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Diversity Statement

As a woman working in methods and legislatures—two male-dominated fields—I bring diversity to my field through my background, perspective, and position as an educator. In the social sciences, life experiences often color our research choices; we tend to study those things we have seen, heard or lived through. In my field of political methodology—where advanced quantitative methods are applied to research on politics—the vast majority of researchers are men. Hence, questions about gender and politics have gone woefully understudied. As a female researcher, I bring attention to these important questions. For example, in a recent paper I employ advanced statistical methods (e.g. semi-supervised LDA topic models and a balancing method for causal inference) to assess the normative impacts of female candidate emergence. I find that Democratic male candidates are thirty percent more likely to talk about women’s issues (i.e. equal pay, sexual harassment, and reproductive rights) in their campaigns when there is a female candidate running in their same race. These results demonstrate that the importance of female candidacies go beyond winning elections. In order to draw women’s issues to the forefront of today’s political discussion, organizations need to redouble their efforts to encourage women to run.

I also promote diversity in my capacity as a women who teaches classes on statistics and empirical modeling. To recruit more women into STEM fields, visibility matters. As a female instructor, I am uniquely able to encourage and support women in my classes who show an interest in data science and applied statistics. For three semesters I have taught our department’s undergraduate course on quantitative methods in political science. Beyond the classroom, I manage a team of fifteen student research assistants who collect and clean campaign website text—the majority of whom are female. My female students have gone on to pursue graduate studies, to serve as teaching assistants, and to pursue internships in data science.

As an instructor, I place the utmost importance on cultivating a teaching environment where students feel comfortable asking for help and expressing their opinions. Through my approachable teaching style, I strive to ensure students traditionally underrepresented in STEM fields feel invited, welcome, and encouraged to pursue data science. In their evaluation of my *Data in Politics* class, one student wrote, “She reminds us often to not get discouraged...I think she does a great job at knowing what pace to teach at, [at knowing] when a student is confused and doesn’t want to show it, and is really great at being patient with those who need more explanation.” Another commented that, “She is available to answer any and all questions and she does so in a manner that is always helpful and never condescending.” This sentiment about my approach to teaching is echoed in other students’ evaluations, summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Course Evaluations Related to Diversity, Inclusion, and Instructor Support

	Promotes a climate of mutual respect	Treats all students with respect	Encourages questions	Encourages participation	Is available when needed
Average Evaluation	4.66	4.80	4.72	4.70	4.73

Each question is answered on a 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) scale. Presented evaluations have been averaged across all classes for which I was the primary instructor (Data in Politics, Spring 2020; Fall 2019 and Introduction to American Politics, Spring 2019). Full evaluations can be found on my academic website: rachelporter.org.