

## Department of Geosciences Diversity Plan for Graduate Education January 2022

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### Department of Geosciences Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Values

In the Department of Geosciences, diversity, equity, justice, accessibility, and inclusion are values that we embrace. We are continuously working to create an environment where our faculty, researchers, students, staff, and visitors can excel, regardless of their age, color, disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, national origin, political affiliation, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, veteran status, or other identity. We are firmly committed to these values because we believe having varied perspectives benefits the individual, our science, and society (<https://geos.vt.edu/dei.html>).

### Ongoing activities led by the Department of Geosciences Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility (IDEA) Committee include:

- Fall departmental workshops focused on specific IDEA topics. Past topics have included having difficult conversations around race and active bystander training;
- IDEA orientation workshop for incoming graduate students;
- Recruiting graduate students from underrepresented communities through participation in the AGU Bridge Program: <https://agu.org/bridge-program>
- Removal of the GRE as a requirement for our graduate application;
- Diversifying our seminar series;
- Monthly seminars through WInGS (Widening Inclusivity in the (Geo)Sciences);
- Faculty participation in the Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI) Inclusive Excellence (IE) Faculty Scholars Program;
- Formation of an Unlearning Racism in Geoscience (URGE) Program (<https://urgescience.org>) Pod in the department in Spring 2021. Our URGE Pod page is at <https://urgescience.org/pod/virginia-tech-geosciences-pod>;
- Meeting the Graduate School's Inclusion and Diversity requirements (CGSP Resolution 2017-18A), outlined below;
- Development and distribution of infographics and similar reference materials which show the resources available to students, staff, and faculty for navigating conflict and reporting discrimination;
- Development of a departmental library on IDEA studies in the geosciences and STEM more broadly.

### Meeting the Inclusion and Diversity Topic Requirements for Graduate Education

The Inclusion and Diversity requirements (CGSP Resolution 2017-18A) requires that the following topics be addressed in graduate education:

**Topic 1.** The Virginia Tech Principles of Community as they apply to the valuing of human diversity and inclusion.

**Topic 2.** The impact that personal actions and words have on self, others, and the communities—university, national, and global—in which we live; issues of privilege, bias, power, prejudice, and discrimination; concepts of multiple personal, social, and cultural identities.

**Topic 3.** Available avenues of redress and our shared responsibilities as active bystanders.

**Topic 4.** The process of individual introspection required both to understand one's own forms of implicit or unconscious bias and to create inclusive environments.

### **Our Plan for Meeting the Diversity Topic Requirements**

We will meet the requirements in three ways: **1)** through addition of the Principles of Community to our courses' syllabi; **2)** through presentation and discussion of Topics 1-4 in our required GEOS 5024 course; and **3)** through further DEI education through workshops in our department and provision of resources about campus activities through our IDEA committee.

1. Inclusion of Principles of Community in Course Syllabi. To emphasize the importance of the Principles of Community (**Topic 1**), we will ask our faculty to include it in all syllabi for graduate courses in Geosciences. We will send reminders to faculty prior to each semester, along with the text and additional resources.
2. Presentation and Discussion of Topics in GEOS 5024. Because all of our students are required to take the GEOS 5024 Professional Development and Ethics in Geosciences course (Fall semester, 1 credit), we have embedded Diversity and Inclusion topics in this course through sessions led by Ms. Alicia Cohen, the Director of Diversity Programs in the Office of Inclusion and Diversity. Ms. Cohen has been leading a two part series on DEI topics in GEOS 5024 since Fall 2018. These sessions address each of the topics required by the CGSP resolution.

The first session is called "Principles of Community and Social Identity". The learning objectives of this session include:

- To become familiar with the Principles of Community and how to affirm them in our everyday actions (**addresses Topic 1**)
- To understand the difference between diversity and inclusion (**Topic 1**)
- To explore aspects of identity and their impact on how we are perceived by and interact with others (**Topic 2**)
- To reflect on privileged and marginalized identities (**Topic 2**)

In this session, students discuss visible and invisible diversity, experiences of invisibility, social identity, intersectionality, and some of the issues of diversity in science, specifically geosciences, which is a majority white-dominated field. This session also includes an activity where students complete a worksheet on social identity that they discuss in small groups.

The second session that Ms. Cohen leads for our GEOS 5024 class is called "Microaggressions and Microinterventions", with the following learning objectives:

- To understand the components of identity and how they impact our relationships and relate to privilege (**Topic 2**)
- To explore how privilege manifests itself in the university and society. (**Topic 2**)
- To examine how bias, microaggressions and stereotypes result in subtle forms of prejudice (**Topic 3**)
- To identify microinterventions (strategies) to address bias, microaggressions and stereotypes to create a more inclusive community (**Topic 4**)

In this session, students learn about and discuss questions of privilege and power; levels of oppression; implicit bias and structural racism; stereotypes; different types of bias in science; characteristics of microaggressions; overcoming microaggressions; including microinterventions; and microaffirmations. Student also learn possible strategies to

employ to call out or educate others (assuming good intent), explain impact, seek external support, and be an ally.

3. Further DEI Education via Department Workshops. As mentioned above, our IDEA committee routinely hosts workshops on DEI topics. New graduate students also attend a DEI workshop presented by the IDEA during their fall orientation. We will encourage all graduate students to attend departmental level workshops to further their knowledge and understanding of DEI topics.