated in the March for Science in Washington, DC, on April 14 of this year, to encourage scientists and concerned citizens to advocate for policy that supports science research and uses that knowledge to better communities. The March united more than a million advocates, thousands of community organizers, and hundreds of partner organizations in a diverse coalition that advocates for equitable, evidence-based policies for the common good. This is the second year WAFS has participated in the event.

At the end of last semester, WAFS hosted a climate justice forum after hurricanes, monsoons, and wildfires plagued the United States and other countries. Professors of geography, psychology, meteorology, history, and religious studies provided powerful insights. The event was followed by a reception, where student groups raised money for charities that provide relief and aid after natural disasters.

“All scientists want to have an impact for the greater good, and so making our voices heard allows a better chance to get funding for projects that can make a big impact on society,” Stokes says. □

