

URGE

Unlearning Racism in Geoscience



URGE Policies for Working with Communities of Color for Washington and Lee University Geology URGE pod

This is what was found by Washington and Lee University's Geology pod at Washington and Lee 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:**
 - Historically, our departmental curriculum has involved a significant amount of teaching in the field. We stopped visiting one field site on Indigenous land due to concerns from local members of Indigenous groups about the extractive nature of geoscience.
 - Four of our six participating faculty have worked on projects in countries or regions with communities of color. Projects involving interactions with local communities include:
 - Research and teaching in Hawai'i. Local community members have been hired as guides.
 - Research in Argentina: Field work in the Andes in northern Argentina was based in a mountain town governed by the Indigenous community.
 - Research in Belize: This project monitors the health of *Acropora cervicornis*, a coral species that has survived in an apparent refugium in Belize. The faculty member takes two trips to San Pedro a year, usually with students, to take photographs of corals and replace data collection instruments. Local boat captains and assistants are used. In the past couple of years, the W&L faculty member has reached out to a local researcher.



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- **What worked well in these interactions?**
 - Allowing time for relationship building
 - Offering data to local researchers
 - Asking a local community researcher to be a co-author on a paper
- **What did not work well, and how can this be better addressed in future plans?**
 - Initially, our researchers in Argentina did not reach out to the Indigenous community and simply began field work. We were challenged by a local about our presence and left for that field season. We attempted to hire an intermediary to reach an agreement with the local community, but did not provide sufficient time to build a genuine relationship. We ultimately were denied access by the leaders of the local community and abandoned the field work. In the future, we could better address this issue by reaching out to local communities early to build a relationship built on mutual understanding and trust.
- **Are there ways to improve the outcome of projects, whether already in progress or new?**
 - In Belize, our faculty member recently shared data and monitoring equipment with a local researcher. This has created a new collaboration to the great benefit of the project and all involved. Our project leader is exploring additional appropriate ways to enhance this relationship.
 - A faculty member who studies water quality intends to make connections with local communities of color to find out their concerns and the priorities they are engaged with as she develops her research plans.
 - A faculty member who studies soils is revisiting how he approaches working with farmers, to be aware of their concerns and views and to learn from them. This could include bringing speakers to campus that could explore issues relevant to local Black and Indigenous farmers, including their roots/values/principles and what lands that they have lost over time.
 - We have recently engaged with a leader of a local Indigenous group to discuss creating non-extractive educational opportunities and research opportunities for water quality monitoring and stream restoration



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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?**
 - Creating content for our website that acknowledges our thinking about Indigenous people, particularly with respect to of our exploration of the land in our teaching
 - There is a need for Western scientists to learn about Indigenous worldviews, and to think about how to access Indigenous knowledge and consider incorporating Indigenous views and information into their methods and scholarship. There are probably articles and speakers that can help.
 - One potential concern with engaging with Indigenous groups could be around questions of who has access to and control of data, particularly for time-sensitive projects or ones for which a faculty member needs to build a publication record for tenure/promotion. It would be valuable to develop guidelines about how to navigate issues about (1) who has control of data and (2) how can one take the time to build respectful relationships in this context.