On December 17th, 2020, ACS BIOT Mid-Atlantic hosted an international group of Graduate Student leaders, including members from New England, the Midwest, and Europe, for a virtual Forum on Diversity and Inclusion in Academia. Participants discussed the critical challenges facing members of the academic community, as well as strategies for supporting a culture of inclusion both on the administrative level in the university as a whole and on an individual level in our daily interactions.

Common themes amongst institutions included the lack of adequate maternity policies for female students, postdocs, and faculty, as well as a lack of cultural inclusion for many new academics from non-English speaking backgrounds in majority English-speaking Departments. Institutional solutions can include support programming for new faculty and researchers, especially women and international community members, as well as tailored outreach in the community to encourage young women and students from underrepresented communities to pursue careers in STEM. Recommended policy changes include more defined and expanded maternity leave policies (including for graduate researchers and postdoctoral scholars), as well as an increase in availability of counseling services and campus security services such as police escorts late at night, with a campaign to make community members aware of these resources. Individual students can support these initiatives by actively participating in cultural programming on campus to build a sense of belonging through mutual understanding and respect, as well as serving as mentors to incoming and prospective students who may feel out-of-place in the academic environment. Students can also advocate for colleagues who may experience unequal treatment, such as racist or sexist incidents on campus, and should actively speak out against this behavior to maintain an inclusive culture on their campus. Faculty can likewise serve as mentors for new faculty and should encourage both diversity of thought and of background in the Department at all levels.