

Dear Williams Geosciences community,

We hope this email finds you all safe, healthy, and well in these challenging times. There have been so many intersecting challenges in recent months, including new and ongoing threats to Black, Indigenous, and other people of color, immigrants, members of the queer and trans communities, people with disabilities, and other vulnerable populations.

These challenges may be new, or may be compounded over a lifetime or many generations. If you are having a difficult time concentrating on your work or contemplating the next semester at Williams, you are not alone.

We want to acknowledge two important points:

1) Black people comprise 13% of the US population, but are underrepresented in the Geosciences. [According to the American Geosciences Institute](#), Black students made up less than 3% of Geosciences graduate students in 2016, and only [1% of all PhDs awarded in Geosciences sub-disciplines](#). Geosciences remains one of the whitest sciences in the United States; this includes our own department. Of 108 Geosciences graduates from 2010-2019, 47 (44%) were women, and 21 (19%) were students of color; for comparison, the US Census estimates that about 40% of the US populations identifies as non-white and/or Hispanic/Latino ([this number is similar for Williams overall](#)) While the demographics of our department have changed over the last decades, we still have a long way to go to reach a level of diversity matching that in the US population and the Williams community.

2) This lack of diversity negatively affects our discipline, including our research and the communities we serve. Geosciences is not immune from scientific racism (dating back to Linneaus, Cuvier, and beyond), and we need to confront that head-on, especially given the current reality that Black communities disproportionately bear the brunt of environmental degradation, pollution, and climate change (see work by [Robert Bullard](#), [Sacoby Wilson](#), [Beverly Wright](#), and many others). These facts intersect in the [disproportionate impacts](#) the COVID-19 outbreak is having on Black communities.

Black students in Geosciences, we want you to know: your lives matter. You are a treasured part of our department family.

Non-Black members of Williams Geosciences: we have work to do. It is fundamentally important to educate ourselves about racism in Geosciences, and in society at large. We must also [become better allies](#).

As faculty, we need to be more proactive about sharing information and resources with you, and also need to take steps such as incorporating more information about scientific racism into all of our courses. And the entire department—students and faculty alike—must do the work to educate ourselves and think deeply about our biases and cultural encumbrances. So as a start, here is a list of articles and resources specific to Geosciences, which we hope will help you understand the structural problems in the discipline. We all live with these historical realities. We must all work to change them.

- [The Geosciences Community Needs to Be More Diverse and Inclusive](#): Bell and White, Scientific American, 2020
- [Deep Biases Prevent Diverse Talent from Advancing](#): Howley, EOS, 2020
- [No progress on Diversity in 40 years](#): Bernard and Cooperdock, 2018, Nature Geosciences
- [Race and Racism in the Geosciences](#): Dutt, 2019, Nature Geosciences
- [Earth Science has a Whiteness Problem](#): Goldberg 2019, New York Times.
- [Women from some under-represented minorities are given too few talks at world's largest Earth-science conference](#): Ford et al. 2019, Nature.
- [Scientists push against barriers to diversity in the field sciences](#): Pickrell 2020, Science.
- [A Primer on Diversity](#) (with specific Geosciences examples and resources)

This work is not easy. We, your professors and mentors, are prepared to feel uncomfortable and know that we will make mistakes, but we are committed to doing this work long-term. We are here for all of you.

With warm regards,

Phoebe Cohen  
Alex Apotsos  
Alice Bradley  
José Constantine  
Mea Cook  
Rónadh Cox  
Paul Karabinos  
Bud Wobus