In reading about the three service areas present in the George Mason Center for Culture, Equity, and Empowerment, I am enthusiastic that student diversity at GMU is supported and celebrated. I understand, value and support how important it is to maintain core academic values that support the success of groups that face unique challenges. Diversity for me embodies those groups supported at the Center, including undocumented and first generation students, communities of color that are historically underserved, and LGBTQ students. In addition to the action of respecting, supporting, and fostering diversity, the result of these actions also strengthens the university through a cohesive atmosphere.

In my work as a biostatistician, I worked with visiting international scholars from Mexico, Brazil, Puerto Rico, and Ethiopia at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, Department of Psychiatry. My role was to collaborate with them in manuscript development to structure analyses that matched their hypotheses, analyze their data, and present results in peer-reviewed journals. As a researcher working in this environment, I was also able to learn from these researchers about the different cultural aspects of their work with eating disorder research that were not evident to me prior to joining the Center of Excellence for Eating Disorders.

In my doctoral studies I spent several years working with data derived from a Chilean infancy cohort recruited from low- to middle-income neighborhoods. In collaborating with the international investigators of this study, I developed a better understanding of economic development in Chile affecting public health during the time of participant recruitment in the 1990s. The shift started prior to the recruitment period and dovetailed with Western dietary and lifestyle characteristics, which shaped the health of the population I studied and informed the first aim of my dissertation: “Sociodemographic predictors of early postnatal growth: Evidence from a Chilean infancy cohort.” Similar to my work as a biostatistician, my work with diverse groups enriched my research and understanding of burdens faced by underserved groups.

In these roles as a biostatistician and epidemiology doctoral student, I was able to develop a better understanding of perspectives and cultural aspects outside of my own range of understanding. These experiences also reinforced the value of broadening my perspectives, in this case strengthening my development as a researcher by expanding my understanding of problems and burdens faced by diverse groups. In a sense I was mentored more by the people I mentioned above than the opposite, and I would be thrilled to be able to function in a role helping the professional development of diverse groups of students as they strengthen their advanced methodological skills and further their research careers.

As a professor teaching biostatistics within the Department of Global & Community Health, I anticipate working in several capacities when serving one of the most diverse student bodies in the country, at George Mason University. Efforts within the classroom can span syllabus wording that includes a diversity statement to a focus on health disparities, signaling an inclusive atmosphere. I plan to build a diverse group of students in my lab and will do this by intentionally implementing equitable and inclusive policies, set norms for acceptable workplace conduct, and provide opportunities for mentorship and networking. Activities can include holding regular lab meetings discussing inclusive practices, mentoring students through manuscript writing and grant development activities as well as outreach activities in underserved populations promoting public health research. To bolster these activities, I would seek the support of federal funding sources to build my lab while utilizing the diversity initiative resources available at GMU for faculty.