

# URGE

## Unlearning Racism in Geoscience

Many geoscience programs are currently developing and implementing policies and programs meant to improve accessibility, justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (AJEDI). These changes are inspired by the recognition that the racism and injustices impacting society are reflected and perpetuated in academia, especially in Geosciences, which remains one of the least diverse STEM fields. 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.”<sup>2</sup> 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, diversity, and inclusion (AJEDI) in our discipline. We call this program Unlearning Racism in Geoscience (URGE; [www.urgeoscience.org](http://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) draw on existing literature, expert opinions, 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 and programs that will lead to lasting change.

### Why do we need URGE?

URGE strongly believes that our community needs to shift our 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 halls<sup>3</sup>, commentaries<sup>4</sup>, petitions<sup>5</sup>, opinion pieces<sup>6</sup>, social media campaigns<sup>7</sup>, book clubs, and bias training. However, the resulting anti-racist policies will

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

<sup>2</sup>Morris, 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/>

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

<sup>4</sup><https://notimeforsilence.org/>

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

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

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

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, 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 within the discipline, often the same people who control how policies are created and implemented).

During this time, where COVID-19 is real, online 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.<sup>10</sup> The main drawbacks of traditional 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.

### **How will URGE work?**

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. The first week of each session will be dedicated to independent reading, followed by a live interview with the authors of the papers or other experts on the unit's topic. 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 major conferences (e.g., AGU and GSA) as well as online, where groups report on what

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<sup>10</sup>Flood, 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>

worked, what did not, and additional challenges that still remain.

## **Join us**

URGE's vision is to empower geoscientists, especially those who are historically over-represented, to implement anti-racist strategies into their workplaces and careers, thus taking ownership of the need for real change in our discipline. URGE runs from January 18, 2021, to May 07, 2021. Pod sign-ups begin in January 2021. Please, come help us unlearn racism in Geoscience!

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<sup>10</sup>Flood, 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>