

EDI Statement – V.N. Vimal Rao

நான் யார்? [naan jaar] In Tamil, this question famously asked by the Saint Sri Ramana Maharishi simply asks, “Who am I?”. Together with the answer from the Yajur Veda, अहम् ब्रह्मास्मि [aham brahmaasmi], “I am Brahman”, this question fuels my drive to try to see myself in everything and everyone, and share my knowledge to help empower my fellow humans.

These values are perhaps most distinctly manifested in my classroom. In order to see myself in everyone, I must be able to ‘see’ everyone. Thus, an important part of my teaching is focused on teaching students to consider who they are not able to ‘see’. To achieve this, I teach them a critical habit of mind towards inclusivity. For example, every semester, the teaching team for EPSY 5261 Introductory Statistical Methods at the University of Minnesota uses a graph on perceptions of food healthiness from the New York Times’s What’s Going On in This Graph ([October 9, 2017](#)). The scatterplot includes many common foods such as pizza, peanut butter, and granola. It wasn’t until my fourth time teaching with the graph that I realized, prompted by a colleague, that my favorite foods weren’t represented. Where are sambar, gulab jamun, and dosai on the graph? What about eba, mole, or khao swe? Someone looking at the graph wouldn’t be able to ‘see’ me. I want my students to ask “what’s not here?”, or more generally “who’s not here?”, and to use the question to consider issues of power and equity, and to fuel new exposure to the diversity of human culture. This experience led to me creating a series of 5 minute activities to develop students’ habit of mind to ask “what’s not here?” based on the cognitive apprenticeship framework. At the beginning of each class, we examined visualizations together, asking “who’s not here?”, and talking about diversity and inclusivity. By the end of the semester, students were able to recognize gaps in representation, and seek out information in order to create a more inclusive picture. I am currently working with Nina Bailey (UNC Charlotte), who has developed a Critical Statistical Literacy Habits of Mind (CSLHM) framework to plan a research study in which we will evaluate the design and implementation of these activities utilizing design-based research methods. But I am particularly proud of when one group of my students came to me and with smiles on their faces said, “We’re not on that graph either”. They then told me how they shared their favorite foods and thought about where these items would be on the graph. At that moment, I knew that I had helped them ‘see’ each other.

This one anecdote exemplifies the way my values inform my scholarship, as they permeate my teaching, research, and service. I try to see others ‘as me’, and share my knowledge and skills in statistics to empower them through my teaching, scholarship, service, or simply being kind.