Working with Communities of Color - UF Geosciences

This is what was found by the UF Geosciences Pod at the University of Florida on Policies for Working with Communities of Color as well as plans for improved processes and/or needed resources.

Audit of previous interactions with communities of color:

This report was compiled by sending an email out to the faculty list serve for feedback. Follow-up emails were sent to individuals that are known to do international field work regularly.

Current or recent international research projects

UF Geology has ongoing or recent research projects in Greenland, India and Costa Rica. The following is a summary of feedback from researchers that have participated in these trips:

- India: (from a grad student researcher) Interactions with Indian colleagues are focused on science and collaboration, with meaningful interactions and inclusion in research. Interacting with the broader communities we visit has many layers of complexity, including the positionality and role of the researcher doing field work, language barriers between our team and the communities we visit, language barriers between our Indian colleagues and local groups, and cultural differences with regards to field work, etiquette, and societal roles of individuals.

- Greenland: We have a growing group of researchers (undergraduates, graduate students and faculty) working out of two communities, Kangerlussuaq and Sisimiut. We have actively worked to build partnership by traveling to Nuuk to meet with governmental agencies, such as Asiaq (the Greenlandic Survey) and the Mineral License and Safety Authority, and the Greenland Institute of Natural Resources. We’ve also met with officials in the local communities (the Qeqqata Kommunia) to let them know what we are working on and exchange data about water quality and chemistry. Scientists from Asiaq are collaborators on our active grant in the area and have been co-authors on several publications. We also built strong relationships with people in the communities who have helped us as citizen scientists. Our permits include information about interactions with the local wildlife and preservation of ancient cultural remains.
Current or recent research on indigenous lands or in predominantly non-white communities within the US.

- Research is commonly done in western states including Idaho and New Mexico (where field camp is held). As best as we could determine, no acknowledgement, consultation or collaboration with local tribes has happened in the past on these projects. However, field camp does have a code of conduct that clearly outlines that permission is obtained for all work on tribal lands, and the expectation that students will respect tribal boundaries and practice a “leave no trace” approach to field work in culturally sensitive areas.

Outreach & collaboration activities with local communities of color

- UF Geology has an active role in the local chapter of SACNAS, supporting Latinx and Native American students and faculty.
- Many years ago, outreach events a Lincoln High School, a predominantly Black public school where regularly done, but seem to have stopped at some point. It is unclear why these activities stopped.
- Attempted collaboration with UF Chapter of the National Society of Black Engineers via email twice to initiate a conversation or colloquium about a lack of diversity in geosciences. Their first response in mid-2020 was positive, interested in having a conversation in the Spring of 21. We will continue to try and build a relationship with their group if they are open to the idea.
- Our Graduate student leaders have reached out to the Black Student Union on Instagram about having a dialogue with our Dept. (and maybe having a recruiting thing once we get back to in-person), but have not heard back. BSU doesn’t have an email listed publicly, but UF does have a portal if we want to contact their group (or any other student group) https://orgs.studentinvolvement.ufl.edu/Organizations

- What worked well in these interactions?
  - **India**: When we are sampling we do talk with people and if they're curious we explain to them the goal of the work.
  - **Greenland**: Reaching out to interested/invested individuals, sharing what we are working on and engaging with aspects of their ongoing work that is relevant to us as well.

- What did not work well, and how can this be better addressed in future plans?
  - **Greenland**: Trying to build relationships through email. Sitting down and talking to people has been essential.

Improving how we work with communities of color

- Are there ways to improve the outcome of projects already undertaken?
○ **US indigenous communities:** In the future, we will encourage our researchers to include local place names in teaching materials and publications. When appropriate, we will seek permission ahead of time for any work conducted on lands with tribal ownership, oversight or cultural ties.

○ **Greenland:** We are trying to engage with local school teachers. The timing of summer field work doesn’t not match their academic schedule well and many of the teachers come from Denmark on only stay for a few years. Finding a way to build these contacts would be beneficial.

- **Are there specific resources or guidelines that are needed to improve the process for planning ahead and working with communities of color?**
  ○ A guiding document, developed by the department, could be a valuable reference for department members planning field campaigns. This could be developed collaboratively with the DEI, Field, and Executive Committee.
  ○ Once the guiding document is in place, we would propose a brief summary of how the project leaders have address the considerations in the guiding document in a meaningful way be submitted to department leadership in the early stages of planning. This document could be reviewed, with suggestions for improvement, if needed. This will ensure we build healthy relationships with local communities and each of our researchers are representing our department in a responsible and culturally sensitive way.

**Action Items from this deliverable:**

- Work with department leadership to assign a team to create the guiding document for field work and community interaction.
- Once the guiding document has been created, distribute to faculty. It could also be sent out again as a reminder at the start of summer when most people conduct field work.