

Georgia Coastal Ecosystems Long-Term Ecological Research Program

Broadening Participation Plan

The Georgia Coastal Ecosystems Long-Term Ecological Research (GCE-LTER) program is committed to broadening participation within our ranks. We seek to create an inclusive environment where all persons are welcome and respected. These efforts are consistent with NSF guidance (April 18, 2025, <https://www.nsf.gov/updates-on-priorities>) that activities undertaken to broaden participation should be open to all and create opportunities for all Americans.

Definition

We take wide definition of “broadening participation”, to include different backgrounds and cultures, nationalities, ages, socioeconomic statuses, races, genders, physical abilities, sexual orientations, religions and language. We want everyone to be welcome and included in our activities.

Need

Historically, many groups have been under-represented in science compared to their representation in the US population. Past exclusion of these individuals harms our mission, because the skills and talents of those who are excluded don’t contribute to the research enterprise. In particular, Hispanics, African Americans, Native Americans and Pacific Islanders are under-represented in GCE ranks, and environmental science in general, compared to the US population. Many of the factors that exclude different individuals and groups from science are outside our control as a research program. Our plan seeks to address a subset of factors that do lie within our control.

Goals

The overarching goal of the GCE Broadening Participation Plan is to remove barriers that exclude some individuals and groups from participation in GCE science. The GCE Broadening Participation Implementation Plan (BPIP) contains specific action steps that we will take to achieve this goal. The BPIP is updated annually. Key areas of concern include women, under-represented minorities and the local community where we work.

Women. Women make up ~ 44% of the GCE ranks overall (2020 survey of GCE IV participants) lower than their representation (~51%) in the US population (2020 census). At the Project Investigator level, moreover, women are only 36% of the group (GCE website as of 10/24/2024). At the national level, both men and women report being excluded from participation in research

by harassment, discrimination, sexual misconduct, and lack of childcare, but on average these factors affect women more than men, and are part of the explanation for why women are under-represented in science. We seek to remove obstacles like these that limit the success and advancement of any individuals within our ranks.

Under-represented minorities. A number of groups have historically been excluded to varying degrees from participation in science in America, and these patterns are reflected in GCE ranks. Hispanics or Latinos make up only about 4% of the GCE ranks, and African Americans only about 3% (2020 survey of GCE IV participants), compared to ~19% and ~12% respectively in the US population (2020 census). At the Project Investigator level, Hispanics and African Americans together make up only 2% of the group (GCE website as of 10/24/2024). None of the participants in our 2020 survey identified as Native American or Pacific Islander, groups that combined make up ~1% of the US population (2020 census). At the national level, barriers to participation in science by individuals from all ethnic groups include lack of previous research experience, lack of familiarity with particular research programs and field stations, concern over field and travel expenses, harassment, and discrimination. On average, these factors affect some ethnic groups more than others, and are part of the explanation for why some groups are under-represented in science. We seek to remove obstacles like these that limit the success and advancement of any individuals within our ranks.

Local community. The historic Saltwater Geechee community on Sapelo Island has experienced enslavement and discrimination and has been made fragile by ongoing development pressure on Sapelo Island. We seek to improve communication and trust between the GCE-LTER and the Hogg Hummock community, and to share knowledge about the ecosystems that we study.

Our efforts don't stop here. With the general goal of broadening participation, we seek to remove barriers that prevent any individuals from participating in our program. Our Broadening Participation Implementation Plan contains more details about these efforts.

Responsibilities and Accountability

The GCE Broadening Participation Committee is responsible for reviewing the GCE Broadening Participation Plan, Broadening Participation Implementation Plan, code of conduct and field safety plan on an annual basis, and reporting to the broader GCE community. The committee makes recommendations to the GCE Executive Committee about high priority action items. Members of the Broadening Participation Committee volunteer their time, and the committee does not receive any direct funding.

Last revised on 10/8/2025