

URGE

Unlearning Racism in Geoscience

Many geoscience programs and societies are currently having conversations surrounding racism. These conversations are inspired by recent reminders (e.g., the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery) that the injustices in society are reflected and perpetuated in Geoscience. Morris et al., (2020) appropriately describe the effects of racism on the careers of black, brown, and indigenous Geoscientists by stating that “in place of mass incarceration, there is mass exclusion [and] in place of police brutality, [geoscience] careers are killed through forced attrition and under-investment.”² Like the rest of the world and academia, the Geosciences need to unlearn racism.

We designed a community-wide journal-reading and policy-design curriculum to help Geoscientists unlearn racism and improve accessibility, justice, equity, and inclusion (AJEDI) in our discipline. We call this program Unlearning Racism in Geoscience (URGE; www.urgeoscience.org). URGE’s primary objectives are to (1) deepen the community’s knowledge of the effects of racism on the participation and retention of black, brown, and indigenous people in Geoscience, (2) use the existing literature, expert opinion, and personal experiences to develop anti-racist policies and strategies, and (3) share, discuss, and modify anti-racist policies and strategies within a dynamic community network and on a national stage. By meeting these objectives, we hope that Geoscience departments and societies will be able to implement a well-researched crowdsourced group of anti-racist policies.

URGE, like Geoscience departments and societies, strongly believes that our community needs to design and implement policies that help shift the culture from one that is, at best, passively not racist to one that is actively anti-racist. Geoscience departments and societies are currently discussing and developing anti-racist plans through town halls³, commentaries⁴, petitions⁵, opinion pieces⁶, social media campaigns⁷, book clubs, and bias training. The resulting anti-racist policies will only be as good as the data that inform them, the people who uphold them, and the resources that go into supporting them. The policies Geoscientists develop must, therefore, be well-informed by multiple ways of knowing (i.e., personal experiences, expert opinion,

¹R. E. Bernard, E. H. G. Cooperdock, No progress on diversity in 40 years. *Nature Publishing Group*. 11, 1–5 (2018).

²Morris, V., White, L., Fuentes, J., Atchison, C., Smythe, W., Burt, M., Williams, L., Tripathi, A., Demoz, B., Armstrong, R. (2020). *A Call to Action for an Anti-Racist Science Community from Geoscientists of Color: Listen, Act, Lead*. <https://notimeforsilence.org/>

³<https://www.geochemsoc.org/news/2020/06/09/gs-eag-town-hall-discussion-black-lives-matter-promoting-div>

⁴<https://notimeforsilence.org/>

⁵<https://www.change.org/p/geoscientists-call-for-a-robust-anti-racism-plan-for-the-geosciences>; over 20,000 signatures.

⁶<https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/voices/the-geosciences-community-needs-to-be-more-diverse-and-inclusive/>

⁷<https://twitter.com/search?q=%23BlackInGeoscience>

and scientific literature) and well-supported by the entire community. Support is especially needed from those with the most power to change the system (i.e., people who are over-represented and or control how policies are created and implemented).

In this virtual era where COVID-19 is real, book clubs have become popular ways to begin conversations that lead to the development of anti-racist policies and strategies. The utilization of literary work as a medium for discussions allows readers to reflect on existing scholarship and share their personal experiences that have been shown to influence the perspectives of participants.¹⁰ The main drawbacks of book clubs are that they often focus on the work of only a few authors, the books are often not Geoscience specific, and discussions often occur only among small, isolated groups. URGE's curriculum aims to maximize the benefits of book clubs while limiting their drawbacks.

URGE invites lab groups, departments, professional societies, and others to form 'pods' that will serve as their discussion groups. Resources for effective group discussions, group leading, registering pods, and finding or joining pods that suit participants' needs (i.e. affinity groups) will be available on the URGE website. Each group will participate in eight, two-week units that incorporate readings, interviews, and discussions focused on learning about and implementing efficient anti-racist strategies. These two-week units are entitled Racism and Sociology, Racism and Individuals, Racism and History, Racism and Justice, Racism and Accessibility, Racism and Inclusivity I, Racism and Inclusivity II, and Racism and Accountability. The first week of each session will be dedicated to independent reading followed by a live interview with the author of the paper or expert on racism. The interview will provide additional insights into the readings and will allow pod members to ask questions. Interview recordings will be made available on the URGE website. The second week of the unit will be dedicated to pod discussions, where the interview and readings are discussed and used to generate anti-racist strategies and policies. Each pod will then share these strategies and policies on the URGE website, so that the pods can see, discuss, and learn from each other. At the end of the curriculum, each pod will be invited to submit a document that summarizes what they have learned and their future action plans. URGE also invites the groups to present their summaries to the department chairs, deans, and directors of their departments, institutions, and societies for discussion and development of accountability plans. URGE will facilitate check-ins at conferences (e.g., AGU and GSA) or online, where groups report on what worked, what did not, and additional challenges that still remain.

URGE's vision is to empower geoscientists, especially those who are historically over-represented, to implement anti-racist strategies into their workplaces and careers,

¹⁰Flood, J., & Lapp, D. (1994). Issues and Trends: Teacher Book Clubs: Establishing Literature Discussion Groups for Teachers. *The Reading Teacher*, 47(7), 574-576. Retrieved September 11, 2020, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20201319>

thus taking ownership of the need for real change in our discipline. We encourage pods to share their action items over social media (using #URGEO) and on the URGE website. URGE will have discussion boards available on the website for everyone to see what policies and strategies other pods have developed and to share ideas. Sign up for pods will begin in January. While you wait, please sign up for our mailing list, share our website and information videos, and start building your pods. Come help us unlearn racism in geoscience!

¹⁰Flood, J., & Lapp, D. (1994). Issues and Trends: Teacher Book Clubs: Establishing Literature Discussion Groups for Teachers. *The Reading Teacher*, 47(7), 574-576. Retrieved September 11, 2020, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20201319>