

Advancement of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Statement

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Creating an environment where everyone is valued, given equal opportunities, treated fairly and respected is central to my character and, as such, is reflected in both my personal relationships and professional life. Everyone is entitled to fair and just treatment, with access to resources and have their input valued. Similarly, I view the access to an education unimpeded by biases and hostile environments to be a fundamental right of students. My background and experiences have aided me in appreciating the values of diversity, equity and inclusion.

The strengths and benefits of being open-minded and inclusive were impressed on me at an early age. I grew up in the San Francisco Bay Area which was likely the most diverse environment in the US. The Bay Area is composed of people from numerous countries, cultures, viewpoints, sexual orientation and socioeconomic backgrounds. To a large extent, people collectively work together and appreciate each other--the societal fabric is rather flat. This strength of the region not only engenders productivity through merging varied ideas and customs, but creates a pleasant, accepting environment for all through encouraging dialog between those from different backgrounds. As a product of this diverse environment, I carry these values with me and apply them on a daily basis.

As a graduate student in southern California, I spent many weekends tutoring disadvantaged and ambitious children from the southeastern Los Angeles area. This was simply inspirational. Many of these students had little family support or access to resources and they simply thrived when given an opportunity to advance their education. The experience with one high school student is particularly imprinted in my memory. She grew up in a somewhat segregated community with a very high crime rate and widespread poverty. She came to me highly motivated and bright, but with little knowledge of how to go about providing herself with a solid education. Clearly, her high school education was deficient and failing her ambitions. We not only studied English, Mathematics, and the basic principles of the Physical Sciences together, but we found a safe library that was accessible where she could continue her self-driven education focused on Physics. She was accepted to Caltech.

At a similar point in time, I witnessed the effects of humiliation and stifling of educational and career opportunities through inappropriate behavior of a very prominent professor toward female students and faculty. I was a teaching assistant for this professor. This abhorrent behavior negatively impacted the lives of these women in profound ways. I removed this professor from my Ph.D. committee and actively complained about his behavior to other professors in my department, other professors within the School of Biological Sciences and other professors at another university. Unfortunately, my complaints did not result in any action. It was not until this last year that a new administration at the university removed this professor from his position following a series of sexual harassment accusations and a thorough investigation. I have little tolerance for such behavior.

Within my research, I conduct studies within a population that is largely rural, socioeconomically disadvantaged and medically underserved. There are many medical conditions that are highly enriched in this population (e.g., farmer's lung and anaplasmosis) and if it was not for the Marshfield Clinic Research Institute, several of these would not be actively investigated.