RECOMMENDATIONS FOR UNIT-SPECIFIC SAFETY PLANS
VIRGINIA INSTITUTE OF MARINE SCIENCE / WILLIAM & MARY

The VIMS/W&M URGE Pod includes representatives of six academic departments across two campuses, two VIMS "centers", and multiple academic and academic-support offices. The needs for JEDI-focused field, lab, or campus safety plans will differ for each of these, relative to their activities, roles, responsibilities, and focal areas. Thus, in place of a comprehensive, pod-wide "safety plan", we present here recommendations for unit-specific plans. It is the intent that these be broadly shared among the VIMS and W&M Geo communities to motivate and be incorporated into plans designed later (*e.g.*, Summer 2021) by individual Principal Investigators (PIs), Department Heads, or other unit leadership.

I. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INCLUSION IN A UNIT "CODE OF CONDUCT"

VIMS and W&M Geology both have overarching "Principles of Community": see here and here, respectively. Additional considerations for unit (e.g., lab group, office) Codes of Conduct are:

- Include reporting guidelines for issues in code of conduct (*e.g.*, to institution or PI), but also provide a specific option for when reporting the PI is necessary written in the code of conduct. This fosters accountability and that no single person is all-authoritative/infallible.
- Departmental consistency on individual field and lab Codes of Conduct,
    - Each should cover points of physical safety as well as emotional/cultural support, guided by overarching principles of DEI.
    - All should contain a common reporting structure.

II. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FIELD SAFETY PLANS

Engagement in the "field" is a central aspect of much (though certainly not all) of geo- and marine sciences. This can include both data-collection "field work" (day trips, multi-day field campaigns [local/international], research cruises, vessel operations) and field-based education (day or multi-night field trips; multi-week field camps, etc). Recommendations for items that should be incorporated in, or considered for, field safety plans for field work, field trips, conference and meeting travel, etc. are given below.

- ***Considerations in advance of field work / education trip (location choice & preparation):***
    - When a choice exists, choose field locations with accessibility in mind. A variety of sites can provide educational learning opportunities at varying comfort levels.
    - Racial risk assessment: PIs should research historical/present-day racial conflicts that may exist in any location field work is to be done, and plan accordingly (or choose a different field location if deemed too dangerous for any member of the team). PIs should also take antidiscrimination training to help them identify/learn ways to address potential verbal, nonverbal, and physical threats BIPOC may face in the field.
    - For international fieldwork or field courses, PIs should research the legal implications (e.g., prison sentence, deportation, etc.) of being LGBTQ in that country (see https://ilga.org/maps-sexual-orientation-laws). No one should feel pressured to conduct research in a country where their identity puts them at risk with the legal system.
    - Provide training for dangerous situations so all lab members feel more prepared if faced with the situation (ex: BIPOC being harassed/threatened by police or passers-by). There is value in thinking about and practicing an action plan ahead of time -- just in case.

    - Provide for and encourage bystander intervention. (https://www.ihollaback.org/bystander-resources/). Have an exit plan if the situation becomes too dangerous and other strategies fail.
    - Where possible, be proactive in building community connections. Reach out to local authorities of land (e.g. land owners, reserve stewards) to provide early notice of diverse team demographics. But, also provide training on how to talk/deflect to landowners prior to field work
- ***Considerations in advance of field work / education trip (personal):***
    - Have meaningful discussions about what to expect, emotionally (*e.g.*, feelings of frustration, sadness, lack of belonging; how to navigate those), logistically (*e.g.*, sleeping arrangements, carpooling and transportation options), etc.
    - Encourage anyone to ask questions, and try to have representative mentors to help answer questions when possible (*e.g.*, a female student will be more comfortable asking another woman what will be a safe space to use the bathroom in the field).
    - Assess lab members' possible anxieties regarding fieldwork so you can create a partnered plan to mitigate negative experiences
    - Discuss accessibility for people with disabilities too
    - Be aware of possible cultural differences that may make some fieldwork circumstances variably safe or comfortable for different people (e.g. values regarding modesty, cleanliness and hygiene, land values, etc)
- ***Considerations in advance of field work / education trip (equipment, gear, permissions):***
    - Create a checklist of field necessities for field participants to reference (e.g., sunscreen, water, hat, change of clothes, etc.).
    - Create a field gear stash (e.g. a "library" of boots, work gloves, jackets, etc.).
    - Provide examples of appropriate attire.
    - Make sure all participants are comfortable in their knowledge of field gear needs, and able to access appropriate gear. Offer help in finding the correct gear.
    - Establish an institute-level safety/visibility neon vest. Create a system to denote official research presence in a space. This may include labeled apparel, high visibility vests, name tags, lanyards and markings for vehicles, removable signs announcing research work. This may also be removable markation in case there are times where identifying yourself may be more dangerous.
        - Wishlist: A VIMS credential outside of our W&M ID card.
    - Provide field workers with appropriate documentation to justify their presence/purpose in a place. This can include collection permits or official documentation.
        - VIMS authority to collect samples in general: https://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacode/title28.2/chapter11/section28.2-1101/
        - VIMS authority to collect sub-aqueous samples: https://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacode/title28.2/chapter13/section28.2-1302/
        - VIMS authority to collect dune and beach: https://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacode/28.2-1403/
- ***Considerations in during field work / education trip (general):***
    - Do not assign tasks based upon gender, in the field or anywhere else. Aim to not assign tasks in general. Allow people the opportunity to create their own preferences and choose their own limitations, and allow teams to share responsibilities equally to build well-rounded skill sets.
    - Avoid making any comments about LGBTQ team members' families, partners, or sexuality unless they explicitly bring them into the conversation. This is particularly important if there are collaborators from other institutions, stakeholders from other industries, or locals present at the field site. Allow your team members to make their own decisions about when, where, and with whom it is safe for them to be out.

- Refer to a significant other as a partner to build a safe, inclusive space, in international or other unfamiliar locations.
- Document all hostile encounters regardless of severity (including microaggressions) for reporting (see section IV).
- Use a forgiveness-based model to create a safe space for personal growth. A PI can discuss with the individual privately, particularly when unawareness/ignorance/obliviousness may be a root cause.
- Check-in for emotional wellbeing periodically during field work.

III. Recommendations for Lab/Classroom/Office "Safety Plans"

Most education, science, and administration is conducted not in the field, but in the lab, classroom, and office. Here, instructors, PIs, and unit heads can create small safe spaces for learning, exploration, and productivity. Recommendations for lab/classroom/office safety plans include:

- Provide clear documentation on lab safety procedures, protocols, precautions that are accessible to all members of the unit.
- Create space for conversations about lab safety, and allow safe space to ask questions privately and publicly (labs, classroom).
- Actively discourage a culture of shaming anyone who is questioning the safety of a procedure, compound, or etc. Being unsafe is not 'cool'.
- Reach out to campus safety or DEI staff (*i.e.*, safety officer, medical professionals, diversity officer, HR etc.) for advice and guidance on safety issues. All members of a unit should be encouraged to seek advice from outside the unit when there are questions or concerns about safety.
- Have regular, mandatory repeated safety training.
- Be proactive about documenting to campus security if someone needs to access specific buildings after hours.
- Be proactive in connecting your BIPOC lab members with support networks/BIPOC communities outside the lab, such as campus resources, external colleagues, online forums, etc.
- Create opportunities for all lab members to develop their lab and/or classroom skills evenly and holistically. Do not allow a single lab member (including professors) to 'hog' a specific task. Allow teams to share responsibilities equally to build well-rounded skill sets.

IV. Processes for Reporting Violations

Below are recommendations for unit-specific reporting policies that could be incorporated into lab/classroom/office/department safety plans. These may assist in resolving issues before they rise to the level of institutional reporting, but should include consideration for when reports need to be elevated to the proper institutional channels (see VIMS/W&M Session #2 Deliverable).

- After any field work experience or big lab work event, have a debrief and provide the opportunity for anonymous feedback on what went well and what didn't. Invite comments for logistics, equity and inclusion, and concerning situations. Provide the opportunity for members to reflect with each other upon any inappropriate/poor behaviors that may have been brought on by the stressful situation: an 'airing of grievances'. Update lab standards/CoCs, and incorporate mitigation strategies when appropriate.
- For lab safety plans, include a statement about reporting instances of harassment or discrimination to the PI or another figure as well as information to file anonymous reports. (especially if that individual does not feel comfortable directly reporting to the PI).
- A department statement that shows each professor is a resource to report violations of policies. This will build more accountability and consistency as a department who acts on violations.

- At the faculty level, provide a forum to discuss common policy violations and solutions for preventing future violations.

V. Miscellaneous Recommendations

Other topics that should be covered in unit-specific W&M/VIMS safety plans or "codes of conduct" include:

- Promote team morale! Celebrate the completion of a successful field campaign or lab activity! Reward your group! This can foster inclusivity and the opportunity to reflect and grow as a unit.
- Provide training for effective implementation of codes of conduct; reflect upon codes of conduct regularly and revise as needed.
- Foster an atmosphere of inclusivity by leading discussions about antiracism in geosciences and (use pronouns too); this may help lab members feel more comfortable reporting when they have a safety concern.
- Be flexible with work schedules and vacation policies to accommodate those who have personal/family/religious/cultural obligations.
- Provide opportunities or resources for personal growth (not just scientific growth). Ex: exercises to be intentional about understanding their own identities & humanity within the context of academia.
- Provide a list of culturally relevant groups/mentors (online, BIPOC organizations, etc), where junior lab members can be introduced to external support communities. PIs should make an effort to facilitate networking and collegial relationships where possible. PIs can offer to fund membership fees for their lab members to join these identity-focused associations; ex: SACNAS membership
- Have empathy for your fellow lab members. Actively contribute to discussions, events, etc. that seek to broaden western science culture into one that values humanity and emotional intelligence alongside academic excellence. Listen and validate feelings (especially feelings of fear, loneliness, hardship, etc).
- Implement team-building exercises/trips to create shared experiences and foster a sense of belonging.
- W&M's training opportunities and mandatory training for new hires/students could be greatly expanded to include antidiscrimination training, bystander intervention training, de-escalation training, etc.
- Include statements at multiple levels (institution, department, lab unit) about mental health and how graduate studies can place students at higher risk. Make it clear that students can talk to the PI about issues regarding mental health and provide a list of campus resources.
- Prep inexperienced lab members before they travel to conferences. Prep them on appropriate attire, how to organize their day (sessions to attend, people to look out for, networking events, etc). Offer a buddy system, routine check-ins or see if they want to get lunch. If a lab member is presenting, show up for support.
- For PIs and those in mentorship roles: remember part of academic responsibility is to remove barriers for other scholars and scientists (JEDI barriers, and other barriers that prevent us from furthering scientific knowledge). Make it clear to your mentees that removing barriers is a priority.
- Continue to increase exposure to scientists (and other academic cultures, teaching styles, scientists with different methodologies) external to VIMS/WM by continuing virtual seminars/Zoom beyond current (pandemic) conditions.
- Additional Resources: https://www.minoritypostdoc.org/diverse-scholar/articles