

URGE

Unlearning Racism in Geoscience

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

This is what was found by the graduate student pod at Syracuse University on Policies for Working with Communities of Color as well as plans for improved processes and/or needed resources.

Pods may have members from a range of career stages and involvement in the development and execution of research projects, and pod members may have different experiences or different perspectives when responding to these questions. Consider this in the summary document and focus on capturing responses that are representative of the range in your pod.

- **Audit of previous interactions with communities of color at our organization:**
 - Survey results from seven members of the faculty indicated that 86% (all but one) were involved with at least one project that took place within countries or regions with communities of color. According to the survey results, 71% of faculty members had significant involvement with communities of color during these projects.
 - Examples of projects where faculty members worked with or involved communities of color included:
 - Collaboration with a local university and stipends for local graduate students.
 - Working with local NGOs and involving community members with project planning from the start.
 - Invitation of researchers from communities of color including an online webinar and multi-day workshop, including paid travel expenses, to generate a community understanding and vision for the research project of interest.
 - Fieldwork in Papua New Guinea which included the approval, help and support from them which was necessary to conduct research.
 - Co-authorship of a manuscript and co-instruction of a field course.

- **What worked well in these interactions?**
 - 57% of the faculty members who answered the survey sought out local collaborators/guides and included them in the development of our project.
 - 43% of the faculty members who answered the survey retained ties with these communities of color after the project was finished.
 - Another 43% of the faculty members who answered the survey sought out to include local students.



Unlearning Racism in Geoscience

- 29% of the faculty members who answered the survey educated themselves regarding the local politics, customs, culture, and history of the region.
- Another 29% of the faculty members who answered the survey considered/prioritized research questions/locations based on the needs of local communities.
- One faculty member each responded noting the following positive interactions:
 - Hired local field guides, exchanged presents, met with elders, etc.
 - Used local names for landmarks/features.
 - Adhered to restrictions and customs.
 - Acknowledged local communities/indigenous tribes in their research.
 - Mentioned the local communities in their broader impacts.
- 5 of the 7 faculty in total responded regarding at least 1 positive interaction with communities of color.
- All faculty members pledged that they would be willing to change their research practices in the future to better include and respect communities of color.
- **What did not work well, and how can this be better addressed in future plans?**
 - Most faculty members chose not to include details about negative interactions with communities of color (2 responses compared to 5 responses regarding positive interactions). Among faculty members who did include a response, one reported that there was a clear hierarchy in the project, where the US university clearly had more resources and power in the relationship, while the other reported that one field season included PIs who did not respect the local community.
 - In the future, faculty members must recognize that collaborations with researchers from communities of color should be equitable and fair, without unjust hierarchies.
 - PIs who refuse to respect local communities should not be included in future projects. Furthermore, researchers should apologize to local communities when/if this situation occurs and provide acknowledgement or compensation if applicable.
 - Only 43% of faculty members were aware of the fact that in the USA, all data generated on indigenous lands belongs to the indigenous peoples who occupy those lands.
 - All faculty members who were not aware of this fact said that this knowledge would influence the planning of their future projects.
- **Are there ways to improve the outcome of projects already undertaken?**



Unlearning Racism in Geoscience

- All publications coming from SU DEES (regardless of where the data are sourced from) can/should include an acknowledgement that the university is built on land which belonged to the Onondaga.
 - This acknowledgement can and should be extended to all talks/lectures (e.g. Nelson, Waggs) as well.
- As far as I know, there is no need to translate our research into other languages, however, we could focus more on providing plain language summaries of our research, which would benefit all communities without a formal education in the Earth Sciences.
 - Again, while a literal translation of our outreach materials may not be necessary, a THEMATIC translation might be important. Generally speaking, Earth Science departments need to move away from selling their programs based on careers in extraction and exploitation of natural resources, not only because this extraction is damaging to the environment, but also because these careers are no longer the best employment option for recent Earth Science graduates.
- **Are there specific resources or guidelines that are needed to improve the process for planning ahead and working with communities of color?**
 - Identify and support local grassroots organizations and NGOs which could provide us with local contacts or information allowing for better future collaboration and planning.
 - Possibility of liaison position with local indigenous groups, which could improve our ability to work with local indigenous communities.
 - Exchange information with the Indigenous Students at Syracuse (ISAS) student run organization to identify points of contact with the local indigenous communities.
 - Inclusion of other ways of knowing: we could develop a curriculum for students/faculty that introduces ways of knowing that may be outside of western science, e.g. a workshop that introduces how to incorporate this knowledge base into your research and how to respectfully exchange knowledge with local communities.
 - They suggest a book in the “Respect and Representation” paper titled Braiding Sweetgrass (2013) which might be helpful with this topic.
 - Faculty and students can be encouraged to form relationships with people from local communities, (e.g. from nearby high schools or state universities, from the Onondaga Nation and Iroquois League, etc...). This could include increased



Unlearning Racism in Geoscience

outreach to or recruitment from these communities and increased inclusion in our seminars, workshops and student symposia.

- The DEES or the university should provide increased scholarship opportunities for local applicants and applicants from communities of color generally.
- The DEES and the University as a whole should use its institutional power to advocate for environmental justice by supporting legislation or policy proposals that seek to address the disproportionate industrial pollution of low income communities and communities of color.
 - For example, we can provide research which demonstrates the harmful effects caused by industrial pollution in our local communities. - Geographic and environmental science are key to urban planning and zoning (as evidenced by the ongoing I-81 community grid project planning process)!
 - Increased coordination with local groups, potentially including free analyses to help with research questions that have significance to local communities. Working with local community organizations and NGOs to identify questions with local significance and plan or execute projects.