

URGE

Unlearning Racism in Geoscience

Working with Communities of Color

The following is a summary of the conversation had by AC Mammoths at Amherst College on previous experiences working with Communities of Color as well as plans for improvements.

The experience of faculty members working with communities of color at our current institution is admittedly and unfortunately limited. We spent much of our conversation reflecting on why that is, and what can be done to increase our interactions as a department in the future. Several pod members shared past relevant experiences that they had at former institutions. Three of the pod members recalled past experiences they had working with indigenous people in Canada, but felt that the interactions -- which were facilitated through the Canadian government agency with which they were collaborating -- were limited and not engaging with local people. Some of them felt the coordination with indigenous people was framed as a hurdle or inconvenience imposed on scientific researchers and not an opportunity. Alternatively, another pod member had a very fulfilling experience (e.g. knowledge exchange) with local indigenous people as an undergraduate on a trip to New Zealand. As a group, we spoke about past undergraduate trips our department has taken. In particular, last year, the department sponsored a trip to Hawaii. They did make a point to discuss issues related to indigenous Hawaiians, but did not directly interact with anyone from that population. This was acknowledged as a missed opportunity and going forward the group has already begun brainstorming ways we can reach out to local communities for mutually beneficial interactions. Another area of discussion our pod touched upon was the issue of our natural history collections. Our department has a museum associated with it, and we spoke about ways we could incorporate indigenous knowledge and perspectives into the collection displays. One faculty member has significant experience working with a Native American researcher on the history of our college, including the collections. The rest of the department expressed an interest in reading that person's PhD dissertation to become more knowledgeable about our college's (complicated) history. We also spoke about land acknowledgments, and the complicated, evolving history of Native tribes in the area.