

Decolonizing a university's tropical ecology curriculum

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A new study of curriculum reading material at the University of Glasgow finds that 94% of recommended tropical ecology authors are white, and that 80% of authors are affiliated with universities outside of the tropics. Dr. Stewart White, Senior Lecturer at the School of Biodiversity, One Health and Veterinary Medicine at the University of Glasgow, UK, intends to change that.

"Tropical rainforest research was long the preserve of rich white men and the resulting literature was the same," says Dr. White. "This historical bias in tropical research and publication is still reflected in reading lists and recommended sources in higher education."

Dr. White and his team compiled data on the genders, ethnicities, countries of origin and institutional affiliations for authors on the University's tropical ecology subject recommended reading list. As well as published papers, data was sourced from institutional websites, LinkedIn and personal websites.

The results of the study show that 94% of the authors were from non-BAME backgrounds, nearly 79% of authors were male, and 80% of the authors were from universities or institutions in the global North and not from the tropics.

"Our results were sadly not surprising, with the vast majority of the 340 authors categorized as male and white," says Dr. White. "Institutional affiliation and country of origin were similarly heavily biased towards North America and Europe, with a significant minority of South American institutions and Brazilian authors represented, and Asia and Africa were hugely under-represented."

Dr. White would like to make changes in the curriculum to widen the scope of recommended authors and allow for greater representation of local research.

"I am currently working to update the reading list for the tropical ecology option and looking to replace existing recommendations with more recent papers covering similar research, but written by local scientists affiliated with institutions based in the tropics," he says.

Dr. White would also like to implement discussion sessions and tutorials

to discuss this issue directly with students.

Dr. White hopes that this research will help to set the record straight on the current publication bias within higher education. "Ecology research is not just for people from rich countries that have access to resources, equipment and prestige [academic journals](#)," he says. "There is huge potential to use the knowledge, intelligence and interest of people in the tropics to conduct research and to spread knowledge at all levels of education."

This research is being presented at the [Society for Experimental Biology Annual Conference](#) in Prague from 2–5 July 2024.

Provided by Society for Experimental Biology

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