

## GCE-LTER DEI Implementation plan

The GCE-LTER diversity plan lays out broad goals for the project in terms of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI). This implementation plan is a companion document that describes in detail what the project has already done, what specific actions we plan for the next 6 years, and what we hope to accomplish over the longer-term in the area of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion for groups such as underrepresented minorities and female scientists who face barriers to participation in research. It also takes stock of our efforts to be thoughtful in our interactions with the local community and to respect the historical ties and knowledge that Native Americans, the Gullah-Geechee community, and others have with our study site. We assess progress annually, and we welcome your input.

Barriers to participation in GCE research include lack of previous research experience, lack of familiarity with GCE and the University of Georgia Marine Institute (UGAMI), concern over field and travel expenses, harassment and discrimination, sexual misconduct, and lack of dependent care support. Some groups may also face barriers associated with poor English skills, lack of trust, or disabilities that limit access. Below we list what we have done to-date to address these barriers, along with both our short-term goals and long-term aims.

### **What we have done:**

We established a standing DEI committee, which meets at least annually to assess the implementation plan and identify new potential actions.

We wrote a GCE diversity plan (2012, revised in 2024), conducted a diversity survey of past and active GCE personnel (2020), and wrote the first iteration of this implementation plan (2022). The implementation plan is revised annually.

We adopted a GCE code of conduct (2021), which prohibits harassment, discrimination, and sexual misconduct, and provides mechanisms for reporting violations. We provide this information to undergraduates, graduate students, technicians, post-docs and faculty who work in the GCE program.

We wrote a GCE field safety plan (2022), which provides guidance on minimizing risk of harassment from co-workers or the public. This is provided to all who work in the program.

We added a question about overcoming obstacles to the summer intern application (2021) so that it wouldn't just emphasize experience, but also motivation. We rephrased this question in 2023 so that applicants didn't feel pressured to over share. We also invite applicants to provide information on disabilities so that we can facilitate reasonable accommodations.

We continue to expand promotion of the summer intern program, including through Savannah State University and minority-serving programs at the University of Georgia and the University of Houston. We have also hosted a visit by the Savannah State University REU program to UGAMI (2021) and will explore hosting repeat visits in future years.

We started (2021) an annual pre-summer orientation for interns and incoming graduate students to help address questions about what to expect at the field site.

We include residents of the Hogg Hummock Community in our summer seminar series and provide opportunities for GCE participants to engage in community-based agricultural programs.

We work with Native American tribes to help design and vet archaeological research.

We make field vests available through the GCE technicians' office to help identify researchers working in the field (2022).

We routinely cover travel expenses for interns to the field site (2022).

We started a GCE twitter account as one way to improve communication within the group (as well as outside) and celebrate our achievements (2023).

We began putting a recording of the annual summer orientation on the GCE web site document archive for future reference (2024).

We added the GCE code of conduct to the orientation materials for the Schoolyard program (2023).

We make sure to emphasize respect and consideration for the Hogg Hummock community in our summer orientation (2023).

### **Action items for 2024**

Host a visit by Ecological Society of America SEEDS group to UGAMI in April 2024.

Distribute the climate survey developed by the network-wide graduate student committee.

Explore a visit by the Savannah State REU program to UGAMI in summer 2024. (Declined in 2023 but will ask again in 2024.)

Emphasize the importance of mentoring to intern sponsors and graduate advisers, and provide access to mentoring resources. Provide clear expectations to mentors, including providing necessary field gear and completing mentor-mentee contracts (provide a standard form on the GCE website).

Provide a welcome packet of sunscreen and bug spray and electrolytes to summer students (GCE techs).

### **Possible actions in the next six years**

Promote the 2025 intern program more broadly to Native American colleges and Hispanic-Serving Institutions (Steve, Io).

Make essential field gear available to reduce out of pocket expenses for undergraduate and graduate students (boots, field shirt and pants, sunscreen, bug spray).

Ask UGAMI to better label the trailers, or make a map that shows which trailer is which.

Add DEI or mentor training to each annual meeting (with funding in the GCE-V proposal).

Make polo shirts with the GCE logo available to help identify researchers working in the field. These will be an alternative to the field vests, depending on the situation.

Establish an on-island buddy system for international scientists (and others who are interested) while they are in residence at UGAMI.

Work with GCE researchers and the Schoolyard program to expand the “meet the scientist” video series on the GCE education web page.

Provide recorded talks on cultural competency in research from Geechee contacts.

Work to improve group cohesion through social events, training events, and other community building events, both in the summer at UGAMI and at other GCE events.

Provide more career training for interns and graduate students and technicians.

Develop regular avenues for graduate student interactions to improve inclusion.

Work to improve diversity at all ranks by: a) meeting each fall to discuss whether we want to recruit successful undergraduate interns to apply to graduate school; b) identifying and recruiting diverse faculty to give seminars, participate in GCE meetings, and visit UGAMI; c) providing seminars and recruiting at HBCU or Hispanic-serving or Tribal colleges (such as the tribal college for the Muscogee Nation in Oklahoma, cmn.edu); d) inviting tribal members for tours of UGAMI and to GCE meetings.

Make it clear that we can provide remote research opportunities for those who face barriers to field work.

Partner with UGAMI and other Island entities (e.g. SINERR, NGOs) to sponsor an open house for Hogg Hummock (and perhaps McIntosh County) residents.

Continue to partner with members of the Gullah/Geechee community to conduct research on traditional ecological knowledge.

### **Long-term aims**

Partner with the Gullah-Geechee corridor organization.

Pursue joint grant applications with URM faculty with interests in GCE work.

Webinars for GCE membership (maybe we can get or promote the CERF webinars).

Provide access to culturally-aware mentoring and DEI training for interns, graduate students, and schoolyard teachers.

Identify mechanisms to provide childcare for researchers while at Sapelo Island.

Build partnerships with additional faculty who have worked in the Gullah-Geechee Corridor.

Provide access to English-language training as part of the GCE experience for international students and faculty.

Evaluate obstacles that might prevent disabled scientists from participating in GCE research, and identify where the GCE can make reasonable accommodations to facilitate participation.

### **Documenting progress**

The GCE DEI committee will continue to oversee and promote DEI actions, including updating the diversity plan and implementation plan as needed.

We will include a DEI working group in every GCE annual meeting to assess annual progress and set priorities for the coming year.

During the fourth or fifth year of each grant cycle, we will identify actions needing funding in the next grant cycle.

We will conduct a demographic survey of GCE participants in the fifth year of every grant cycle to document progress and inform grant proposals (we conducted a baseline survey in 2020).

Updated on 4/22/2024