URGE Policies for Working with Communities of Color for University/Organization - Example Deliverable

This is what was found by Earth and Environmental Sciences at Lehigh University 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.*

Our pod discussed a variety of experiences between faculty, graduate students, post-docs, and undergraduate students revolving around interactions with communities of color in our research and/or work. Some of our members have experience with international students in their work and working with indigenous communities in their research. However, our group reached an overall consensus that our university and program does not interact and bring local indigenous communities into our work enough. Additionally, we agreed that we do need to do more land acknowledgement in our academic spaces. We decided to omit individual experiences with communities of color as a group from the deliverable and focus on what we discussed as steps for improvement.

We discussed the following list of possible improvements to include BIPOC communities more into our spaces divided into sections revolving around *land acknowledgements, indigenous community outreach, and inclusivity in the curriculum*. We want to begin to encourage land acknowledgement in the beginning of classes, oral presentations, and/or whenever such acknowledgement can be suitable by given (e.g. visiting speakers, symposiums). We also want to incorporate them more into the lab component of our program, doing them in the beginning of field labs and camp. Lastly, we want to include them in academic papers.

We also talked about the ways in which we can reach out to BIPOC communities and organizations more as part of our research and work. We hope to visit one of the indigenous peoples’ centers that are associated with the lands that our field lamp takes place on. We found this
link that can be helpful for that: https://www.nps.gov/americanindian/. We also want to invite more indigenous speakers and voices to our seminar series. We talked about the possibility of having our honoraria be offered to BIPOC speakers primarily.

Lastly, our discussion focused on the ways in which we can improve our programs curriculum to include more indigenous texts and perspectives as well as environmental justice case studies, activities, and projects. We agreed that the inclusion of these topics will create a more inclusive classroom and anti-racist curriculum. We also thought about encouraging faculty to apply for grants that Lehigh offers to explore syllabi expansions, changes, and experiments to include units on Indigenous perspectives, history of settler colonialism and its effect on the environment, as well as environmental justice case studies. Our group also thought it would be helpful to create small grants or broader impact budget items that support BIPOC guest speakers and speaking series. On the larger scale, we thought about proposing to make taking an environmental studies course mandatory or count for some EES credits to encourage interdisciplinary learning and classes focused on the social science aspect of the environment. In the long term, as a pod, we want to educate the graduate and undergraduate student body by offering an annual seminar given by a speaker identified through URGE and have a curriculum design workshop for EES faculty on how to best include anti-racist, decolonization, and traditional ecologic knowledge content in courses.

We acknowledged that these are a lot of ideas for improvement within our program and want to start with smaller feasible steps such as land acknowledgement and continue these conversations to propose and formulate the larger ideas.