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Addressing interpersonal and structural barriers to diversity, equity, and inclusion first requires that open and safe spaces exist for discussions surrounding these sensitive topics. To support open communication and cultivate an inclusive community of trainees and scholars who are comfortable sharing their own experiences and willing to learn from the experiences of others, we incorporated diversity, equity, and inclusion topics into our career development seminars series attended by both our TL1 and KL2 groups.

In the fall of 2020, Dr. Esa Davis, Co-Director of the KL2, led an activity called the Culture Box, where trainees and scholars were asked to bring an object that represents an important part of their life story related to one or more of their social identities, like race, gender, sexuality, religion, etc. Trainees and scholars then discussed their object's significance to them among a smaller group of their peers. One of our TL1 post-docs brought up the significance of the Culture Box activity in an interview, saying, "I thought [the culture box] was just a good way to kind of share, about your background, something that you wouldn't necessarily bring up. It's just kind of creating those bonds and just establishing that it's important and okay to share, about other things in your lives, and that would help kind of foster connections within your research group." They also noted that they intended to do the activity with their own mentees.
To further foster an environment for open dialogue, Mario Browne, Director of the Office of Health Sciences Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, was invited to host an open discussion on DEI with our trainees and scholars. After participating in these seminars, a TL1 post-doc noted, "I never once had the opportunity to engage in conversations about wellness, racism, my culture and background, authenticity in the work place, etc. before now. I just didn't know that this type of environment could even exist in academia."