

Diversity Statement

Jinyeong Son

The University of Texas at Austin, Department of Economics

As the first generation of college students in my family, I recognize the importance of understanding and advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in our community. In the following sections, I share my experiences that have contributed to improving my *knowledge* regarding DEI, describe my *previous activities* aimed at promoting DEI, and outline my *future plans* for enhancing DEI.

1 Knowledge about Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Throughout the chapters of my life, I have had numerous opportunities to *experience* and *learn* about the various dimensions of diversity that arise from different identities. I spent my youth moving across *culturally* and *socioeconomically* varied regions within South Korea. For instance, I was born in a very small village in a rural area with an agricultural background. My parents moved to the second-largest city and metropolitan area in South Korea by the time I entered elementary school. Subsequently, when I was in middle school, we moved to another city, which is an urban area, but not as extensive as a major city. People living in these areas differed in language (due to varying dialects), political views, and social classes. Thus, interactions with them exposed me to a *spectrum* of perspectives influenced by their living circumstances, laying the foundation for my understanding of the intrinsic value of diversity.

When I began my undergraduate studies at Seoul National University, I was especially interested in understanding *gender* issues in diverse social contexts. At that time, this was a crucial topic in South Korea, where women's roles have historically been quite limited and often confined to the home under the guise of being good mothers. Indeed, throughout my undergraduate studies, there were no *female* faculty members in my field of economics, which further motivated me to think about this issue specifically within my discipline. As a male, I admit that it was initially difficult for me to understand and experience the challenges that women face. So, I actively participated in seminars and dialogues organized by student bodies and social groups focused on improving diversity. This involvement helped me better comprehend the specific challenges women face in my field and in society at large. For example, many of my female peers expressed that, despite their interest in economics, they often felt like outsiders in their classes due to being in the minority. Moreover, the absence of female role models with whom they could discuss academic and personal issues—especially those with similar backgrounds—often compelled them to choose fields in which women were more commonly represented. Although my ability to address the issue in my department was relatively limited, I consistently tried to include female colleagues in my study group and to provide them with study materials, often easily obtained through my connections with male seniors. In addition, whenever there was a movement to hire female faculty members, I strongly supported and advocated for it.

My early career in the private sector opened my eyes to other aspects of diversity, specifically *race* and *ethnicity*. While working at a global company, Hanwha Group—one of the Fortune 500 companies, my

primary role involved managing international subsidiary entities, which required daily cross-cultural communication and collaboration. Because South Korea is a relatively racially homogeneous society, this experience provided me with a unique opportunity to interact with people from various racial and ethnic groups. I visited many countries, including Indonesia and Australia, and organized a global workshop to bring representatives from around the globe to our Seoul headquarters. This initiative aimed to amplify their voices and improve *racial equity* in our decision-making process, especially by reflecting insights from developing countries.

All these experiences and efforts have significantly enhanced my understanding of the many dimensions of diversity, including those originating from *ethnic, socioeconomic, racial, gender, sexual orientation, disability, and cultural differences*. Additionally, they have led me to pay closer attention to the challenges faced by *underrepresented* individuals and, perhaps more importantly, to recognize personal responsibilities for eliminating both visible and invisible obstacles to their complete and *equitable* participation and development. I firmly believe that such efforts will contribute to diversity in society and serve as a source of innovative ideas and creative accomplishments.

Finally, I am well aware of the existing disparities in my field of economics and higher education. For instance, the economics profession is significantly less diverse than the general population in *gender, race, and socioeconomic status*. According to a recent report by the Brookings Institution (Wessel et al. 2019), only 23% of economics faculty members in academia are *women*, and *racial minorities* account for just 21%. Additionally, Stansbury and Schultz (2023) demonstrate that economics Ph.D. recipients are substantially more likely to have *highly educated parents* compared to Ph.D. recipients in other disciplines. Given this background, I am committed to proactively *discussing* diversity-related issues throughout my career and to *contributing* to the promotion of DEI as *core values* at the institute with which I will be affiliated.

2 Experience Working to Advance Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

I have diligently engaged in advancing DEI through my roles in *research, teaching, and service* activities.

Research My research has focused on (i) identifying the barriers that hinder the progress of *women* and individuals from socioeconomically *disadvantaged* backgrounds, and (ii) informing policymakers about effective policy interventions to improve their outcomes. For instance, my job market paper examines the long-term consequences of pregnancy timing—age of mother at birth—among *female* teenagers with *limited economic opportunities*. This research documents the challenges these *underrepresented* groups, particularly *Hispanics*, face when it comes to investing in their education and careers. Furthermore, it provides evidence that parental support for these teenagers can improve their participation in higher education.

In another study, my co-authors and I explore the experiences of *out-of-home* children who are separated from their families—a phenomenon more common among *minorities* and *lower social classes*. This paper highlights the limited access to educational and mental health resources for this group of children.

It further suggests that a family-like living environment could potentially mitigate these challenges. Moreover, throughout this research, I collaborated with many *female* researchers who often had limited research opportunities in my discipline. I also intensively interacted with out-of-home caregivers and children. These collaborations helped me gain new perspectives and understand their unique difficulties and experiences.

I have presented these papers within and outside my department, including at workshops and conferences. I believe that through these presentations, my research has contributed to increasing others' understanding of DEI in these areas.

Teaching Throughout my time in graduate school, although I had not yet had the opportunity to teach my own class, as a teaching assistant, I have devoted attention to students with *disabilities*. One important task in the first week of every semester has been to identify students with disabilities in order to accommodate them during exams and to *dedicate extra time* whenever they seek my help, thereby contributing to greater *equity* in education.

Service I volunteered to tutor middle and high school students throughout my undergraduate years in South Korea. Specifically, I provided math and English tutoring to students from *economically disadvantaged* backgrounds under a program led by a local social welfare organization. I also engaged with the students' parents, discussing their challenges as low-income working parents. They appreciated the program, as it alleviated some of their burdens and offered their children educational opportunities comparable with those of students from more affluent backgrounds.

During the same period, I also participated in a mentoring program for children living in relatively *rural* areas with *limited educational resources*. As a mentor, I taught various subjects, providing hands-on experiences, knowledge, and motivation. One of the most memorable moments of my life was when one of my mentees gained admission to the university I attended, the most prestigious in the country. Remarkably, he was the first from his school to be accepted into the university. While I cannot claim full credit, I was overjoyed when he and his parents shared that my mentorship had instilled hope in them.

I have participated in various mentoring programs as a mentee throughout my graduate studies. For example, in the 2022 ASHEcon mentoring program, I engaged with a variety of researchers and fellow mentees from *different backgrounds*. Furthermore, the practical tips, insights, and support provided by my mentors made me recognize the importance of exchanging knowledge and attentive listening to *underrepresented* students, which I hope to replicate as a mentor in my career.

3 Plans for Advancing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

I have *detailed plans* for improving DEI as a *teacher, mentor, and researcher*.

Teacher As a teacher, I will strive to develop curricular content that integrates a broad range of backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives to ensure *diversity* in the teaching materials. Students will be exposed to various viewpoints and cultures, which will promote tolerance and foster a sense of belonging for all individuals. In addition, I will make certain that every student has an *equal* opportunity to

succeed in the course by addressing pre-existing disparities in knowledge or resources. For instance, I will avoid using jargon or overly technical terms without explanation and will provide supplementary materials or sessions for those new to the subject. All of these efforts will contribute to achieving educational *equity* in my teaching. Finally, I will use a variety of assessment tools, including traditional exams, in-class participation, and group presentations, to accommodate *diverse* learning styles and needs. All students in my class will have the opportunity to demonstrate the knowledge and skills they acquire in a manner that plays to their strengths. This approach will serve as a fundamental basis for *inclusive* evaluation for all students.

Mentor Beyond the classroom, I plan to participate in formal and informal service activities, including *mentoring* and *advising* students. Specifically, I intend to establish “*regular mentoring office hours*”, in addition to standard office hours. During these dedicated times, students will have the opportunity to discuss any topics on which they seek advice. The main purpose of these mentoring office hours is to reduce the barriers to mentorship for *underrepresented* students, to identify the challenges they encounter, and to guide them toward the additional services and resources available.

Researcher As a researcher, I will continue to improve our understanding of DEI by focusing on *underrepresented* populations in various contexts—such as disparities in health status, educational access, political participation, and inter-generational mobility. While doing so, I am prepared to welcome researchers who are *underrepresented* in economics as my collaborators to promote DEI-related research and to bring their new perspectives into the discipline. Additionally, I will actively engage in public and professional service activities that support DEI. These activities will include training for *underrepresented* or *marginalized* individuals, mentoring *underrepresented youth* to foster their interest in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) careers, and organizing panels for seminars.

Finally, I conclude this statement by declaring my intention to be a *strong advocate* for DEI both within and outside my institute and field.