

Diversity Champion Spotlight: Linda Lee, Agronomy

Dr. Linda Lee, Agronomy, is a professor of agronomy and head of the Ecological Science and Engineering (ESE) interdisciplinary graduate program. With her unassuming personality, she epitomizes one who works tirelessly behind the scenes to advocate and celebrate diversity and inclusion. Dr. Lee has consistently been a strong and inspiring mentor and role model for faculty and students and a devoted and outstanding researcher and teacher.



In her lab, Dr. Lee leads by example, fostering a culture of tolerance and support. Her lab group is (and historically has been) well represented by all races, religious affiliations, gender, gender identity, first generation college students, and sexual orientations.

In her role as the ESE Program head, Dr. Lee has actively recruited a diverse cohort, with many of these students having home departments in the College of Agriculture. Since 2008, 56% of the ESE students have identified as female. In the past two years, 22% of the incoming cohorts have been men and women of color. Of the 77 domestic students in ESE, 5 students are African American, 3 are Native American, 1 is Hispanic, and 4 are from other minority groups. This is in addition to the international students representing 14 countries including Kenya, Kuwait, Nigeria, Colombia, and Peru. This has directly enhanced the diversity of the College of Agriculture while also creating an environment of inclusion by providing an opportunity for undergraduate and graduate students in the college to engage with new members of our Purdue community.

In her role as associate head in the Department of Agronomy, Dr. Lee pushed for staff and faculty to attend Safe Zone training so that our LGBTQ students, staff, and faculty would feel welcome in Agronomy and the college. In doing this, she has helped foster an environment of tolerance and inclusivity. For members of the LGBTQ community, this has had a transformative effect over the past few years on the atmosphere of the department and college environment.

Beyond her official roles, Dr. Lee truly walks the walk in embracing diversity. She has served as an advocate for individual students when diversity-related concerns have come front and center. She has been an outspoken advocate for students in the face of strained race and gender relations. In her role as faculty, Dr. Lee has brought in speakers to address cultural differences to help break down biases that we all hold. Her passion for learning creates in her the need to empower those around her.

Dr. Lee has made it her mission to identify funding opportunities for students in underrepresented groups to support their educational endeavors. Her awareness of

scholarships, fellowships, and various other methods of providing assistance supports students that may, otherwise, not have been able to afford to pursue a degree. Her expertise not only opens up avenues to students directly, but has also been an invaluable asset to the Head of Department of Agronomy in his recruitment efforts.