



Unlearning Racism in Geoscience



UBURGE DELIVERABLE 6: CODE OF CONDUCT AND SAFETY PLAN

Education is essential but action is also imperative for achieving the objectives of URGE. Therefore, each URGE topic is paired with deliverables for individual pods to draft and share. This deliverable is a safety plan, whether you work in a laboratory or in remote field settings.

Consider spaces in your organization as well as in the broader geosciences that have barriers to access for people of color. Much of the attention on this topic has been regarding field work⁴ but this also applies to spaces closer to home, e.g. a Black graduate student walking home late from lab work may be more likely to be stopped and questioned by police. Consider that Black, Brown, Indigenous, and other people of color will face different challenges from one another.

Deliverable: Develop and publish a safety plan specific to your pod (lab, university, organization).

1. This plan includes a code of conduct, as well as a process for reporting violations, as covered in our Complaints and Reporting Policy deliverable from Session 2.
2. This plan describes training resources that are available and requirements for antidiscrimination, bystander intervention, and de-escalation training.
3. For field work, we include a broad-scoped, department level safety plan that should be adjusted for individual labs. Included in the safety plan are tips for researchers to reduce risk, tips to reduce risks for at-risk individuals, procedures for documenting incidents in the field. This safety plan can (and should be) a work in progress that is revisited and refined.

- Example Safety Plan: (Demery & Pipkin, 2021)
www.preprints.org/manuscript/202008.0021/6
- Example Code of Conduct: [Basin Research Group](#) (under “Inclusivity and Diversity”)
- More Resources: https://serc.carleton.edu/advancegeo/resources/field_work.html

1. Code of Conduct

Overview

We value the participation of every member of our community and want to ensure everyone has an enjoyable and fulfilling experience, both professionally and personally. Accordingly, all members of the UB Geology Department are expected to show respect and courtesy to others at all times. We create our culture and our culture is inclusive.

While department level code of conducts are important, lab-specific code of conducts are essential. The department level code of conduct may be used as a starting point for lab-specific codes, but should be critically reviewed and adapted to suit each lab. By creating a lab-specific code, the type of lab/fieldwork, size of the lab group, and spaces the lab group gathers and field work is conducted may be adequately addressed to fit the needs of all lab members. We present a departmental code of conduct that can be used as both a guide to lab-specific codes, and also a framework to work within should incidents escalate beyond the lab group.

This code includes conduct related to inclusivity, mental health, outputs and publications, communication, and social media. Lastly, we define our reporting policy once more. Please note that this code of conduct is not a legal document, and supplements, but does not override university policies for your level of employment or study.

Inclusivity and diversity

Enjoyable, high-quality research can only be conducted when you feel safe, secure, and supported. All group members are thus dedicated to a harassment-free experience for everyone, regardless of gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, disability, physical appearance, body size, race, age, and/or religion. We do not tolerate harassment by and/or of members of our group in any form.

In addition to making group members feel safe and secure, diversity and inclusivity has numerous benefits to us all. Put simply, the greater the mix of people in our group, the greater the mix of skills, experiences, perspectives, and ideas we can collectively draw on. But the benefits of diversity and equality cannot be fully achieved without creating an inclusive environment.

We ask all members of the community to conform to the following Code of Conduct related to Inclusivity:

- All communication, be it online or in person, should be appropriate for a professional audience, and be considerate of people from different cultural backgrounds. Sexual language and imagery is not appropriate at any time.
- Be kind to others and do not insult or put down other group members.
- Behave professionally. Remember that harassment and sexist, racist, homophobic, transphobic or exclusionary jokes are not appropriate.
- Belligerent, intimidating activity or words, and harassment will not be tolerated. Harassment includes offensive verbal comments related to gender, sexual orientation, disability, physical appearance, body size, race, religion, sexual images in public spaces, deliberate intimidation, stalking, following, harassing photography or recording, sustained disruption of discussions, inappropriate physical contact, and unwelcome sexual attention.

- Participants asked to stop any harassing or objectionable behavior are expected to comply immediately.
- Contribute to discussions in meetings with a constructive, positive approach.
- Be mindful of talking over others when discussing in groups, and be willing to hear out the ideas of others.
- At the beginning of long fieldwork trips/ field camp, have an open and honest discussion about the group's commitment to respecting others, creating an inclusive environment, and the severity of a breach in these guidelines. Drafting a 'group norms' document before field camp could be both an effective icebreaker and a space to foster trusting relationships with peers. An example that can be adapted for undergraduate and graduate students can be found here:
https://cwsei.ubc.ca/sites/default/files/cwsei/resources/instructor/Setting-Group-Work-Norms_Activity_Wieman.pdf

Mental Health

There is increasing evidence that certain attributes of academic research, including graduate-level studies, may challenge your mental health. Specific factors driving this include:

- Low pay and quality-of-life issues
- Feelings of isolation in your research; e.g. everyone has their own topic and it can often feel as if you are working on your own
- Uncertainty in your research, although it should be noted that, in research of all kinds, it is not just the outcomes that are uncertain, but the questions themselves!
- Uncertainty in your post-graduate career
- So-called “negative results”; i.e. at some point in your research it is likely that certain questions will be more challenging to answer than anticipated, or that you will feel you have spent days/months/years toiling with little to show
- Burnout; i.e. feeling the need to work endless hours to make up for the above issues, and the subsequent exhaustion
- The feeling that you're not as qualified to be here or have somehow undeservingly made it to where you are (“Imposter Syndrome”). Please see reading below for more on re-defining this 'syndrome'.

All graduate students come across most of these issues at some level. It's strongly encouraged that everyone take an active and pre-emptive approach towards the maintenance of their mental health. If there is anything that is placing undue stress, or preventing peak potential, please do contact postgraduate tutors in the department, the dean of graduate studies, or other resources on campus. These resources include:

Individual and group counseling:

<https://www.buffalo.edu/studentlife/life-on-campus/health/mental-well-being/counseling.html>

Make an appointment and crisis hotline:

<https://www.buffalo.edu/studentlife/life-on-campus/health/mental-well-being/counseling/appointment.html>

Resources to learn more about burn out, imposter syndrome, and mental health challenges during graduate school:

Burnout: <https://www.colorado.edu/today/2018/11/28/dealing-burnout-grad-student>

“Imposter Syndrome”: <https://hbr.org/2021/02/stop-telling-women-they-have-imposter-syndrome>

Outputs, publication expectations and standards

Authorship on any manuscript or presentation will be openly discussed in group meetings and should, if possible, include everyone who has made a significant contribution to the work. A “significant contribution” can include but is not limited to, interpretations of primary data and development of ideas presented in the work; it need not include data curation or financial contribution to the work undertaken. The order of authors on a manuscript or presentation should be dictated by the relative contribution made by each author; in the case these contributions are equal, authors should be listed alphabetically by surname.

Papers must be shown to and receive formal approval from all co-authors prior to submission; this is consistent with guidance provided by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), who state that all authors must approve submission of work bearing their names. Please give co-authors at least two weeks to comment on paper drafts; at busy times of the year, they may need longer. We also strongly suggest that the paper receives reviews from at least two colleagues prior to submission to your supervisors; this will help improve the final product, as well as providing a training opportunity. If using confidential, company-provided datasets, confidentiality agreements usually require permission from these companies to publish their data, and that they must have at least 28 days to provide approval. Explicit permission must be sought for every paper; i.e. images approved for use in one paper may not be approved for a different paper. Upon acceptance (or rejection) of your paper, you must inform all coauthors of the outcome as soon as possible and ensure all co-authors get a chance to look at and comment on page proofs

Conferences/Meeting

Most graduate students will present their research findings to other scientists at conferences or other meetings. These conferences will often take place away from the University at Buffalo and the lab space. This code of conduct must be maintained while at conferences; while students are not on UB property, they are still representing UB.

Communication

Where possible, avoid sending work-related emails outside of 8 am and 6 pm. Gmail provides a function for scheduling emails, such that they can be sent within the hours stated above. Please give consideration to the timing of the email with respect to what the recipient needs to do; for example, try not to send an email at 5:59 pm for something that is required for a 10 am meeting the next day. No lab members are required nor should feel obliged to reply to email outside of their typical work hours. However, prompt replies to emails, within these times, are helpful.

Social media

In your work-related life, you may wish to engage with social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram). Please be considerate of others when using these platforms, and respectful for how others may wish to use them. For example, given the very public nature of interactions on social media many people (who may not be on a specific platform) will read and hear of online correspondence. We are not compelled to engage with any social media, use any such media for work-related purposes, and we will never pressure each other to ‘friend’ or ‘follow’ each other.

Reporting

Reporting incidents of harassment or inappropriate behavior varies depending on setting.

- On campus or in the local area, incidents may be reported to the graduate club grievance officer or director of graduate studies (DGS). These individuals will connect people with additional resources, and may coordinate mediation if desired.
DGS (current):
<https://arts-sciences.buffalo.edu/geology/faculty-staff/faculty/christopher-lowry.html>
- On campus, incidents can also be reported to the Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI). EDI may connect people with additional resources and support, but depending on the nature of the incident, they may be required to take action regardless of the desires of the person reporting. It is also important to note that EDI will involve campus police in incidents.
EDI: <https://www.buffalo.edu/equity.html>
- At field camp and on official field trips, incidents should be reported to teaching assistants or faculty, who can offer accommodations and support, and may coordinate mediation if appropriate. Due to the remote nature of some trips, it may not be feasible to report incidents to EDI, although they may be reported at a later time if needed. Serious violations of the student code of conduct while on an official field trip or at field camp will be grounds for dismissal.

This Code of Conduct (CoC) borrows heavily and is modified from open source CoCs: (i) BahlaiLab CoC (Christine Bahlai); (ii) WhitakerLab (Kirstie Whitaker); (iii) Hill Lab (Jon Hill); (iv) Krevorlab (Sam Krevor); (v) MicroMicEng (Ben Britton); and (vi) Basin Research Group (Chris Jackson).

This CoC is released as CC-BY 4.0

2. Safety Plan

Below is a list of actions to minimize risk and danger while in the field compiled from researchers, supervisors, and institutional authorities from numerous affiliations. These strategies are used to augment basic safety best practices. Furthermore, the actions can be used in concert with each other and are flexible with regards to the field site and the risk level to the researcher. These strategies are not comprehensive; rather, they can be tailored to a researcher's situation.

We acknowledge that it is an unfair burden that at-risk populations must take additional precautions to protect themselves. We therefore encourage institutions, departments, and supervisors to collectively work to minimize these harms by: 1) meeting with all trainees to discuss these guidelines, and maintaining the accessibility of these guidelines and additional resources; 2) fostering a department-wide discussion on safety during fieldwork for all researchers; 3) urge supervisors to create and integrate contextualized safety guidelines for researchers in lab, departmental, and institutional resources.

UB requires that all graduate student employees, faculty, and staff take antidiscrimination and anti-harassment training annually. Field camp teaching assistants, faculty and staff are also required to attend supplemental antidiscrimination

training facilitated by EDI. Training can be scheduled by contacting the EDI office (<https://www.buffalo.edu/equity.html>), and enrollment is offered automatically to UB employees on an annual basis. We suggest that all students, faculty and staff should participate in antidiscrimination training (through EDI or otherwise). UB also requires bystander intervention training and sexual assault prevention training annually for all students, offered through Catharsis Online and EVERFI, respectively. Currently there is no training required or offered specifically for conflict de-escalation. First aid training is required for field camp teaching assistants, faculty and staff, facilitated by the Red Cross. First aid courses are offered on campus and in the community regularly, and are suggested for anyone planning to do field work.

What can researchers do to minimize risk to themselves on a field site?

1. Talk with colleagues and supervisors about the risks, preparations to minimize risk, and reporting mechanisms. Be aware that the conversation will likely be difficult and will require mental and emotional readiness by both parties. If a supervisor is dismissive of this conversation, individuals should be informed that they can and should reach out to additional mentors, institutional or industry advocates (e.g., ombudsman, Equal Employment Opportunity officer, Diversity and Inclusion administrators, Student Disability Services, or other trusted professionals to have this conversation).
2. The scale of risk can be higher at international field sites (e.g., identities may be criminalized). It is expected for PIs to be aware of these risks before bringing students on international trips to these countries. At minimum, be aware of and abide by any international laws and customs in addition to local foreign laws, current political situations, actual degree of law enforcement, and mandate a conversation between researcher and supervisor to establish an emergency contingency plan.
3. Contact others (especially those who share an at-risk identity) that have previously used a field site at a location where there is a history of risk. It is recommended that researchers document all known cases of risk at that location, and make a risk-mitigation plan in response.
4. Take advantage of training opportunities to increase field safety and promote awareness (e.g., self-defense courses, first aid, safety aids, cultural history courses about the location of the field site).
5. Know who manages the field site(s) and inform the field managers when/where you will be at those locations.
6. Introduce yourself to the neighbors surrounding the field property, or leave a short note informing neighbors about research being conducted in the general area (leave out exact locations if possible) and who will be conducting the research. Include official

contact information, such as an email that clearly demonstrates affiliation with the research institution to provide additional credibility. If possible, know where you will encounter fences or gates, and the statuses of these barriers. Always leave gates as you found them (open gates stay open, closed gates stay closed).

7. Engage in fieldwork with another person, when possible. When this is not possible, have a point of contact (preferably the supervisor) who is aware of your whereabouts and expected schedule on a given day. A written communication plan that gives notice of field plans is another way to maintain communication with a point of contact.

8. Always carry credentials in case someone challenges why you are at the field site. These include photo ID (driver's license, passports, institution ID), and relevant permits. Any additional form of identification that clearly demonstrates affiliation with the research institution can also be helpful (i.e., University apparel, institution bumper stickers/car magnets, etc.).

9. While in the field, trust your intuition; your judgment of the risks of a given situation should always be respected. If you feel unsafe, you always have the ability to stop and discuss the situation with supervisors, or to stop completely.

10. Dress appropriately for field conditions and bring safety gear. Typically, long pants and long sleeves are encouraged, even in hot temperatures, due to vegetation, snakes and other wild animals, and sun exposure. Boots that cover your ankles are also recommended; typically tennis shoes (sneakers) do not provide enough protection and ankle support. Hats or other head coverings are useful for avoiding sun exposure. Always bring a raincoat, flashlight or headlamp, and plenty of water (several liters) into the field. A first aid kit and an emergency blanket are also recommended. Discuss field conditions and gear with your supervisor or with others that have experience in the area for specific guidance.

11. Stay away from extremely steep areas. If you have to use your hands to make upward progress, find a different route. While hiking on slopes, be careful of loose material. Avoid hiking directly above or below another person or group. If you must move directly below another person, ask them to remain still until you are out of the way. If you dislodge a rock or boulder, yell "Rock! Look out below!"; if you hear this in the field, seek shelter, and don't attempt to look upslope for the rock. Never attempt to deliberately dislodge a boulder to roll down a slope or off of a cliff.

11. Do not drink water from natural sources in the field without proper treatment and filtration. Do not use any open bodies of water for urination or defecation; bury any feces or toilet paper used in the field.

12. Many areas are subject to wildfires. Exercise extreme caution while smoking in the field; never throw a cigarette butt on the ground. If you make a campfire, clear the

ground around the fire at least 2 m in every direction, and always keep enough water nearby to put out the fire. Always put out a fire by drowning it completely; do not leave a lit or smoldering fire unattended.

13. If you are at high elevation during an electrical storm, move to lower elevation. If there is heavy precipitation, keep away from drainages to avoid flash flood hazards.

14. Follow local laws regarding alcohol and other substances. If you do consume alcohol, consume in moderation, and exercise caution, particularly in desert and high elevation areas, as dehydration and elevation can lower your normal tolerance.

15. For more background on camping gear and what equipment is helpful for staying safe and comfortable in the field, REI's "Intro to Camping" series is a good place to start: [<https://www.rei.com/learn/expert-advice/camping-for-beginners.html>]

Additionally, the Take the Truck blog:

[<https://www.takethetruck.com/blog/bathing-while-camping-and-traveling>] is a good resource for bathing and hygiene options while in the field:

[<https://www.takethetruck.com/blog/camping-bathroom>]

16. If at any time you feel unsafe, you should contact your supervisor to discuss ways to modify the project. While supervisors work closely with researchers, they often do so outside of the field site, and therefore may not know of the risks and dangers therein encountered. It is paramount that at-risk individuals advocate for themselves.

In the event that an at-risk individual's supervisor is unwilling to help minimize risk, the individual should leverage available resources at their institution:

1. Have a support group for 1) reporting and documenting risk and 2) gathering witnesses to help showcase the level of threat. The support group might range from peers, a counselor, to established institutional services.
2. Report the risk and the supervisor, following the institution's established reporting policy or office (report to EDI or Director of Graduate Students). This report can include documentation of the risk (for example, recordings of a verbal altercation, written correspondence of an inactive supervisor, photo documentation of a slur, etc.).
3. Reach out to the departmental officer in charge of reporting situations to higher echelons of administration who would provide administrative and legal support for the researcher. There are laws in place to maintain the safety of researchers.

Environment and Safety Dept. at UB:

[<https://www.buffalo.edu/administrative-services/managing-facilities/environment-and-safety.html>]

To support an at-risk individual in minimizing risk:

1. Self-educate on the experience of your team member's identity, and the corresponding risk that they may encounter in the field. This does not involve asking researchers to relive trauma surrounding their identity as a source of education. Rather, use available resources to self-educate. First-person accounts and resource compilations are available. Furthermore, self-educate on the politics, demographics, and culture of the areas surrounding established field site(s), in order to be fully aware of potential risks.

Resources:

<https://urgeoscience.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/33/2021/03/Ten-Steps-to-Protect-BIPOC-Scholars-in-the-Field.pdf>

<https://urgeoscience.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/33/2021/03/Safe-Fieldwork-Strategies-for-At-Risk-Individuals.pdf>

<https://urgeoscience.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/33/2021/03/Mental-Health-in-the-Field.pdf>

2. BIPOC researchers may have specific needs in the field that supervisors are unaware of and unprepared to answer questions about. There are organizations and individuals who are working to promote outdoor activities within BIPOC communities, which may be a helpful resource when such issues arise. For example:

Outdoor Afro [<https://outdoorafro.com>],

Lauren R. Gay of the Outdoorsy Diva blog and Adventure is a Lifestyle facebook group <https://outdoorsydiva.com/camping-while-black-honest-conversation-on-race-in-outdoors/>

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/outdoorsydivaandfriends>

Melanin Base Camp

<https://www.melaninbasecamp.com>

For suggestions specific to hygiene and Black hair care, Reddit threads and subreddits such as the following represent active communities that researchers and supervisors can contact with additional questions.

https://www.reddit.com/r/blackladies/comments/rcpfuo/black_hair_and_camping_wilderness_backpacking/

https://www.reddit.com/r/camping/comments/m1kzhe/curly_hair_in_bear_country_please_advise/

<https://reddit.com/r/blackladies>

<https://reddit.com/r/camping>

<https://reddit.com/r/BlackHair>

3. Prior to fieldwork, contact relevant institutional offices for risk management on how to best manage risk in the field and identify resources for researchers to identify the social landscape in which the field site(s) is(are) situated and identify potential risks.
4. Create a field risk management plan that discusses risk at established field sites. This document should detail potential risks and identify mitigation(s) for that risk. This document should also act as a living document for recording safety incidents. Copies of these should be carried with fieldworkers on their person as well as left in the workplace/lab.
5. Provide materials to clearly identify researchers and their purpose (e.g., signs for vehicles and field sites, safety vests, etc.). These items should be provided for the researcher so that their use is easily implemented.
6. Have a conversation with all research team members on the risks and preparations to minimize risk. This can include a statement that certain demographics may be at higher risk, and that the supervisor is available to discuss with any researcher about concerns and proactive measures. Educational resources, such as this document should be made available to all researchers, who can then self-select to engage in a conversation about safety issues surrounding their specific identity(/ies).
7. Create a time and space to talk to research team members specifically about fieldwork safety concerns in advance of the field season, and touch base with them throughout the season to address new concerns. As a reminder, this is an uncomfortable reality and merits the need to establish a space and time for both parties (researcher and supervisor) to be ready and willing to engage in this important discussion.
8. Even after education, supervisors that do not share the same identity as their researchers will be unaware of all potential risk to researchers. If researchers bring up potential or experienced risk, validate their experiences and assist in modifying the project so that they can safely continue conducting research.
9. The scale of risk can increase dramatically in an international field site. At minimum, be aware of and abide by any international laws and customs in addition to local foreign laws, current political situations, actual degree of law enforcement, and mandate a conversation with the researcher. Furthermore, this conversation should include allies in the field - collaborators/supervisors at the international field site - to discuss any safety concerns that the researcher may not be aware of.
10. At established field sites, introduce researchers (via email or in-person) to the manager of those locations, if they exist. If there are multiple managers, researchers

should be introduced to each manager to minimize any miscommunication that could lead to increased risk.

11. When possible, show new researchers established field locations, teach them about the specific concerns of that field location, and inform them of the resources in accordance with established safety plans. The resources should have contact information about field site personnel relevant to research and safety (e.g., contact information of the local police department).

12. Assist researchers in establishing safe housing accommodations before arriving at the field location. A safe and secure housing location includes the following: researchers are able to secure food, safe travel to and from field sites, and supportive points of contact in the local community.

13. Review and agree upon fieldwork and safety plans with the researcher before any fieldwork begins.

14. Actively engage with researchers on how to reorganize fieldwork practices if and when there are restrictions on movement; for example, local ordinances limiting activity (i.e., curfew, stay-at-home orders, etc.).

Risk-management for at-risk individuals on the department level:

1. Make a general field safety, harassment training, bystander intervention, and first aid course available for all researchers to attend in the institution/department. Funding for additional training, in particular first aid training (which is not offered through the university), should be considered when PIs are writing grants.

2. Make a list of resources available about diversity in the sciences, barriers to entry in the sciences and safety concerns.

3. Regularly reevaluate all current department and institutional practices to remove barriers to inclusion in safety practices. Develop a proactive plan to alter detrimental (anti-inclusion and equity) practices and document the process to increase transparency of decision-making.

4. Inform and advise supervisors and research groups about the benefits of acting responsibly and with care, as well as legal and social ramifications if they fail to invest in researcher safety during university-sanctioned fieldwork.

5. Provide training to supervisors on how to be an effective mentor to diverse individuals. This training should provide clear lines of communication for anyone conducting fieldwork, regardless of the researcher's institutional affiliation (e.g., a visiting researcher working with faculty and field sites managed by the institution).

6. Ensure field course locations and housing are appropriate, safe, and equitable for all identities. Solicit regular, anonymized feedback from field researchers to determine the climate and safety of field sites and accommodations, engage supervisors in responding to this feedback, and make all anonymized reports widely available.
7. Ensure that all department- or institution-managed field sites are clearly labeled as a part of the institution. On this signage, include acceptable activities allowed at such locations (e.g., birdwatching, dog walking, no public access).
8. Supply an official letter of support for researchers doing fieldwork with contact information. This provides additional credibility to the researcher, if and when they are approached and challenged.