
URGE Policies for Working with Communities of Color for West Los Angeles College

This is what was found by West Los Angeles College (WLAC) group of the SoCal Community Colleges pod on Policies for Working with Communities of Color as well as plans for improved processes and/or needed resources.

Acknowledging and Honoring the Traditional Stewards of Tovaangar

West Los Angeles College is located on traditional, unceded [land](#) of the Tongva/Gabrieliño people. We are not aware if our college has an official land acknowledgment and we pledge to raise this issue with our leadership. We will also work with college leadership to seek relationships with the Tongva community.

Working with and Serving our Community

West Los Angeles College is two-year college whose primary mission is education and does not regularly conduct or execute research projects. However our community is largely composed of students of color because we are a “minority serving institution” (see demographics from Session 3). Therefore, we approached this deliverable by considering how our college is serving our community’s needs and concerns.

Updating our Mission and Values Statement

The shared governance structure at our college recently recommended revisions to the college mission and values statements to be more anti-racist and equity-minded. We are awaiting official approval from our college president, and these are some of the recommended edits:

West fosters a diverse learning community committed to student success, *racial equity, and social justice.*

Equity

At West, it is our obligation to challenge the foundations of implicit and explicit bias and address historic and persistent inequity.

Support Groups

To help create community and to assist our students in achieving their educational goals, the college has multiple support groups, including the following:

- **Dream Resource Center:** <http://www.wlac.edu/Undoc/index.aspx>
 - Mission: The Dream Resource Center seeks to serve undocumented, LGBTQ+ and housing/food insecure students with information and resources. These resources are intended to promote college access, persistence, completion and transfer by creating a safe and supportive environment, building leadership skills, promoting equity as well as civic and community engagement. We seek to

promote an inclusive campus culture that empowers our students to achieve their academic and personal pursuits and become active members of our communities. We believe that students deserve the right to learn, be healthy and pursue their dreams regardless of personal circumstances; such as: gender, immigration status, sexual orientation, and race etc.

- **Extended Opportunity Programs and Services (EOP&S)** <http://www.wlac.edu/eops-care/index.aspx>
 - Mission: Our mission is to enhance student success by providing “over and above” services to students with economic and academic barriers to their education. Another fundamental goal of the program is to increase the number of underrepresented students enrolled in the community college. This is accomplished by providing an overall supportive environment with a variety of benefits and services. Eligibility is determined by academic and financial need as mandated by the state.
- **International students / West Language Academy:** <http://international.wlac.edu/>
 - About: Students learn or improve English through the West Los Angeles College intensive English academy. The West Language Academy is for students who want to study in the United States but first need to learn or improve English skills. The Academy offer 20 hours of English instruction per week so students can quickly improve oral and written competency. Additionally, Academy students enjoy excursions to notable sites and cultural experiences around the city.
- **Puente Project:** <http://www.wlac.edu/Puente/index.aspx>
 - About: The Puente Project at West Los Angeles College is designed to aid under served and underrepresented students achieve academic success. This is obtained through an interdisciplinary program, known as the Puente Model, that includes Academic Counseling, English courses, and Mentoring by community leaders. The Puente Model is designed to guide the student in earning degrees, transfer in four-year colleges and universities, and create leaders and mentors of their communities and future generations. Much like its namesake, The Puente Project aims at building and facilitating a bridge for students between their college and four-year universities by creating a sense of *Familia* (which is Spanish for Family). In creating a West LA familia, the Puente Project wishes to build a nurturing learning environment that fosters not only academic growth and success but also personal achievement and community connection.
- **TRIO Student Support Services:** <http://www.wlac.edu/ccp/sss.aspx>
 - TRIO SSS is a federally funded program that serves 160 students who are U.S. citizens, meet federal residence guidelines, or meet the residency requirements for federal student financial assistance (Pell Grant) and at least one of the following: a first-generation college student, or low-income as defined by federal income guidelines, or part of the WLAC Disabled Students Programs and Services (DSPS).
- In 2020, West Los Angeles College also initiated a **Black Student Success Taskforce** that is charged with creating a Black Student Union and other supports and resources for our Black and African-American students. This work is ongoing.



Unlearning Racism in Geoscience

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

This is what was found by the Southern California Community Colleges Pod at Santa Monica College (SMC) 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:**
 - *Typically there are two to three study abroad programs offered each summer to varying locations and two to three study abroad programs offered over spring break. These programs are centered around the Global Citizenship requirement at SMC (<https://www.smc.edu/administration/governance/academic-senate/curriculum-committee/global-citizenship.php>) which aims to foster an appreciation of diverse cultures in the US and abroad.*
 - *SMC has held at least two grants that focus on working with minoritized students, the first was a NASA grant (Minority University Research and Education Project (MUREP) Community College Curriculum Improvement (MC3I)), the second is an NSF grant for increasing equitable outcomes in STEM for our Black and Brown students (Fostering an Equity-Minded Student Success Culture in STEM Through Faculty Development)*
 - *At SMC, we have several groups on campus that specifically focus on interactions with students of color to help guide them on their college pathway and increase their success. These programs are called Adelante and Black Collegians Umoja Community. Given that these programs impact far more students on campus and have a larger reach, they have existed for longer than the grants and have reports written and available, I will focus on them and the key components that make them successful.*
- **What worked well in these interactions?**
 - *Required counseling classes and sessions for students*
 - *Combining what had previously been the Black Collegians program with the African American Collegians to create the Black Collegians Umoja Community*
 - *A new Student Service building which had dedicated space for the program furthering foster a sense of place and belonging on campus*
 - *Funding. Money allows both Adelante and Black Collegians Umoja to increase their students services (dedicated counselors)*
 - *Priority enrollment for students in their next semester courses*
 - *Removing academic barriers to joining (dropping GPA requirement and English 1 requirement)*
 - *Creating a strong and positive environment among the staff and faculty in the program*

- **What did not work well, and how can this be better addressed in future plans?**
 - *The Adelante program was created in 1989, the information posted did not include any program reviews so I cannot address what did not work well in the past. A consistent theme among special programs in campus is the need for more funding to serve more students and serve current students better.*
 - *The Black Collegians are celebrating 30 years at SMC (~1990 creation), they undertake regular reviews- the most recent one is linked below. In the report there are suggestions for the center to acquire outside funding to continue their work, I would think that the College itself would want to contribute to the funding given the success of the program.*

- **Are there ways to improve the outcome of projects already undertaken?**
 - *The Black Collegians pivoted quickly to the online environment in March 2020 and they said that as part of that pivot, they did proactive wellness checks on every member. The wellness checks worked so well that they are now making that something they do every semester to increase their connection to their students.*

- **Are there specific resources or guidelines that are needed to improve the process for planning ahead and working with communities of color?**
 - *Our campus does not have any documents or policies for working with communities of color outside of our own students. I bring this up because there is a robust study abroad program at SMC which does interact with communities of color but has no guidelines. From the data available for the study abroad programs (sample itineraries), it appears that students engage in a performative or tokenistic way with communities of color when they are aboard, which is concerning. A robust policy would strengthen the study abroad program and would help ensure that these interactions are not token experiences.*

Data from:

https://www.smc.edu/administration/governance/academic-senate/committees/program-review/exec-summaries/2020-2021/2020-2021_BlackCollegiansProgramUmojaCommunity_Executive_Summary.pdf

<https://www.smc.edu/student-support/academic-support/counseling/special-support-programs/black-collegians/index.php>

<https://www.smc.edu/student-support/academic-support/counseling/special-support-programs/latino-center/adelante-program/index.php>



URGE Policies for Working with Communities of Color for East Los Angeles College

This is what was found by the East Los Angeles College (ELAC) group of the SoCal Community Colleges pod 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:**

As community college faculty, we do not engage in research or other interactive projects with external communities of color; instead, we are the immediate access to higher education for the communities we serve, which are overwhelmingly populated by people of color and other groups historically underrepresented in higher education. Courses in our department provide the most immediate path for our local communities of color to access the geosciences. It is our fundamental mission to serve our community, and our demographics data show that we do not have trouble recruiting from diverse populations to our department courses. The scope of community interaction that we need to focus on, therefore, is centered on equity in completion and success in our courses and transfer from our department.

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

In introducing the geosciences to our students, we are working to integrate local issues and local knowledge into our curriculum, especially in courses that focus on California geography and geology. We acknowledge that most of our students are the first in their family to attain higher education, and we are the means for these students to discover geoscience and how science can help them understand their world. Beyond classroom instruction, we strive to empower our students in their introduction to the geosciences (and science, in general) through:

1. Structured field activities
2. Supporting departmental clubs
3. Encouraging and supporting student attendance at professional conferences, forums, and public lectures
4. Encouraging original student research

In 2020, our department crafted a credo to direct our intentions in these types of interactions with our students:



Unlearning Racism in Geoscience

We, the faculty of the Department of Anthropology, Geography, and Geology at East Los Angeles College stand in solidarity with Black Lives Matter and denounce police brutality. We grieve alongside our Black community members for the tragic murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery and the many Black people who have died as a result of racial violence. We acknowledge the historic role that our education system has played in perpetuating inequalities, but we believe in the power of education to transform our society. We, as educators, are committed to confronting our own internal prejudices and biases as well as working toward dismantling institutions of oppression in order to be strong allies to our communities of color. We strive to be an antiracist department and to empower our students in their fight for racial, social, environmental, and economic justice.

In addition to applying this statement to our personal and institutional antiracist development, we have also begun to successfully incorporate discussions of the historical inequities in the geosciences, underrepresentation of women and people of color in the discipline, and possible solutions into our course curricula. Frank, genuine, and thoughtful discourse among and between our students and faculty continue to benefit faculty growth and student interest and success.

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

Our faculty acknowledge that gate-keeping in the geosciences has no place in our classrooms, and traditional pedagogy and classroom attitudes can undermine attempts at equitizing access to STEM curricula and fields. We are actively working on abandoning learned/ingrained teaching practices and mindfully increasing accessibility to our field trips, clubs, and majors.

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

As geoscience faculty, we are trying to increase our understanding of local environmental justice issues like environmental degradation, resource management, health disparities, etc. We are seeking new strategies to effectively engage our students; new pathways for our students to enter and be welcomed in the Geoscience community; and the material resources and funding to make this happen.

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



Unlearning Racism in Geoscience

Funding allocated specifically for improving our students' access to field localities is the most urgent resource that would improve equity outcomes within the communities we serve. In order to successfully attract traditionally underrepresented students to our department majors and recruit them for continuing degrees and careers within the geosciences, we need to increase our ability to offer field experiences for students who haven't had access to the field before. Our students frequently lack means to travel or the resources for hiking or camping, and increased funding would afford these students previously inaccessible opportunities.