

URGE

Unlearning Racism in Geoscience



URGE Policies for Working with Communities of Color for UMass Geosciences

This is what was found by the Geosciences Department at University of Massachusetts Amherst 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:**

We reviewed experiences working with communities of color and provided a number of examples of work and interactions. These are summarized below.

- One faculty member shared an example of work as an undergraduate as a mapper for a gold mining company in Peru. Mine development in the region tended to drain water from beneath extremely high altitude very dry valleys, depleting the scarce water resources for meagre native grasses and sheep tended by the native population, their only source of sustenance and survival. When fieldwork was threatened by slingshots, the company promised (temporary) work for locals digging trenches and such, but ultimately contributed little to nothing toward the wellbeing of the native community. Mapping work never incorporated this community, and its outcome would have an outsized effect on them.
 - Knowing this, the faculty member now strives to examine existing conditions and communities BEFORE engaging in such a project, and working toward mutually beneficial and restorative ends for all parties to any such development.
- Another faculty member reflected on public service and research. Modeling earthquake hazards of southern California with physical and numerical can seem disconnected to people. However, press releases about papers get picked up by local media and this does inform the community. I often dread taking those interviews because I struggle sometimes to explain my science at the popular level. Now, in



Unlearning Racism in Geoscience

reflecting that this is one of the few ways that my research connects with the local community and I will value this more.

- A graduate student reflected on their work in another cultural context. When I was writing my proposal to do research (including fieldwork) in Norway, I worked closely with collaborators at the Norwegian university which would serve as my host institution. I assumed that they were familiar with the regional community specifics, and trusted them to bring up any requirements for permissions, opportunities for knowledge sharing, etc. when I raised those questions as we were planning the project. So when they told me that there was a community of indigenous Sámi living in the area where we would be conducting fieldwork, but that there was no need to arrange anything in advance because of Norway's right-to-roam laws and because they were "used to having geologists visit" I didn't question it--after all, I was the visitor, and they were the experts. During our fieldwork we had plenty of opportunities to interact with the community, and would discuss what we were doing if they asked, but didn't go out of our way to do so. The other members of our field group were much more concerned with making sure the people hiking there on holiday were aware and supportive of our presence. While I still don't really know how my experience stands in terms of compliance with norms and best practices within the Norwegian system, it made me wonder how things would go if the roles were reversed; if someone coming from another country to do research, in full collaboration with US academics, could they trust their "local" hosts to consider the social justice landscape of the study area? Or can students learn effectively from their professors and advisors to model each step of the research process? Likely not, since ignoring the local communities (or worse) has been the overwhelming historical norm for so long, and as long as academia remains a predominantly white space it will continue that way.
- Moving forward, our department recognizes the need to do some sort of departmental monitoring of interactions department members have with communities of color. Many communities are probably invisible to the scientists working in them from our department, and there is currently no way to track these interactions.
- **What worked well in these interactions?**
 - Reaching out to colleagues 1-on-1 to discuss place names, donating leftover field food to community members or groups, sending follow-up information and announcements about any papers/talks, connecting on a personal level when possible (e.g. bring a gift, offer to take people for a meal after/during fieldwork, invite them to visit, attend any presentations they might be giving, offer to share information about groups they work with...and many more possibilities!). It also helps to be prepared; having short project summaries (with your contact info) that you can



Unlearning Racism in Geoscience

hand out if people are curious about what you're doing is a great way to engage with the local community, even if you already have permission to work there. Spend money in the community when possible; shop in their grocery stores, eat in their restaurants, rent gear locally, and always stop at the roadside fruit stands!

- **What did not work well, and how can this be better addressed in future plans?**
 - Don't sneak around - ask permission not forgiveness for access to land, resources
 - Don't 'take' from a community - but give and integrate the community in all work
 - UMass has an "extractive" reputation in the community for researching our surroundings and giving nothing back - in Extension, we are trying to use more PAR-like approaches and make sure that if we're asking a community for something (information, interviews, etc.) that we give something back (best practices, lectures, outreach materials)
 - Maps showing property lines can be out of date. Hunting apps are accurate, frequently-updated, and easy to verify that you're not trespassing on someone's property. I've used i-Hunting and can recommend it.
 - Clear communication is the key to a successful field trip! Students should know what to expect (and really know, as in have detailed conversations with people signing up for field courses, not just sending an email, and overnight fieldwork should be preceded by 1-on-1 conversations about the food situation, what to pack, potential hazards and stress factors, emergency procedures, and addressing any particular concerns of the student). I also appreciate taking short non-geology detours; why not schedule bathroom stops to coincide at historical or cultural points of interest?
- **Are there ways to improve the outcome of projects already undertaken?**
 - As we've been working on cranberry bog restorations and researching the history of this food, I have been including specific reference to indigenous cultivation in the region in our presentations. In addition, I am currently reaching out to current tribal leaders who may be connected to cranberries, to solicit feedback on the significance of this crop, the meaning of "restoration" in their view, and how to incorporate their voices into a statewide, state-agency-led initiative to restore these lands.
 - Attend local and Indigenous scientific conferences such as the Shifting Season Summit to engage with tribal scientists already working in the same areas.
- **Are there specific resources or guidelines that are needed to improve the process for planning ahead and working with communities of color?**
 - We need to proliferate the resources for contacting indigenous leaders, the resources and databases for soliciting indigenous speakers and scholars, and



Unlearning Racism in Geoscience

recruiting students and faculty and staff applicants from communities of color. These should be linked to our department website, and rigorously consulted for each recruitment effort when it is initiated.

- Ask communities of color what do they need? How can we help you?
- Develop an inclusive process ahead of working with communities of color.