Community Agreements:

This classroom is a place intended to support meaningful learning by developing scientific understanding, communication, and collaboration skills. These community commitments are meant to help foster curiosity, questioning, and active engagement with course content. While scientific findings are often presented as established facts, there is significant uncertainty in data collection and interpretation. Questioning results and conclusions is just as critical a skill as generating and analyzing data; In this class we are expected to ask questions and share personal stories and insight to deepen our understanding of the class content, one another, and ourselves. The following agreements apply to everyone in the classroom, including me as the instructor.

Practicing Curiosity over Certainty:

We approach science as an evolving body of knowledge, rather than a fixed set of facts. As we move through the course, let's treat confusion as a productive starting point for learning and understanding. If you have a question, or didn't follow something, most likely someone else didn't either. When engaging with your peers or the instructor, think of clarifying questions to broaden your understanding, such as:

"I didn't understand your interpretation of this figure… could we revisit it?"

"What assumptions are we making in this data set?"

"I didn't follow your reasoning when you explained X, could you try rephrasing?"

"What other explanations could fit with this data / evidence?"

"I don't fully understand this yet, but I am thinking about it like …"

Knowledge is Contextual:

Scientific discovery does not occur in a vacuum, it happens within historic, cultural and political contexts. In this class, we will examine whose knowledge has historically been prioritized, and whose has been overlooked or excluded. We will foster a deeper collective understanding of our perspective as scientists by periodically asking questions like:

"Who collected this data, and why?"

"Who does this explanation center / benefit?"

"How does our background influence how we are interpreting this result?"

Sharing Responsibility for Knowledge:

Students and Instructors contribute differently but are both parts of the learning environment. We help each other understand complex material by explaining ideas, asking questions, and sharing resources. Science is interdisciplinary, and everyone comes into the

classroom with a different background; we can all support each other to deeper understanding of scientific concepts. This can look like asking:

“What questions have not been resolved for us as a group?”

“Can someone please explain this in a different way?”

“Does anyone have an outside experience that may have helped them understand this better, if they’re comfortable sharing?”

Take responsibility for Impact, not just Intent:

We understand that good intentions do not erase harm caused. We aim to avoid defensiveness and try to prioritize understanding and accountability; treating being corrected or challenged as a part of learning rather than personal failure. Ultimately, we critique ideas, not people.

“I want to pause and re-think how I phrased that”

“I appreciate your feedback. I will approach it differently in the future.”

“I’m realizing that this assumption I made could be harmful.”

Conclusion:

Ultimately, these agreements are meant to help us work through challenges in the classroom by creating a collaborative and supportive environment. These agreements are a practice we will continue to develop, change, and add to, as we continue through the course. Please let me know if you would like to add to, or modify, these agreements, and we can discuss how to improve them to support everyone.

Credit:

A lot of my ideas for the basis and intentions of these community agreements aligned with the community agreements written by Dr. Kachine Kulick and Dusty Martinez, the facilitators of the Critical Dialogic Pedagogy Micro credential course.