

URGE

Unlearning Racism in Geoscience



GENESEO
THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

URGE Policies for Working with Communities of Color for SUNY Geneseo

This is what was found by the Department of Geological Science at SUNY Geneseo on Policies for Working with Communities of Color as well as plans for improved processes and/or needed resources. Note that responses to the first set of questions reflect a summary of data collected from faculty with 8-30 years of experience in teaching/research positions.

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

In a department survey completed by 5 of 6 full-time tenure track faculty, about 7 study abroad trips and about 10 research projects were audited for interactions with communities of color. No faculty discussed in detail doing research with communities of color, though one person has experience doing research in non-white communities. Much of our departmental experience with communities of color comes with study abroad trips with students. Our department of 6 faculty at a PUI, described “meaningful interaction” as shared meals, evening cultural events, and local guides/trip leaders, bus drivers, cooks. Many of the faculty feel that there was some meaningful interaction between themselves and the communities they visited; however, the degree to which meaningful interactions occurred between the communities and students largely depended on the student. In the survey, many faculty members discussed an evening at a Maori cultural center in New Zealand (2017) as the most meaningful interaction between communities of color and our department; however, this event was described as a “fairly touristy activity” by some and probably lacking some depth and authenticity. With few exceptions, these interactions were not developed with the intention of deep meaningful interactions with the community, especially in terms of research. Of the 7 most recent study abroad trips reported by 5/6 faculty who participated in the survey, most faculty said that 1-3 had some meaningful interaction with communities of color, while the senior most member of our faculty reported that he has meaningful interactions with communities of color in virtually all of his research and study abroad trips, but the detail provided were not sufficient to analyze using the questions below.



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

Overall we did not have much to say here because as a group there were few interactions with communities of color in our teaching or research lives. Our study abroad trip to New Zealand had the most intentional interaction with the Maori Community; however, this was a tourist type activity and didn't involve research or field trips.

Comments from the Survey:

Connecting with the local cultural community was key.

Attended a demonstration of local Maori customs by local Maori people. Was relatively straightforward to plan, as it was part of a larger organization of local people who run regular events/shows and give tours.

Respect of the local culture, communication with the local political and civic leaders.

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

As a department we are not being intentional at developing relationships with communities of color in places where we take students on study abroad trips or while doing research both abroad and locally. We need to improve in every aspect of this area. This is not to say that we lacked interaction with these communities, but those interactions were mostly superficial. We need to seek better depth in these relationships. The research part of this question does not really apply to our group at this time.

Comments from the Survey:

For all of these excursions, I did not include or prioritize the indigenous or local communities of color. For these locations, these are mainly rural but may have local indigenous community members that I could communicate with in the future.

We did not include priorities of local communities of color when developing our proposal, and to address this in the future we will include community member(s) in the early stages of proposal planning and writing as collaborators (I have some ideas below).

It was a fairly touristy-kind of activity. But, suitable for the number of students involved and the complexity of planning. We did not prioritize other, more authentic interactions. I think it would have been nice to get more of a local perspective on the volcanic activity in the region. This particular Maori tribe lived directly on top of the Rotorua caldera...the geology there must impact their entire history and society. I would have liked to have engaged in that more.

By being aware of local norms through communication and interaction with local people, or those familiar with local people everything has pretty much worked out. It has been the students that are distressed.



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- **Are there ways to improve the outcome of projects already undertaken?**
 - 1) Faculty and staff are receiving training in cultural competency and we are developing a training program for students prior to working with and within communities of color.
 - 2) We plan to engage more meaningfully with local communities on our next study abroad trip.
 - 3) We are reaching out to our local indigenous community. Our department chair contacted a local Seneca group at Gonandagan and received helpful feedback on land acknowledgements, need for full inclusion in departmental trips, and no cost access to analytical equipment.
 - 4) Our instructional support specialist and adjunct instructor have been collecting resources to educate ourselves about indigenous communities in places where we hold study abroad and traditional/indigenous knowledge about these areas.
 - 5) A student in our department and our instructional support specialist developed a land acknowledgement for our department to use when appropriate. While we acknowledge that this is highly performative, we find that the land acknowledgement begins to engage us in decolonized thinking and shows respect. It is a good start...but certainly not the end of our engagement with local indigenous communities.

Comments from the Survey:

It would be neat to find resources that explain the root of many of the volcanic terms on the island. Every volcanic region has local terms/customs pertaining to volcanism (Hawaiian and Icelandic terms are well known in geology, but Maori terms are not). I would have liked to have learned these terms from the Maori perspective. What did volcanism mean to them and how did they describe it/interpret it?

I think we could invite folks from the local schools to participate in our field trips.

Land acknowledgements will be a good first step.

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

We do not have any specific resources or guidelines at our university at this time. This is the first attempt at creating this policy at our institution. Our work for URGE begins after the comments from a survey based on the initial questions asked in the URGE deliverable example document.

Comments from the Survey:

I would say that a clear planning framework should be in place so that the workload is not disproportional toward communities of color (or other disparate relationships, e.g., junior vs senior research faculty). I think developing these relationships would allow for future collaborations. A single point person, in theory,



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sounds like a great idea, to coordinate this sort of thing, but that person may not connect well with everyone.

I think that I could do a lot better job of digitally "previewing" this trip (or any field trip that I run) for our majors. I'm thinking of Ryan Petterson's at Stanford approach (http://web.stanford.edu/group/field-education/virtual_california/overview/output/index.html). In the past I wasn't much into this kind of thing as a replacement for field trips. More recently, however, I've been sold on the strong case that these sorts of "previews" of trips can significantly reduce the cognitive load that students have to carry because it lets them become familiar with the trip before attending. It is kind of like Google Street View for geologists. I love street view for when I am traveling to a new place. It gives me confidence that I will recognize where I am going, what building I should be looking for, etc. That reduces my stress while driving to that new place. I think that this can do the same thing (benefit to all students) while also allowing students that cannot go to participate in the program (increasing accessibility). This approach, however, would require additional resources (another trip to CA, equipment to take the photo scans, time to learn how to build the websites, etc). I think that this could make our field trips accessible to communities of color.

Geneseo does not have guidelines set for these interactions. However, there is a requirement for introspection for all study abroad programs and interacting with communities that are different from ones own should be a more clear component of our January field trips.

I have found that preliminary trips and speaking with colleagues that have been to these areas previously helped greatly. For example, prior to the initial trip to Puerto Rico I called people with a similar research background. We have become friends and they were fountains of information and assisted in our on-ground experience.

Nascent policy goals for working with communities of color: Improve planning, working, and inclusion of communities of color in research, study abroad experiences, and local indigenous communities (Framework from Urban.Org augmented with notes from Week 4 readings)

Cultivate community-engaged research methods: Researchers can better understand the place they study and by understanding the people and the realities they face by actively engaging with communities and building on their knowledge and insights. Creating a collaborative, equitable learning partnership requires researchers to include community members in multiple phases of research, including study design, data collection, analysis, and dissemination. This will not happen overnight because it requires gaining the trust of the communities of color.



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- 1) We will be patient and work to develop trust with the communities of color within which we work and lead student study abroad experiences. This process may take several years, and we will not be pushy or aggressive in pursuing these relationships.
- 2) We will seek equitable relationships with research partners and maintain an asset-based view of the community. This includes valuing and showing respect for indigenous knowledge, traditional knowledge and/or non-western ways of knowing.
- 3) We recognize that in our research partnerships the indigenous community must be involved in every aspect of the research process from defining the questions, through analyzing the data, and interpretation of the results.
- 4) We will be sensitive to the cultural demands on time and build this into the project from the beginning.
- 5) We will not perpetuate tokenism of individuals or communities of color in science by: a) superficially using culture and knowledge b) establishing a collaboration to check a box, or c) pursue research that benefits the community without meaningful engagement of the community.
- 6) Recognize that when working with communities of color, especially indigenous communities, the community has sovereignty over the data that is collected and that they control speed of publication with internal review process

Devote resources to translation: Language barriers may exist between research partners. To overcome these barriers to inclusion, we will include resources for translation services in grant budgets to a) ensure that everyone who wishes to be is included and b) that their responses are accurately reflected. This may be essential for indigenous knowledge.

Monetary Compensation: Time and expertise are valuable assets. Researchers can acknowledge these contributions by paying survey respondents and community partners. Financial remuneration may be most appropriate, but if this is not possible, alternative forms of compensation, such as providing food or securing child care, should be offered. We will also seek to provide scholarships for Seneca students and provide the Seneca and Haudenosaunee free analysis of artifacts using our analytical equipment. Institution wide scholarship programs for indigenous groups in New York State are already in progress (Reconciliation Action Plan <https://www.suny.edu/media/suny/content-assets/documents/diversity/suny-dei-final-action-plan.pdf>)

Training of Faculty-Staff and Students in Cultural Competency in advance of work with communities of color: Chair of the department is contacting the study abroad office to see if there is a campus program already in place for students. Faculty and staff can participate in an advancing cultural competency certification program, and by May 2021, 4 of 7 faculty and full-



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time staff will be certified. The gold program through the office of student affairs offers two certification programs that may serve as a foundation for pre-study abroad training for students, especially the [Global engagement certificate](#) and the [equity minded leadership certificate](#) through the student affairs office does have a pre-study abroad certificate program which may well serve as the foundation of the training that students receive before traveling abroad.

Local Land Acknowledgements: When appropriate, we will use the following land acknowledgement at our home institution to recognize and acknowledge the Seneca Nation and Haudenosaunee Confederacy. The chair of our department reported back to our URGE group that the Seneca Nation was not terribly impressed by land acknowledgements. Scholarships, free participation on field trips, and free access to analytical facilities were more appreciated forms of acknowledgement.

Nya:wëh Sgë:nö' (pronunciation found here: <https://senecalanguage.com/>)

"I am thankful you are well"

We make this land acknowledgment as an expression of gratitude and appreciation to those whose historic territories we call Geneseo, especially the Seneca Nation of Indians and Tonawanda Seneca Nation - who call themselves Onöndowa'ga:'- The People from the great hills. By making this acknowledgment, we respectfully recognize a painful history of theft, displacement, and genocide. - which is essential to the educational mission, pursuit of open dialogue, and community commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at SUNY Geneseo. (By Maria Leonard, SUNY Geneseo Class of 2021)

We would also like to acknowledge the Haudenosaunee for sharing the Seventh Generation Value, which reminds us that we are connected to a community that transcends time. In the present and through the space that we occupy, we are connected to the past, but also to the future. We use lessons from the past to support our adaptation to the present circumstances, while also considering how our decisions will affect the next seven generations of people. (From the writings of Rick Hill Sr., Oren Lyons, and G. Peter Jemison and the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, adapted for the department of Geological Sciences at SUNY Geneseo by Sarah Gaudio)

Sources of information:

<https://www.haudenosauneeconfederacy.com/values/>

<https://sni.org/>

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For other land acknowledgments this is a good place to start: <https://native-land.ca/>

Assessing Progress

With these considerations and strategies in mind, one big question remains: How can we, as institutions, hold ourselves accountable and determine whether these efforts are working? As research organizations, our assessments of progress and decisions about next steps should be rooted in evidence. We propose the following as indicators for researchers to assess their progress in confronting structural racism and cultivating meaningful interactions in our work with communities of color.

1. Training: Increasing numbers of staff will participate in efforts to learn about structural racism and apply this lens in their research about issues of difference and disparities.
2. More experts of color will want to work for our organization and contribute to the bodies of work we produce.
3. Independent “audits” of the language and images in our published research products will find improvements in respect, equity, and inclusion.
4. Survey All research and study abroad stakeholders to assess experience when appropriate.



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Additional resources

Resource for Conducting research through an Anti-racism Lens

<https://libguides.umn.edu/antiracism/lens>

Resources for working with communities of color

Conducting Research With Communities of Color

Leo Mcavoy, Patricia L. Winter, Corliss Wilson Outley, Dan McDonald, Deborah J. Chavez

Pages 479-488 | Published online: 30 Nov 2010

[Conducting Research With Communities of Color: Society & Natural Resources: Vol 13, No 5](#)

Puerto Rico

<https://eos.org/articles/keeping-indigenous-science-knowledge-out-of-a-colonial-mold>

New Zealand - Maori Traditional Knowledge and Volcanic Hazard Mitigation - also a bit about Iceland and traditional knowledge about explosive volcanism there

https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/11157_2016_44

Indonesia/Malaysia

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2212420914000612>

Lisa Hiwasaki, Emmanuel Luna, Syamsidik, Rajib Shaw,

Process for integrating local and indigenous knowledge with science for hydro-meteorological disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation in coastal and small island communities, International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction, Volume 10, Part A, 2014, Pages 15-27

Chile

Decolonizing Environmental Justice Studies: A Latin American Perspective

Lina Álvarez & Brendan Coolsaet (2018): Decolonizing Environmental Justice Studies: A Latin American Perspective, Capitalism Nature Socialism, DOI:10.1080/10455752.2018.1558272

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328198877_Decolonizing_Environmental_Justice_Studies_A_Latin_American_Perspective