

Over the past decade, I have had the privilege of living and studying in six different countries. Through my interactions with people from various corners of the globe, the notion that diversity serves as the catalyst for creativity, innovation, stability, and productivity has become deeply ingrained in my perspective. Collaborating with individuals from different linguistic backgrounds makes every team member a better communicator. Problem-solving becomes more efficient as people approach challenges from a multitude of angles. Teamwork becomes highly effective due to the infusion of different skill sets and strengths. There is no need to "think outside the box" because, in a team comprised of individuals with unique "boxes," the traditional confines of the box cease to exist. Moreover, it is also abundantly clear to me that the flourishing of diversity hinges on an environment that embraces and respects it. **My international experiences serve as the cornerstone of my mission to promote diversity in science, and to support and protect the diversity by creating an equitable and inclusive environment.** I am also acutely aware of the barriers that reside in the dominant culture, education systems, and personal biases that can impede progress. So far, I have been very heavily involved in various diversity-focused initiatives through outreach and my leadership roles in professional societies, and I plan to continue and expand this professional commitment in the following areas:

AS A TEACHER

As highlighted in my Teaching Statement, I recognize that all students come to our classrooms with unique backgrounds and learning styles, and being sympathetic, open-minded, and flexible while still upholding academic rigor will remain my highest teaching priority. I also intentionally foster a classroom environment that is collaborative and supportive and encourage students to present acquired knowledge in their own creative ways. I plan to incorporate a variety of practices and tools (e.g., lecture, active, flipped, or blended learning) with an active interest in targeting diverse learning backgrounds in order to engage the plurality of students but also include those who may require more targeted engagement. Moreover, I am eager to further my pedagogical training by utilizing the education resources within the university and attending educational workshops and conferences, with a focus on innovative inclusive teaching for a neurodiverse environment.

AS A MENTOR

As a graduate student and a postdoc fellow, I mentored 10 students, who comprised a diverse range of identities, experiences and learning styles. Working closely with these students has been an extremely fulfilling experience, during which I learned that good and effective communications can only be established after I listened to and understood the paths that they took to become who they are. As the PI of a research group, my mentoring strategies will be rooted in providing personalized advice and recommendations based on my understanding of the individual. I will clearly communicate my expectations and what my mentees can expect from me, and how they should feel comfortable to hold me accountable even if the topic is difficult. I plan to have both pre-scheduled, formal meetings with all my lab members to check-in on their well-being and research progress, as well as informal "walk-in" hours every week that they can freely bring up anything to me. I will also use different resources to learn and improve my mentoring practices. My aim is to foster a lab environment that is supportive, collaborative, inclusive, and intellectually stimulating, where every member can thrive personally and academically. Meanwhile, I understand that mentorship extends beyond me, and I will encourage and support my students in forming strong peer and co-mentoring groups.

AS A FACULTY

Being a faculty at a university, by default, I am in the position of power in many ways, and I will use this power to promote diversity and demonstrate allyship in three keyways. 1) I will engage with

various diversity-focused initiatives, especially if they are student- and/or postdoc-led, to understand where action needs to be taken, and use my power to help to implement change. 2) I will also actively serve on various committees (e.g., admissions and hiring committees) in the department to ensure that decisions being made are inclusive and equitable. For instance, students from marginalized backgrounds are unlikely to know about, or have access to, the “hidden curriculum” of academia, such as contacting potential advisors in advance or having prior research experience, and their applications should be viewed holistically rather than simply how many boxes they checked. Moreover, recommendation letters from different countries could have vastly different styles of writing, and we should always keep cultural context in mind while reading the letters for the candidates. 3) Just as I will encourage and support my lab members to form co-mentoring groups, I will also serve on different university mentoring programs to provide resources and support for students who may find strength in knowing my personal background and career path.

AS A MEMBER OF THE SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY

Early in graduate school, I realized that one of the best ways to reach more people and promote real change is through scientific societies. Since 2018, I have been very heavily involved in the leaderships of different professional societies, particularly the Botanical Society of America (BSA). From 2018 to 2020, I was one of two student representatives of BSA, responsible for organizing events for the student body and serving on the Board of Directors. Our events prioritized diverse representation, inclusivity, and accessibility, with a mindful acknowledgment of an international membership base. I also spearheaded several policy reforms within the society, including lower fees for students, increased awards, and mandatory student involvement in committees. I represented the BSA at Plant Summit III, where I advocated for a collaborative, global approach to science rather than a competitive, country-centric stance. I served on the 2021 Strategic Planning Committee of BSA, during which we mindfully and intentionally incorporated the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion into every aspect of the strategic plan. From 2022 to 2023, I participated in ROOTS & SHOOTS, an NSF-funded project to change the culture and climate of plant science. As a member of the election reform group, we proposed a timeline for action items for the BSA Election Committee to have repeatable, transparent, and equitable processes and guidelines for selecting candidates. Currently, I am serving on the BSA Early Career Professional Development Committee. I will continue to be actively engaged with professional societies throughout my career, because I have witnessed how changes from within the societies can have immediate positive impact on their memberships.

AS A SCIENTIST

Various forms of gatekeeping in academia tend to homogenize all axes of diversity to the dominant ones and the loss of diversity can begin early in the educational paths for many students. To this end, engagement in outreach activities has been a central part of my efforts to dispel the traditional perception of who can pursue a career in science and encourage broader participation. As a graduate student and a postdoc, I participated in various community-serving outreach events in the Harvard Museum of Natural History, Arnold Arboretum, and the UConn Botanical Conservatory. Additionally, I presented in many webinars for REU and international students to address the “hidden curriculum” for applications and what graduate school is like, including how graduate students typically obtain stipends via TAs/RAs, which is a concept that in fact can be alien to many. As a faculty member, I will continue and expand these outreach efforts to various populations, particularly school aged children and communities that are predominant immigrant and marginalized groups, to ignite their curiosity in science, to present science as a career path that they can pursue, and to dismantle the hidden barriers that may prevent them from moving forward.