URGE Policies for Working with Communities of Color for University/Organization

This is what was found by Grand Rapids GeoPOD at GVSU, GRCC, and MCC on Policies for Working with Communities of Color as well as plans for improved processes and/or needed resources.

Pods may have members from a range of career stages and involvement in the development and execution of research projects, and pod members may have different experiences or different perspectives when responding to these questions. Consider this in the summary document and focus on capturing responses that are representative of the range in your pod.

- **Audit of previous interactions with communities of color at our organization:**
  - Ideas
    - We know some faculty and institutions are making it routine practice to acknowledge that campuses exist on the land of Indigenous peoples; for instance, we know some colleagues at WMU and MSU who include this information as part of their email tag. We intend to explore the possibility for similar statements at our institutions.
    - We also considered this deliverable in the context of our teaching, and considered instances and opportunities to center or empower students of color.
  - Callahan: In advance of a class discussion on the Flint water crisis, I spoke with a Black student who had shared she was from the area; she was also the only Black student in the class. I offered that she could participate however much she wished. On the day of the discussion, she approached me and said that she had prepared a PowerPoint presentation to explain the story of what happened in Flint. I was stunned, to say the least. Notably, she made an intentional effort to describe not only what had gone wrong in Flint, but also to highlight positive aspects of the city. Her narrative was illustrative. I hoped, too, that by deciding to tell the story herself, she had the power to tell it in her way.
One team member (Callahan) is currently engaged in research that includes students of color. In particular, her project is an example of research in which the students of color and their experiences are the subject of inquiry. Here are her responses to specific questions:

- I serve as the external evaluator on a five-year NSF-funded grant awarded to Triton College in River Grove, IL (Award 1741971). The Geo-Engineering Innovations through Undergraduate Scholarship (GENIUS) project is designed to address the regional need for more and better-prepared geoscience and engineering technology graduates. Many of the students in the program are students of color.
- I was recruited for this work based on previous experience as a co-PI on another NSF-funded project (1535011): “The Impact of Social Capital and Mentoring in Earth System Science Workforce Development”. This research study included conducting interviews with scientists of color at different stages of their education and career.

What worked well in these interactions?

- For the Triton Project, as is the case for any research or evaluation work involving human subjects, I have the necessary training and approval of a Human Subjects Internal Review Board (HSIRB) to conduct the project.
- I met in person with stake-holders in October of 2019 at Triton College. This on-site visit was useful for me to see and experience the setting of the program.
- At the beginning of the fall semester of 2020, I participated in an online orientation meeting hosted by the program leadership. As an outsider to Triton, as well as being a white woman, I was mindful and glad to have the opportunity to meet some of the students in this informal setting.
- In December of 2020, I conducted interviews with five of the students in the program via Zoom. Notably, the program coordinator was responsible for recruiting participants. This was crucial and intentional. There is an established relationship with the program coordinator and the students; I am unknown. Thus, it was only after the student volunteered for an interview that I wrote to the student myself.
- I wrote a semi-scripted interview protocol and shared it with the program leadership. Moreover, I included a summary that specifically aligned each interview question or prompt with the program goals. This ensured that the questions were seen as useful and appropriate for the program.
- Prior to each interview, I asked the students to review a consent form. The consent form assures students of anonymity in their responses; the consent form also explains that I would be recording the interview. This is a fairly standard practice in human-subject research.
I designed the interview protocol with a focus on building trust and comfort for the students. For example, initial questions were fairly general and not particularly personal. This allows some time to build rapport between me and the interviewee. It was only after those questions were complete that I asked more sensitive questions regarding students’ experiences in the program.

During the interviews, I had my video camera on, but I did not require students to turn on theirs. Two students elected not to turn on their cameras.

Prior to one interview, which also happened to be the last of the five, a student asked about the reason for recording the interview. I explained that I use the recordings to reinforce my notes; indeed, I explained this reason in the other interviews as well. However, since the question came up prior to even meeting, I spontaneously added another piece of information: I have a language-based learning disability. The recordings, thus, take on a particular importance for me due to my need to reflect on a student’s comments more than once. During the interview, I ask about how a student knows that she can trust someone else like a mentor or teacher. To my surprise, the student volunteered that I had gained her trust by sharing about my learning disability prior to the interview.

After the interviews, I aggregated the responses into a single summary. Then I shared the summary with the participants and asked for their feedback. This kind of member-check is a useful way of ensuring that participants feel ownership and safety in how their ideas are being represented.

What did not work well, and how can this be better addressed in future plans?

I would like to engage with more students in the program. There may be many reasons that I did not receive responses from more than five students. I cannot eliminate the possibility that a lack of trust in me contributed to the low response. One thing I plan to do in the future is share the outline of research questions in advance. This may help students to see that even the more personal questions are focused on their experiences in the GENIUS program at Triton.