

URGEO

Unlearning Racism in Geoscience



Virginia Tech Geosciences Pod

Deliverable #6 Safety Plan

This document is based upon the Code of Conduct for Fieldwork at the Department of Geosciences at Virginia Tech. It is a work in progress and will continue to be updated in 2021. The plan is for the Code of Conduct to be revised annually.

1.0 Goals of this document

- Establish expectations and guidelines for appropriate behavior during field work.
- Promote safe and welcoming environments for all participants in field situations.
- Establish best practices for leaders and participants in field work.
- Promote awareness of challenges unique to the field workplace environment.
- Provide resources and procedures for participants to identify and report violations of these guidelines, such as identity-based harassment, sexual harassment, bullying, or other types of discrimination associated with field work.

2.0 Overview

This code of conduct establishes guidelines and expectations for appropriate behavior during field work. It does not, in any way, replace or supersede applicable local, state or federal laws. Nor does it supersede relevant Virginia Tech policies, particularly [Policy 1025](#) on Harassment, Discrimination, and Sexual Assault, regarding workplace environment, sexual harassment, bullying, etc., which remain in full force during field work. **The guidelines presented here are meant to amplify and augment existing institutional policies.** We provide a link to [this spreadsheet](#), which can help individuals identify reporting procedures for specific violations of these guidelines.

3.0 Introduction

Recent studies have shown that identity-based harassment and sexual harassment are far too common during scientific fieldwork. As a department that is committed to diversity, inclusion, and equity, both on-campus and in off-campus

activities, and as a department that leads frequent field trips, scientific fieldwork, and an overseas field camp, it is our responsibility to establish and promote a rigorous code of conduct for fieldwork.

Fieldwork poses unique challenges to maintaining a safe and welcoming work environment. When conducting fieldwork, fieldwork participants may be harassed, made to feel uncomfortable or unsafe, and/or placed at risk of physical or mental harm on the basis of their appearance, gender, identity, or background. Roles and power structures may be unfamiliar, as students (both graduate and undergraduate) may be assigned as team leaders, drivers, etc. “Power” can be nuanced and depend on things like who has the car keys, who has the satellite phone, etc. The field environment is generally less formal than the classroom, including a more casual dress code, more casual styles of interaction, looser manners of speech, and shared meals. Field work often involves overnight trips (sometimes for weeks at a time), which can present unique opportunities for predatory behavior. Shared “down time” (meals, travel, rest) during extended field work can blur the lines between professional and personal interactions. Participants in field work often work and live in close quarters. Access to alcohol during field trips can create situations where misbehavior is more likely, or where potential targets are more vulnerable. Finally, field sites may be remote, with limited access to transportation and communication, which can add an extra element of risk.

For all these reasons, fieldwork presents unique situations that require a targeted code of conduct. We expect all responsible parties (faculty, staff, and student leaders) to learn, share, and enforce these expectations. It is important for all participants in field work to be informed, both on how to prevent inappropriate behavior in the field, and on how to respond and report such behavior should it occur.

4.0 Definitions

4.1 Fieldwork includes any work, study, or research approved by the Department of Geosciences at Virginia Tech and conducted by faculty, staff, or students at a site other than the Virginia Tech campus.

4.2 Faculty Supervisor is the faculty member who oversees adherence to the Fieldwork Code of Conduct and serves as the responsible party for the fieldwork personnel.

4.3 Fieldwork Leader(s) ensure all fieldwork members adhere to the Fieldwork Code of Conduct during fieldwork. They also have the authority to influence or direct the actions of students or employees involved in the activity. Fieldwork Leaders must be designated by or be a Faculty Supervisor.

4.4 Fieldwork Members are students and/or employees involved in the activity.

4.5 Field Site Manager is the individual or entity that owns, operates, governs, or otherwise controls the field area (e.g., landowner, city office, park service).

4.6 Local Contacts are individuals at or near a fieldwork site who can be contacted if necessary and who are familiar with check-in and check-out arrangements.

4.7 Discrimination and/or Harassment means conduct that conditions any element of a person's employment, enrollment as a student, receipt of student financial aid, or participation in university activities on that person's age, color, disability, sex (including pregnancy), gender, gender identity, gender expression, genetic information, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, or veteran status, unless otherwise permitted or required by applicable law. Virginia Tech does not otherwise discriminate against employees or applicants who inquire about, discuss, or disclose their compensation or the compensation of other employees or applicants nor on any other basis protected by law. Discrimination on the basis of sex in education programs and activities receiving federal financial funding as set forth in Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, as amended, is included in this definition of prohibited discrimination;

Conduct of any type (oral, written, graphic, electronic or physical) that is based upon a person's age, color, disability, sex (including pregnancy), gender, gender identity, gender expression, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, or veteran status and unreasonably interferes with the person's work or academic performance or participation in university activities, or creates a working or learning environment that a reasonable person would find hostile, threatening or intimidating; and/or

Conduct consisting of unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature when submission to such conduct is made, explicitly or implicitly, a term or condition of an individual's employment or education, or submission to or rejection of such conduct is used as a basis for employment or educational decisions affecting an individual.

4.8 Retaliation means any adverse action taken against a person for making a good faith report of conduct prohibited under this policy or participating in any proceeding under this policy. Retaliation includes threatening, intimidating, harassing, coercing or any other conduct that would discourage a reasonable person from engaging in activity protected under this policy. The definition of retaliation does not preclude an individual from engaging in good faith actions, lawfully pursued, in response to a report of conduct prohibited under this policy.

4.9 Sexual Harassment means conduct any type (oral, written, graphic, electronic or physical) that is based upon a person's sex (including pregnancy), and unreasonably interferes with the person's work or academic performance or limits participation in university activities, or creates a working or learning environment that a reasonable person would find hostile, threatening or intimidating. Sexual Harassment includes conduct of a sexual nature, including conduct consisting of unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual

nature when submission to such conduct is made, explicitly or implicitly, a term or condition of an individual's employment or education, or submission to or rejection of such conduct is used as a basis for employment or educational decisions affecting an individual. This policy includes sexual violence, gender-based harassment, domestic violence, dating violence and stalking as forms of sexual harassment.

4.10 Sexual Violence means physical sexual acts perpetrated against a person's will or where a person is incapable of giving consent due to the victim's use of drugs or alcohol, or is unable to give consent due to an intellectual or other disability. Sexual violence includes rape, sexual assault, sexual battery, and sexual coercion.

4.11 Consent means knowing, voluntary, and clear permission by word or action, to engage in mutually agreed upon sexual activity. The existence of consent is based on the totality of circumstances, including the context in which the alleged consent occurred. Silence does not necessarily constitute consent and coercion, force, or threat of either party invalidates consent.

- Consent cannot be given where a person is incapacitated due to drugs or alcohol; or where a person has a disability; or is not of legal age to consent as defined by law.
- Consent to any one form of sexual activity cannot automatically imply consent to any other forms of sexual activity. Consent can be withdrawn at any time.
- Previous relationships or prior consent cannot imply consent to future sexual acts.

4.12 Bystander intervention focuses on helping community members understand and become more sensitive to issues related to identity-based harassment, discrimination, sexual harassment, and sexual violence by teaching prevention and interruption skills. The bystander role includes interrupting situations that could lead to assault before it happens or during an incident; speaking out against social norms that support harassment, discrimination, and violence; and having skills to be an effective and supportive ally to survivors.

5.0 Expectations for Appropriate Field Behavior

The Department of Geosciences expects professional, respectful behavior in all work locations, including field sites. Fieldwork sites are an extension of the workplace, and all Virginia Tech policies supporting a safe, welcoming work environment apply equally to field locations.

5.1 Pre-field planning

Establishing the conditions and expectations for appropriate field behavior starts before the field trip departs. Pre-trip planning should include discussions of expectations for behavior (e.g., this code of conduct), including institutional policies, advice for how to handle situations when they arise, and how to report misbehavior.

Some research suggests that having females in leadership roles at field camp is an important factor in preventing sexual harassment. Faculty Supervisors should thus make every effort to engage women in student leadership roles (e.g., drivers, field camp directors, team leaders).

5.2 During the field trip

Here are some simple do's and don'ts to help maintain a safe and welcoming environment during field work. This list is not exhaustive, but these examples should serve as guideposts for the kinds of behaviors that are unacceptable, and for how to respond should something occur.

Don't:

- ...comment, speculate, or joke about another person's appearance, body, dress, romantic history, gender, or sexual orientation.
- ...make repeated or unwanted sexual or romantic advances.
- ...make jokes or remarks that are based on gender, race, sexuality, identity, religion, body type, or disability status.
- ...use abusive language.
- ...violate the personal space, privacy, or integrity of others.

Do:

- ...treat everyone professionally and with respect, dignity, empathy, and compassion.
- ...familiarize yourself with Virginia Tech Policy 1025 on Harassment, Discrimination, and Sexual Assault and the procedures for violations of Policy 1025, including identity-based harassment, sexual harassment, discrimination, intimidation, and bullying.
- ...understand and share the chain of reporting for complaints.
- ...practice bystander intervention. If you see something inappropriate, call it out immediately. Interrupt the behavior and support the target.
- ...commit to being an active ally. Talk about identity-based harassment, sexual harassment, intimidation, discrimination, and bullying. Listen to, and respect, others' stories.
- ...report any concerns about personal safety, unwelcoming behavior, or possible harassment to a responsible party, either in your field party or, if necessary, in university leadership. See [this spreadsheet](#) for details about reporting.

6.0 What to Do If Harassment (identity-based, sexual, or other) Occurs

Your immediate response to harassment when it occurs depends on (1) the severity of the infraction, and (2) whether you are the target or a witness to the behavior. Safety is the primary concern. If you are in a situation in which your (or someone else's) immediate safety may be at risk, do everything you can to flee from the situation and find help. Call 911 if necessary, but be cognizant of the safety threats this may bring to other members of your group. In what follows, we suggest responses assuming that the harassment, while illegal and inappropriate, does not rise to the level of assault or other physically endangering behavior.

6.1 If you are the target of harassment or inappropriate behavior:

- **Do what is necessary to protect your safety.** If your safety is under threat, take the necessary steps to remove yourself from the situation. The necessary actions will depend on the situation, but could include: asking someone you trust to stay physically with you; asking someone to watch the perpetrator; calling someone (friend, family, law enforcement) you trust and asking them to come; and/or leaving the field (or other location) where the perpetrator is.
- **Say no.** If your safety is not under immediate threat, it may be possible to defuse the situation through direct communication. Express directly and clearly to the harasser that the behavior is inappropriate, unwelcome, and will be reported.
- **Document the behavior.** Write down an account of the incident, on paper and digitally. Save the records in a safe place. Tell a friend or loved one so there is potential corroboration.
- **Report the harassment.** Unless they are the harasser, and if you are comfortable doing so, tell your direct supervisor, responsible faculty member, and/or the director of the field station what happened. Do be aware that such employees will have a “duty to report,” so the incident will be reported to the appropriate institutional authorities. If you wish to ensure confidentiality, first seek out a “confidential responder,” which includes counseling services, the ombudsperson, and clergy. Details on reporting procedures for Virginia Tech employees and students can be found on the [spreadsheet linked here](#).
- **Keep a paper trail.** Report the incident in writing, and keep copies of all correspondence on the matter.
- **Consult [Virginia Tech Policy 1025](#) on Harassment, Discrimination, and Sexual Assault.**

6.2 If you are a witness to harassment or inappropriate behavior:

- **Practice bystander intervention.** Here are some techniques from the Virginia Tech Bystander Intervention Playbook:
https://www.stopabuse.vt.edu/content/dam/stopabuse_vt_edu/docs/bystander_intervention_playbook.pdf
 - Step in and separate the two people.

- Use a distraction to redirect the focus somewhere else: “Hey, I need to talk to you.”
- Evaluate the situation and people involved to determine your best move. You could directly intervene yourself, or alert friends of each person to come in and help. If the person reacts badly, try a different approach.
- Divert the attention of one person away from the other person. Have someone standing by to redirect the other person’s focus.
- Approach everyone as a friend. Don’t be antagonistic, and avoid using violence. Be honest and direct whenever possible; recruit help if necessary; keep yourself safe; and contact the police if things get out of hand or become too serious.
- **Speak up.** While policies and codes of conduct are important in curbing inappropriate behavior, equally important is changing the culture of what’s acceptable to “let slide” in the workplace and at field sites. If you see something, call out the behavior, firmly and publicly.

7.0 Virginia Tech Policies and Procedures

University Policy 1025 - Policy on Harassment, Discrimination and Sexual Assault

Virginia Tech does not discriminate against employees, students, or applicants on the basis of age, color, disability, sex (including pregnancy), gender, gender identity, gender expression, genetic information, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, or veteran status, or otherwise discriminate against employees or applicants who inquire about, discuss, or disclose their compensation or the compensation of other employees or applicants, or on any other basis protected by law.

The university is subject to Titles VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, Sections 503 and 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, as amended, the Age Discrimination in Employment Act, the Equal Pay Act, the Vietnam Era Veterans' Readjustment Assistance Act of 1974, Federal Executive Order 11246, Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act of 2008 (GINA), Virginia Executive Order(s), and all other rules and regulations that are applicable.

Point of contact for Title IX compliance at Virginia Tech:
The Assistant Vice President for Equity and Accessibility
Office for Equity and Accessibility
Virginia Tech
North End Center
300 Turner St.
Blacksburg, VA 24061
Phone: (540) 231-2010
equityandaccess@vt.edu

The university applies the preponderance of the evidence standard when determining whether this policy has been violated. "Preponderance of the evidence" means that it is more likely than not that a policy violation occurred. The appropriate university avenue for resolving a complaint covered under this policy is determined by the status of the person accused. Violations of Policy 1025 should be submitted [here](#) as a formal complaint.

8.0 Reporting Violations of this Code of Conduct

For detailed information about how to report violations of these guidelines, please see [this linked spreadsheet](#), which includes [a link to the form](#) for reporting violations of Policy 1025.

9.0 References

Background materials on identity-based harassment and sexual harassment related to fieldwork

- <https://eos.org/opinions/ten-steps-to-protect-bipoc-scholars-in-the-field>
- <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41559-020-01328-5>
- https://serc.carleton.edu/advancegeo/resources/field_work.html
- <https://harassment.agu.org/>
- <http://www.nationalacademies.org/sexualharassment>
- <http://www.sciencemag.org/news/2014/07/sexual-harassment-common-scientific-fieldwork>
- <https://www.nature.com/news/many-women-scientists-sexually-harassed-during-fieldwork-1.15571>
- <http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0102172>