

## Diversity Statement

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My journey into astronomy began under the vast, dark skies of rural Kansas, in a conservative community where horizons often felt as fixed as the landscape. For many of my high school friends, the world beyond our county line remained a theoretical concept, a life they'd never be encouraged to lead. My path diverged, not because of any innate brilliance, but because of the persistent, transformative guidance of teachers and professors who saw a spark and fanned it into a flame. They didn't just teach me physics; they showed me a world of possibilities I never knew existed, encouraging the curiosity that would eventually lead me to live and work in places as diverse as Australia and the United Arab Emirates. They made me believe I belonged in rooms I hadn't yet entered, and my trajectory is a testament to the power of mentorship that actively broadens a student's sense of what is possible.

This experience is the bedrock of my mentoring philosophy, which prioritizes equity and inclusion as the essential framework for student success. I believe diversity is a starting point, not a destination. The real work lies in cultivating a deep sense of belonging and leveling a playing field that is systemically tilted. For me, equity means demystifying the "hidden curriculum" of academia. It's recognizing that the deck is stacked against students who haven't been taught how to navigate institutional structures, seek out research opportunities, or network at a conference. My role as a mentor is to be an advocate and a translator, providing the tools and explicit guidance necessary to empower students to thrive. Inclusion, in turn, is the daily practice of ensuring that every student—regardless of their background—feels that their voice is not only heard but is essential to our collective scientific enterprise.

I have put these principles into practice throughout my career. While working with a first-generation, Indian student on her first major research project, I began our mentorship not by assigning readings, but by collaboratively creating a roadmap of the research process itself. We broke down how to critically read a paper, how to formulate a testable hypothesis, and, crucially, how to embrace and learn from failed experiments. This scaffolding of the scientific process transformed her initial apprehension into confident ownership of her work, and eventually a Ph.D. in astrophysics. Similarly, while leading an international team in the UAE, I learned to foster inclusion among students from a dozen different cultural and educational backgrounds. I

organized a weekly meeting of students and researchers that focused on offering an equitable and innovative environment for all to share their science.

As a faculty member, I will build a research group and teach my classes with this same commitment to proactive and structured mentorship. I will actively recruit from programs that support underrepresented students and partner with community colleges to create pathways into astronomy research. In my research group, I will implement a tiered mentorship model, where graduate students are trained to mentor undergraduates, fostering a supportive ecosystem of shared knowledge and mutual respect. My goal is not simply to welcome students from all walks of life into the room, but to consciously build a system where every single one of them has the support, equity, and sense of belonging they need to succeed and, in turn, to redefine the boundaries of their own worlds.