

# Georgia Coastal Ecosystems Long-Term Ecological Research Program

## Diversity Plan

### Introduction and goals

The Georgia Coastal Ecosystems Long-Term Ecological Research (GCE-LTER) program is committed to sustaining and enhancing diversity within our ranks. The GCE-LTER is administered through the University of Georgia (UGA) and our Diversity Plan is based on and consistent with the key priorities of the UGA Diversity and Inclusive Excellence Plan ([https://diversity.uga.edu/about/inclusive\\_excellence\\_plan/](https://diversity.uga.edu/about/inclusive_excellence_plan/)). UGA embraces diversity in all forms at all its locations, with the goal of creating an inclusive environment where all persons of the University community are respected. Diversity includes, but is not limited to, groups defined by race, nationality, ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation, language, religion, disability and/or health status, gender identity/expression, veteran status, geographic origins, and socio-economic status.

The GCE-LTER ([gce-lter.marsci.uga.edu](http://gce-lter.marsci.uga.edu)) is a large research program that uses the UGA Marine Institute on Sapelo Island as its base of operations. It has participants from UGA as well as multiple additional institutions. The program provides a particular locus where people of different backgrounds and perspectives work together to actively advance knowledge in ecology and ecosystem dynamics through research, education, and outreach. In all of our activities we seek to respect, value, and learn from each other's differences.

The GCE-LTER is well positioned to contribute to the UGA Diversity Plan Priorities. **The primary strengths** that the GCE-LTER brings are 1) we are a major, long-term research program that can provide context and administrative support for long-term diversity and inclusive excellence initiatives, 2) our scientists have an international reputation that leads to multiple opportunities for research collaborations, both across the US and globally, and 3) we have sufficient financial resources that we can target some of our funding directly towards supporting this plan.

### Goals of the GCE-LTER Diversity Plan

- 1. To sustain and seek to increase the number of underrepresented minorities within our ranks** until these are consistent with the proportion of these groups in the national population. To accomplish this, we will seek to ensure that there are no discriminatory obstacles that limit the success and advancement of underrepresented minorities within our ranks, and will provide targeted opportunities for participation in GCE-LTER research by underrepresented minorities.
- 2. To sustain and seek to increase the number of women within our ranks** until these are consistent with the proportion of women in the national population. To accomplish this, we will seek to ensure that there are no discriminatory obstacles that limit the success and advancement of women within our ranks.

3. **To provide international research opportunities** to our members that will expose them to scientists and students from different cultures. To accomplish this, we will encourage participation in international research opportunities through NSF and other agencies.
4. **To sustain and seek to increase the geographic representation of our members.** As a program whose primary mission is research, our success is best ensured by recruiting the best appropriate scientists to our group, regardless of geographic and institutional affiliation. To accomplish this, we will seek to recruit participants to our ranks from across the nation, and, as appropriate, from across the globe.

We will assess our progress towards meeting these goals, and reevaluate them, on an annual basis.

## Obstacles to participation

We recognize that different groups face different obstacles to participation in science. As outlined below, our implementation plan seeks to address these obstacles.

**Under-represented minorities.** Barriers to participation in GCE science by URM scientists include lack of previous research experience, lack of familiarity with GCE and UGAMI, concern over field and travel expenses, harassment, and discrimination. URM teachers may have pressures to stay in their own schools or districts over the summer.

**Female scientists.** Barriers to participation in GCE science by female scientists include harassment, discrimination, sexual misconduct, and lack of childcare.

**International scientists.** Barriers to participation in GCE science by international scientists include lack of funding, separation from family, culture shock, and English-language skills.

**Disabled scientists.** Disabled scientists will face different barriers to participating in GCE science depending on the nature of their disability. Many of the appropriate accommodations would be the responsibility of their home institution, of the laboratories in which they would do GCE work, or of UGA as the owner of the field station where we base GCE field operations. We will do what we can to facilitate reasonable accommodations, and to provide them in cases where it is the responsibility of the GCE-LTER program.

**The local community** of Hogg Hummock, MacIntosh County, and the broader GA coast. GCE science should serve and benefit from local knowledge of the local communities, but significant barriers to these exchanges exist, including lack of trust and differing priorities.

## Implementation plan

The GCE-LTER maintains an implementation plan (updated annually and available on our website), which describes specific steps to help us accomplish our goals. The GCE DEI committee, which includes personnel from all ranks, reviews our progress and adds new implementation steps annually. The most significant steps that we have taken to date include the following.

We conducted a diversity survey of past and active GCE personnel in 2020 to track our progress, and will repeat this survey in 2025.

We adopted a GCE-LTER code of conduct.

We adopted a GCE-LTER field safety plan, and purchased field vests to help identify researchers as official parties when they are working in areas where they may encounter the general public.

We took several steps to broaden participation in our summer intern program, including adding a question focused on personal motivation rather than past research experiences, targeting minority-serving institutions for advertising, removing financial obstacles to participation, and providing a welcome package for interns.

We added an annual pre-summer orientation meeting each year for interns and incoming graduate students to help address questions about what to expect at the field site, and have increased expectations for faculty mentoring of undergraduate and graduate students.

We have hosted visits to our field site for the Savannah State University REU program and the Ecological Society of America SEEDS program.

We have taken steps to strengthen our interactions with the local Hogg Hummock Community and the broader Gullah-Geechee Corridor, and with the Native American tribes with historic connections to our research area.

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