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## Recommendations to Increase Inclusivity and Representation in the UC California Naturalist Certification Course

UC California Naturalist Capstone Project

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### Introduction

The Western Scientific perspective is pervasive across much of the science curriculum used in the U.S. today and is the dominant framework of the California Naturalist Handbook. While the handbook does acknowledge the need to represent diverse perspectives, we found that the chapters require supplemental resources and information to challenge and enhance the dominant Western narrative. Luckily, the textbook is just one element of the course, and the flexibility to curate resources, lessons, and speakers that represent diverse perspectives of the naturalist world provides an opportunity to create a course that is inclusive, representative of diverse perspectives, and culturally relevant to a diverse group of Naturalists-in-Training.

### About Community Nature Connection

Community Nature Connection is a community-based nonprofit organization with a mission to increase access to the outdoors for communities impacted by racial, socio-economic, and disability injustices by eliminating existing barriers through advocacy, community centered programming, and workforce development. In designing our UC California Naturalist course, we set a number of goals that would serve our audience, uphold our mission, and result in an inclusive and representational course. The purpose of this document is to share the strategies we employed in hopes that others may take away ideas for their own course design from our efforts to create a CalNat course that demonstrated inclusivity and representation through the cohort, materials, speakers, and resources.



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## Our Course Goals:

- Recruit a diverse cohort of Naturalists-in-Training
- Create a welcoming environment that highlights and celebrates diversity and inclusivity in the field
- Center Indigenous perspectives and Traditional Ecological Knowledge as it relates to course topics
- Present course topics in a socio-political context relevant to Southern California communities facing environmental injustices
- Feature guest instructors and speakers who represent professionals from diverse backgrounds actively working in the naturalist field
- Expose naturalists-in-training to opportunities in the field by highlighting active projects and current events

## Strategies and Recommendations for Achieving Course Goals

### *Recruit a diverse cohort of Naturalists-in-Training*

- Advertise course themes of environmental justice and diverse perspectives to attract folks interested in applying those lenses to CalNat.
- Target marketing of course to community-based organizations that serve communities of color and other traditionally underrepresented groups in the naturalist community.
- Create a scholarship program that provides full and partial course scholarships to target groups.

### *Create a welcoming environment that highlights and celebrates diversity and inclusivity in the field*

- Set the tone in the first class.
- Share a code of conduct that encourages students to be respectful and open-minded. For example, ours included the following:
  - Be mindful of pronouns
  - Ask for pronunciation of names
  - Be open to others' interpretations, backgrounds and experiences



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- For the first class, invite a guest speaker who is a naturalist from an underrepresented background to share their experience and insight. For example, we invited Dr. Rebecca Hernandez, Director of the American Indian Resource Center at UCSC to share her experience of what it was like to attend a mostly white CalNat course that focused on topics from a western perspective.
- Create an activity that prompts students to redefine what it means to be a naturalist, who we think of as naturalists, and that builds their confidence in the existing naturalist skills they are already bringing with them to the course.

## *Center Indigenous perspectives and Traditional Ecological Knowledge as it relates to course topics*

- Invite guest speakers and instructors who represent Indigenous backgrounds and/or have experience and expertise in Indigenous knowledge and practices as it relates to course topics.
- Select resources, articles, and videos to supplement the handbook that center Indigenous perspectives and TEK as it relates to every topic! For example:
  - Cultural burning as it relates to forest management,
  - The effects that California's water redistribution has on tribal communities,
  - Ethnobotany and indigeous uses of native plants,
  - The importance of animals to the Indigenous peoples of your geographic focus area, etc.

## *Present course topics in a socio-political context relevant to Southern California communities facing environmental injustices*

- Invite guest speakers and instructors who represent communities facing environmental injustices and/or work on these issues.
- Select resources, articles, and videos to supplement the handbook that describe these issues as they relate to course topics. For example:
  - Struggles and solutions for communities facing disproportional pollution burden, clean water access in CA communities, the effects of climate change on working conditions for certain industries, etc.

## *Feature guest instructors and speakers who represent professionals from diverse backgrounds actively working in the naturalist field*



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- Feature guest speakers and instructors representing Indigenous and other diverse backgrounds who can share their work, journeys, and experiences as they relate to working in the naturalist field.
- **Work compensation for these speakers into your course budget.**

*Expose naturalists-in-training to opportunities in the field by highlighting active projects and current events*

- Feature guest speakers and instructors who can highlight projects they are currently working on in the field.
- Highlight relevant community science projects that naturalists-in-training can contribute to now.
- Share information on organizations, projects, and volunteerism in the field to demonstrate the availability of opportunities for naturalists-in-training to continue their impact in the naturalist community and field.