

# URGE

## Unlearning Racism in Geoscience

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### URGE Complaints and Reporting Policy for WHOI

Based on the discussion on Feb 10, 2021, we think it would be useful for the department and institution to consider the systems in place for accountability, reporting, prevention and support, when harm is caused to individuals by others.

1. Support - People who have been harmed need to be able to turn to someone who would listen and provide support, while maintaining confidentiality. MIT instituted a Peer-to-peer support system called [REFS](#) at both the departmental and institutional level. REFS are trained in conflict resolution and can coach students through addressing difficult situations and institutional resources, including reporting, that is available to them. REFS apply for these positions and are paid for their work. MIT also has an office, Violence Prevention and Response that has victim advocates. This is a confidential service. They also offer training to the MIT community. These are available to JP students, but not to people only employed at WHOI. REFS are also less familiar with WHOI and do not have the power to implement any changes directly at either institution. At WHOI, we do not have an ombudsperson, or identified individuals at different levels within a department, that people should feel comfortable to approach. This is particularly important because reporting is often not the course of action that a harmed individual would choose to take and, even if someone does want to report an incident, the policies and procedures for reporting can be opaque or difficult to navigate. If an individual does not want to report, they may still want to discuss the harm confidentially. There is not currently a position at WHOI that is designated as confidential with respect to Title IX violations.
2. Bystander intervention - can be very powerful and offering everyone training could help prevent the perpetuation of harmful comments or actions. Hierarchy can be one challenge in bystander intervention. Training can address bystander intervention in the context of academic hierarchy and policies could be implemented to ameliorate the effects of the hierarchy and reduce the risk of retaliation.
3. Reporting - while there are systems in place, most people are reluctant to resort to reporting. Making known some facts about reporting would help lower the bar to report a harmful action. For example, how often are cases reported at WHOI? What are some examples of what can (or should) be reported? What are the consequences of reporting and being reported? How are incidents tracked? Is the person who reports an incident protected from retaliation? Are there resources or accommodations for the time taken reporting?

Rather than reporting alone, we found that it was more useful to talk about three categories of actions in response to harm, or for prevention of harm and betterment of a community.

1. Accountability: Taking responsibility for the action, or being held accountable when harm is caused



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2. Support for the harmed individual - coming from the community, but also from the institution
3. Bystander intervention - how we can make others aware if they are causing harm (even if it is not intended) and stop further harm

In this vein, we also discussed reparations. How can we as an institution repair harm that was caused by racial exclusion and exploitation since the founding of WHOI in 1930? We did not come to any conclusions on this topic, but will likely to return to it throughout the URGE program.

Here are some links to current policies with some relevant information

- **The link(s) to the reporting policy at our organization are here:**
  - [WHOI institutional policy against harassment \(link\)](#)
  - [We are not aware of any reporting policies at the lab level in our department](#)
- **What mechanisms are available for reporting complaints, bias, microaggressions, harassment, and overt racism?**
  - Brochure about reporting harassment, including in the field ([link](#)). This includes links to make online anonymous reports.
  - Are police included in the process? When and how? Are individuals accompanied by an advocate or someone from the organization?
    - There are no official advocates at WHOI, but MIT does have victim advocates
    - There is no explicit mention of when police might be involved in the process
- **What resources are available to groups raising issues or proposing changes?**
  - There is an annual town hall with students and the Joint Program student organization is in regular contact with the academic programs office.
  - WHOI performs regular culture surveys
  - The committee on diversity and inclusion (CDI) can propose changes, but it is not clear to those not on the committee what authority the CDI has.