

Diversity Statement

In support of my application to the Economics Ph.D. Program at Northwestern University

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With the many student-outreach positions I held throughout my college career, I have met countless individuals from different backgrounds. I cannot properly advocate for diversity without stating that diversity requires inclusion - the idea that everyone should be able to feel safe and the sense of belonging. I started out my college career thinking naively that everyone can just be nice to each other. However, I have realized the importance of recognizing and putting in the effort required for inclusion. Without inclusion, diversity is like a buffet. People pick and choose what values they accept and just walk right back to their table. There would be no interaction between groups, and the world would just be divided. Not only will the lack of inclusion harm group work, the negligence of its importance is alienating to those who should be celebrated.

In the Summer of 2018, I was hired as a Buckeye Student Leadership Academy (BSLA) Mentor and a university tour guide in Ohio State admissions. I did not know it at the time, but these two jobs pushed me to be more proactive in advocating for inclusion. BSLA is a program designed reach out to underprivileged high school seniors and help them through their college applications. These were high-achieving students with traditionally disadvantaged background like first-generation college student and low-income students who were nominated through their guidance counselors. There was a one-week intensive program where we went through all the processes for these high school students and expose them to life on a college campus. When I heard from my students that they did not feel like they belong on our campus after the campus tour, I was shocked. They told me that it seemed like the tours are selling amenities that typical middle-class white students would enjoy, but it failed to show the supports system and the effort to inclusion for students without those privileges.

At this point, I was still in the training phase for the tour guide program. Our staff consisted of around 80 tour guides at the time and only about 10% are students of color, and only around half of them discussed diversity and inclusion as part of their standard tour. Inclusion had been a topic that most tour guides unapologetically waved off because it takes up time that they "could have spent talking about the residence halls." My BSLA students' feedback on campus tours made me re-evaluate whether this was a part of campus that I want to invest my time in as a senior. I sat down with my supervisor and explained the dilemma I had. I had signed up for the job because I wanted to make a welcoming environment to prospective students, but if we have a staff and a script that does not actively promote diversity and inclusion, I would be doing the exact opposite to students like my BSLA students. I was given the opportunity to help make changes to the script and to our hiring process. Our program stopped looking for a specific type of students to be tour guides, and

discussions about resources supporting diversity and inclusion have been made mandatory for our tours.

As a senior, I started a student organization with some friends whom I knew wanted to support diversity and inclusion. The organization was called *Act!on Social Change* and our motto was "We have to start somewhere". It is an organization in which we watch popular movies that stimulate the discussions of different social issues like race, immigration, poverty, etc. We knew that Ohio State is a predominantly white institution and its community have not been known for being the most inclusive. We realized that we can contribute by building a safe space to discuss social issues. We want to provide a place where people from all backgrounds can ask good-willed questions, regardless of how ignorant the questions may seem. The first step of inclusion is to include - to educate and not chastise someone who is genuinely trying to learn. For each meeting, we bring in a speaker from our campus community who can speak on the particular issue for that week. Our organization exposes people to social issues and create a welcoming environment so that people can learn. We encouraged difficult conversations and had discussions designed to be thought-provoking and inclusive. I learned more about how to engage in meaningful conversation about diversity and inclusion in every meeting, and I think others in the club will say the same. Together, we created a space to teach to and to learn from our peers. Together, we made the contribution that I did not even think was possible.

Through all my outreach and inclusion experiences, I learned that a single person can make sizeable contribution to diversity and inclusion. I know to promote inclusion and proactively build a welcoming environment for others. Instead of diversity, individuals and institution should strive for inclusion. Without inclusion, the most diverse community will break apart due to alienation; with inclusion, the least diverse community can work towards diversity. Our community is what we make of it, and when I become part of the Northwestern community, I will do my best to be a good influence and advocate to advance the goals of diversity and inclusion.