

URGE Outcomes From University of Michigan’s Earth & Environmental Sciences

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Abstract

The Department of Earth & Environmental Sciences at the University of Michigan formed an Unlearning Racism in GEosciences (URGE) pod composed of six graduate students, three postdocs and eight faculty in the beginning of 2021. The department’s Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) efforts have been building in the preceding years. Our first DEI committee was formed in 2017 and increased its activity since initiation, hosting DEI discussions and initiatives with participation from students, postdocs, staff and faculty. Existing DEI activities include a Fall Preview event for prospective graduate students, DEI office hours and book discussions, adding DEI resources to the public-facing Department website, student grants for DEI related activities, and hosting workshops. The formation of an URGE pod provided new, focused energy to our DEI efforts and bolstered ongoing work by creating a bigger, critical mass of people who met regularly and were focused on action. The scope of URGE, the NSF support for it, and the interactions with other institutions that came from it, helped give our pod momentum, legitimacy, and contributed to broader departmental support for the recommendations that it produced. It also helped our department identify our most critical deficits on a DEI front and concrete ways that we will respond to them, which parallel needs articulated in a recent report from our college’s anti-racism task force, a major focus of our Dean. Actions emerging from the URGE pod include, but are not limited to, hiring a Wellness and Inclusion Advocate staff member, creation of field safety training and guidance, and building a workshop series to address issues centered on creating a culture of wellness and inclusion (anti-bias training, ally training, etc). The formation of our pod coincided with and complemented the finalization of our department’s self-study as part of a decadal strategic planning process. Many recommendations related to hiring, inclusive teaching, reporting, and deliberate mentoring practices that our URGE pod discussed were incorporated into our department’s strategic plan that was finalized in July 2021. We are eager to translate these recommendations for anti-racism work into actions, building on and contributing to the momentum and resources of the URGE community.



URGE Outcomes From University of Michigan's Earth & Environmental Sciences

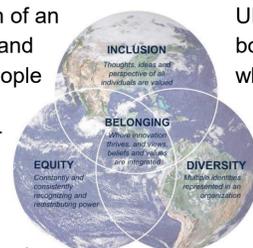
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University Background

University-wide Strategic Plan

- Overarching Strategy 1: Create an Inclusive and Equitable Campus Climate
- Overarching Strategy 2: Recruit, Retain and Develop a Diverse Community
- Overarching Strategy 3: Support Innovative and Inclusive Scholarship and Teaching



Wolverine Pathways

- College readiness program for middle/high school students in underserved districts, successful completion results in 4-year tuition scholarship

NextProf Science

- Workshop for underrepresented PhD students and postdocs to obtain advice on pursuing academic careers

Department Background

Recruiting and Outreach Initiatives

Earth Camp



- Summer residential program for underrepresented high school students
- 3 summers of week-long programming in Earth and Environmental Sciences



Fall Preview

- All-expenses paid opportunity to explore graduate education, participate in admissions workshops, meet world-renowned faculty and current graduate students, and learn about life in Ann Arbor
- Recruiting event to help underrepresented undergraduate students have strong applications and connections to the Earth & Environmental Sciences PhD program

Postdoc to Faculty transition programs

Coastal Ocean Environment Summer School in Ghana (COESSING)



- Faculty and students from the University of Michigan among other US-based universities volunteer their time to offer a summer school for African scientists and students centered around oceanography, environmental sciences, programming, and professional development



Support and Retention

DEI committee

- Addresses DEI concerns and supports DEI initiatives within the department
- 5 faculty members, a graduate student representative, and staff representative

Department DEI website page

- Revamped web resources for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion Resources <https://lsa.umich.edu/earth/diversity--equity--and-inclusion.html>

Positive messaging campaign

- Stickers, posters, photos that highlight diversity of people & types of research



First year cohort seminar for graduate students

- Includes components of identity, social justice, and wellness



Welcome to Earth: "onboarding" seminar for majors

- Onboarding course started Fall 2021 for undergraduates required for all majors starting Fall 2022 declarations

Field Gear Reuse/Library program

- Run by the departmental GeoClub to remove financial barriers to undergraduates participating in field trips

URGE Outcomes

Teaching

Needs

- Anti-racist pedagogy instruction
- Decolonize curriculum
- Better recognition of student barriers



Actions

- Slack group for sharing resources among all instructors on curriculum with channels on anti-racist pedagogy and decolonizing our curriculum
- Held Anti-Racist Pedagogy Workshops well-attended by faculty and students

Fieldwork

Needs

- Support for students
- Instruction on inclusive field work
- Guidelines for working with local communities



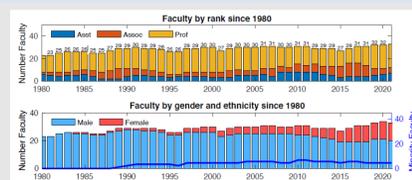
Actions

- Fall semester entry-level field/camping trip for graduate students
- Working to implement training for instructors
- Wellbeing sessions with experts for how to support students better at field camp
- Conversations with Wellness Center about inclusive work
- Bringing Wellness Center experts into classes with field trips

Hiring- Diversifying Faculty

Needs

- Representation
- Active recruitment



(Top) Faculty by rank since 1980, demonstrating recent hires (past four years) at the assistant professor rank. (Bottom) Faculty by gender since 1980. Gender diversity with the faculty has grown substantially since 1980, but the number of minority faculty has declined in the past decade.

Actions

- Inclusive hiring practices for faculty
- Use College/University mechanisms
 - LSA Collegiate Fellows
 - Presidential Postdoctoral Fellowship Program

Equitable Community

Needs

- Expertise
- Codified expectation
- Staff support

Actions

- Creating a new staff position in our department: Wellness and Inclusion Advocate (Mental Health + DEI)
 - proposal shared with 2 other departments (Anthropology and Ecology & Evolutionary Biology)
 - common thread is Field-based research/teaching.
 - support from external review committee
- Code of conduct developed and implemented
- Graduate Student Instructor Handbook finished and developing Grad Student Handbook
- Training for faculty on Cultivating a More Equitable Academy

Ongoing questions



Interested in bringing discipline-specific (Earth & Environmental Sciences-specific) anti-racism pedagogy & other trainings

Interested in hosting BIPOC scientists for seminars, visiting scientists, etc

Continue to focus on anti-racism work and support BIPOC-led initiatives; making sure voices of non-White people are heard

Any insight into how to better collect and collate data, and other strategies, to assess success of programs?

What else has worked for you?

What are *your* ideas and priorities?