URGE Deliverable - Policies for Working with Communities of Color

Session #4

- If you are involved in research with communities of color, in the US or abroad, have you...
  - Actively sought out local collaborators / liaisons / guides? Why or why not? Were they included in the early development and/or proposal of the research or project itself, or added at a later stage?
    
    Participant 1: Yes, I have been working in Puerto Rico and with Puerto Rican undergraduates and graduate students for many years now. Puerto Rican colleagues have been essential as both collaborators, liaisons and guides. And have collaborated on large NSF proposals with Puerto Rican faculty at the University of Puerto Rico. Yes, these individuals were included from early stages of development.
    
    ○ Were any local collaborators included as authors on presentations and/or papers?
      
      Participant 1: Yes, I have multiple peer-reviewed publications with Puerto Rican students and professional researchers. Examples include Puerto Rican scholars as both lead and co-author.

- Actively sought to include local students in your research? Why or why not?
  
  Participant 1: Yes, I have worked with both undergraduates and graduate students from Puerto Rico. This includes field work in Puerto Rico as part of a large NSF grant and with Puerto Rican students as REUs (Research Experience for Undergraduate fellows) at the University of New Hampshire.
  
  I am also currently building local collaborations here in New Hampshire with indigenous communities (Abenaki and Pennacook) to develop research opportunities for indigenous youth.
  
  Participant 2: Involved local students, but they were not students of color.

- Sought to build trust and form long-term connections and collaborations with local institutions if your project is multi-year / ongoing? Why or why not?
  
  Participant 1: Yes. I have been leveraging long-term connections to the University of Puerto Rico through the Luquillo Long-Term Ecological Research program.
    
    ○ Were previous negative interactions, whether from inside or outside of your organization, addressed in the plans for building these connections and trust?
      
      Participant 1: No, not necessarily. I am unaware of previous negative interactions. Not to say they don’t exist, I am just unfamiliar with these interactions if they do. But with proposal develop, I try and listen to the particular needs and concerns of
Puerto Rican collaborators as they can often feel overwhelmed and burden since they are “on-the-ground” with respect to the research that occurs on the island.

Participant 2: Yes, with institutions such as PREP (local conservation group focused on a regional estuary), or local town public works departments, by meeting with them regularly, providing advice, and listening to their data needs. For example, am planning to share high frequency NO3 sensor with City of Dover PWD so they can address issues with I/I in sewer lines during storms, when their treatment plant does not work as well.

- Shared data and findings with the local/regional community in a way that is more accessible? (i.e., translating into different languages). Why or why not?
  Participant 1: Unfortunately, my Spanish is inadequate to fully present findings with local communities in Puerto Rico. However, I do frequently make presentations at the University of Puerto Rico specifically targeting a student audience and provide multiple examples of Puerto Rican students at their work in the fields so as to provide appropriate representation. My goal here is to make research opportunities more accessible.
  Participant 2: Analyzed data from local reservoir (Mill Pond, Durham NH) for inclusion in dam removal feasibility study, shared with local town council. Participated in Town Council meetings to answer questions in understandable terms for informed lay people.

- Educated yourself and your group/team about local politics, culture, customs, and knowledge, including the history of colonialism / settler colonialism in the region? Why or why not?
  Participant 1: This is something we have not done sufficiently in Puerto Rico. Specifically educating our team about the history of colonialism. Generally, our group is well-versed in local politics and through strong relationships with students have experienced multiple cultural exchanges. Our group can and should do more about learning Taino culture and Taino environmental knowledge.
    ○ Was sufficient time allocated to the process of working within the community’s governance, customs, and priorities?
    ○ Is respecting culture and customs included as part of your code of conduct? This will be addressed in Session 6 as well.
  Participant 1: No, our team currently does not have a code of conduct for interacting with Puerto Rico students and professionals.

- Acknowledged local communities / Indigenous tribes in your research results?
Participant 1: Yes. Just recently I have begun adding land acknowledgments to my peer-reviewed publications. And graduate students in our group have begun adding land acknowledgments to their presentations. This includes the Sami, Taino, and Abenaki and Pennacook.

Participant 2: Most recent student defense (MS student) included land acknowledgement

- Included local communities in your broader impacts in a meaningful way that builds on the community’s identified needs and concerns?

Participant 1: Yes, proposal development often includes broader impacts that engage undergraduate students from the University of Puerto Rico. We believe that these have been successful as multiple form Puerto Rican REU students are now in graduate school including both master’s and PhD programs. These efforts are in specific response to student concerns including identifying and developing opportunities off the island of Puerto Rico so students can have a broader array of experiences.

- Did these efforts leverage community members, and was that work compensated appropriately?

Participant 1: Yes, our group works specifically with faculty at the University of Puerto Rico to identify interested students. These individuals are often co-PI or senior personnel on grants and have a long-history of working and publishing through the LTER program.

- Considered and prioritized research questions and research locations based on needs of local communities, in addition to how impactful they are seen within academia?

Participant 1: The history of work in Puerto Rico has focused on understanding the rainforest ecosystem. However, we are making new efforts over the last few years to increase the amount of work happening in and around cities in Puerto Rico more directly tying into water quality. While this is an impactful question within academia, it is also an identified concern of multiple Puerto Ricans including young students.

Participant 2: Yes, for example the wastewater treatment plant in Dover example above. Previously did nitrogen measurements throughout Oyster R. watershed for Durham as part of permit planning.
Below are two short personal reflections. These come from pod participants who did not feel like they could adequately address the more individually focused prompts above. Both individuals opted to write short reflective pieces as part of this deliverable.

Individual Reflective Essay #1:

For me, it was not appropriate to answer line by line because I would simply be saying “no, but I want to” and that would give an incomplete story. I did my PhD research out of a field station located on the ancestral hunting grounds of the Nunamiut, and occasional hunting grounds and routes of the Gwich’in, Koyukuk, and Inupiaq peoples. But, at the time, I wasn’t thinking about the Earth as a partnership between people and nature, but rather, I was there as the “observer-reporter” and felt that it was my job to understand the impacts of climate change on this delicate landscape, but my viewpoint was from the perspective of the landscape and the degradation is was undergoing. Doing research at a field station didn’t challenge this approach, which I find is was fairly typical of white, environmentally-leaning folks. In fact, I left Arctic/permafrost science for agricultural science in my postdoc because I didn’t feel like my permafrost work had enough direct relevance to humans (beyond the huge implications of the permafrost-climate feedback, which no one cared about at the time and I was getting discouraged). So, while I guess I was opening my eyes to doing more human-integrated work, I still was seeing the Arctic as a vast, mostly human-less space rather than the culturally-rich land that it is.

In the last few years, I have recognized the importance of working with local communities as partners in science. I think that mentally my transformation has expanded from the “observer-reporter” to the “helper” to the “partner.” (And, I recognize that being a “helper” is not “helping” and that, in fact, it is quite insulting to imply that anyone who is part of a people who have lived with the landscape of the Arctic for millenia would need my help. But, in full transparency, that is a stage I went through mentally. In discussions—mostly with other white colleagues, but also through learning and listening sessions like this and others—I have recognized this approach is rooted in colonialism and the worldview that I, a white woman, bring to science.

I now endeavor to build collaborative partnerships with people local to my work. I am currently in a learning phase, partially paralyzed by questioning whether I have enough to bring to the table to deserve the time of the local, Indigenous community members, but also intentionally slow while I strive to read the texts produced by Arctic locals about their concerns (both about the local environment, but also about environmental scientists). My current approach to begin to understand this was to transform one of my classes into a large reading group on this topic. In doing so, I also hope to bring awareness to the 15 early career environmental scientists in my class about how environmental scientists can work with locals and how we can transform our way of seeing the environment from humans as observers to humans as parts of the system. I also hope that we all come away with some sense of how (western) environmental scientists can be
true partners with Indigenous people. I am not even sure what this looks like, because as written I still see an “othering” in my language that I don’t intend, but I aim to keep learning and keeping my mind open.

So in short, I have not worked with local communities to identify concerns or work together. But, I am trying to read all the various texts that have been produced about building meaningful relationships with Arctic Indigenous communities (who currently feel inundated by inauthentic requests for collaborations with colonial scientists). Following this, I hope to know the best approach for working (meaningfully, as partners) with Indigenous communities so that I can begin.

Individual Reflective Essay #2:

Similar to the individual above, I did not feel equipped to answer the specific questions they laid out in the deliverable. I have not collaborated with Indigenous communities while doing research on unceded, occupied Indigenous lands (including both in the field at Harvard Forest, which is located on the traditional unceded lands of the Wabanaki peoples, and at UNH, which is located on unceded and occupied lands of the Pennacook, Abenaki and Wabanaki peoples). One thing I am currently reflecting on is how most of the conversations I have heard about non-Indigenous researchers collaborating with Indigenous communities revolve around research happening in Alaska and the Arctic. I have been reflecting on how this ignores and distances us from our own occupation of unceded Indigenous lands here at UNH. This distances us from the need to interrogate our own positionalities and responsibilities here. By making a land acknowledgement, we make an important first step towards acknowledging the violent and racist history of white people in this country in murdering, excluding, subjugating and disenfranchising Indigenous communities to reinforce the accumulation of wealth and resources with white people. However, I feel like often when we make land acknowledgements, the history is over-emphasized. Settler colonialism is a useful theory for understanding the manifestations of colonization/colonialism today, as it explains the ways in which settler colonialism “persists long after obvious forms of colonialism and their structure are dismantled” (Taylor, 2016). What responsibilities do we have to the Pennacook, Abenaki and Wabanaki peoples today? How can we collaborate with these peoples as researchers and as a University today? In a webinar hosted by the University of British Colombia, Dr. Robin Wall Kimmerer discussed how universities “own” large areas of indigenous land, and thus hold access to this land, and financial resources, which allow them to ask research questions which are motivated by largely non-Indigenous scholars. Kimmerer reveals this tension to emphasize that “Indigenous neighbors hold a very small fraction of land that belongs to them on which to teach their children,” and she underscores that Indigenous folks in the community also have questions about natural resources, stewarding the land, research etc. that they would like to answer, yet they don’t have access to the same land and resources. Kimmerer discusses collaborative access and land sharing as one path forward. These are all things that I would like to continue learning more about. I have also been interested
in learning more about ways in which Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Indigenous ways of knowing could be incorporated into curriculum and pedagogy. However, I want to acknowledge that I am not yet sure what my place as a white person is in learning about and trying to incorporate this knowledge. As many Indigenous scholars point out, non-Indigenous people have a tendency to incorporate Indigenous ways of knowing and TEK in an “extractive” way (*sensu* Zoe Todd) in ways that are fragmented that serve/fit within their white/Eurocentric frameworks without fully understanding the lineages of these concepts (*sensu* Robin Wall Kimmerer; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Kim TallBear).

- This Twitter thread was very eye opening for me, and discusses the limits of and popularity of Kimmerer’s *Braiding Sweetgrass* with white audiences: [https://twitter.com/ZoeSTodd/status/1356658436872626176](https://twitter.com/ZoeSTodd/status/1356658436872626176)

Related to this week’s deliverable topic of working with communities of color, the other work that I am doing towards this goal is reading and thinking regularly about theories and actionable ways to center those theories in curriculum and pedagogy (as a graduate student my roles in teaching and mentoring are limited, but I am thinking about the roles I do play now, as well as future work as an educator). Some of the theories that I have been learning about are critical race theory, Black feminism, Black queer feminism, queer theory, critical and inclusive pedagogies, historically responsive literacy/education, abolitionist teaching, agitation literacies.