

URGE

Unlearning Racism in Geoscience

URGE Policies for Working with Communities of Color for University/Organization - Example Deliverable

This is what was found by **EES Pod** at the **University of Pennsylvania** on Policies for Working with Communities of Color as well as plans for improved processes and/or needed resources.

- **Audit of previous interactions with communities of color at our organization:**

Multiple programs within the Earth and Environmental Science (EES) Department interact with Communities of Color, but the kind of interaction varies with the research focus and education philosophy of each program. The Water Center and professional Master's programs, for example, engage Communities of Color in the Philadelphia area and other urban landscapes. Education through Academics Based Community Service Courses (ABCS) is a primary vehicle for students to engage communities and to learn how to do so more effectively. Students interface with West Philadelphia residents, especially those living in the Cobbs Creek area. ABCS students also build guided lesson plans for environmental science education in public elementary school classrooms. These include a class on weatherization of low-income homes and a course on air quality and pollution. Programs also extend beyond the vicinity of Philadelphia. Students led by Dr. Sauder occasionally participate in Engineers Without Borders, creating or maintaining water infrastructure in Central America. In Anchorage Alaska, The Water Center focuses specifically on equity, language inclusivity, and intentionality.

We were unable to ascertain the specific ways that research faculty in the EES graduate group have engaged with communities of color. Historically EES faculty have done international research in places like Venezuela, Egypt, West Africa, and China. Many faculty members have productive ongoing collaborations with colleagues in other countries where their field work takes place. But field sites are sometimes located within or adjacent to communities that do not see a return from research taking place in their vicinity. The orientation of field work, reflecting that of the geosciences overall, has often been one of knowledge extraction. Although local communities may not see the fruits of research, in some cases national governments have imposed conditions on the use of natural resources. For example, the fossil remains of the dinosaur Paralititan stromeri were returned to Egypt after Penn researchers completed their preparation and study of the bones.

- **What worked well in these interactions?**

During the different types of interactions with Communities of Color, different EES affiliated projects such as the Water Center related ABCS courses emphasized that engaging with the people in these communities and entering with an understanding and helpful mindset helped to make these interactions successful. In addition, appropriate compensation and being



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mindful of the communities' time worked well to foster relationships with these communities. The point was to engage in a collaborative environment and put the community leaders at the forefront as experts.

Also related to the EES ABCS courses, professors have stated how important it is for elementary school students in the community to interact with EES/Penn students since the instructional dynamic is different than with professors. Younger students see college students as role models and they love the interactions. Another thing that worked well was having support from the class teachers and having the support of the Netter Center which focuses on forging connections with K-12 schools in West Philadelphia.

- **What did not work well, and how can this be better addressed in future plans?**

What has not worked well in the past is the lack of follow up and continuity with these communities after the 6 weeks of community teaching and service of these ABCS courses. Students would like to make a further impact on the community, and the community schools would like to have a follow up on this information so students can continue to learn about environmental equity, pollution, water quality, etc., in their own communities. However, nothing has been done to address this so far. In the future, we believe having longer term programs over a couple of years, and even staying with the same group of students to ensure their development and success could be planned through the Netter Center for Community Engagement.

With regards to the Water Center, what has not worked well in the past or what has been hard is getting to know the community and their needs instead of just going in, doing a short project and just leaving. The point is to prevent any negative interactions, securing funding, getting to know their needs and progressing to support the community over time with the help of students, faculty, professionals and the community members and leaders.

- **Are there ways to improve the outcome of projects already undertaken?**

Some suggestions of improving the outcome of projects already taken is to humbly approach these communities of color in our backyard with lots of understanding, and not coming in without asking of their needs. In addition, it is important to look internally into the project and these community relationships to see if we are intentionally representing the community that we are working with and we are doing our best by them to support them.



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- **Are there specific resources or guidelines that are needed to improve the process for planning ahead and working with communities of color?**

The Netter Center Partnerships are invaluable resources needed to improve the process for planning and working with these Communities of Color. The role of this program is to connect service in these Communities of Color with research and teaching, which is how Penn and EES gets to work with West Philadelphia.

Additional resources or guidelines suggested by different faculty and students is the continuous conversation and getting informed by the community, and not vice versa. For example, a roundtable style continuous community conversation and engagement to best ensure what the needs of the people are. In addition, compensating people for their time with food or any type of support, monetary compensation, etc., is essential when taking the time of people from especially low-income communities.