

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Statement

I was born in Kazan, the capital of the Republic of Tatarstan, an autonomous region within the Russian Federation. As a Tatar and a Muslim, I grew up with a double minority identity in Russia. Russia is known for its blatantly xenophobic attitude towards non-Russian ethnicities and migrants from ex-Soviet republics. While I have not been subject to overt discrimination in my adult years, I can clearly recall an incident from my childhood that greatly affected me. As a preschooler who only spoke Tatar with my family at home, I had the misfortune of being put under the charge of a teacher who brought me to tears by shouting at me and angrily demanding that I speak Russian “like everyone else”. I became fully bilingual by the time I graduated from primary school but even as a teenager, I continued to face casual racism and microaggressions such as being teased when I spoke Russian with a slight Tatar accent and having people try to “Russianize” my obviously non-Russian first and last names. Because of these experiences, I always adhere to a simple personal rule of never judging anyone by their accent and/or language fluency, but focusing only on the content of their message. While I do not claim to have full comprehension of the multitude of challenges that all sorts of minorities face, my own early life experiences ensure that I remain cognizant and ready to address instances of subtle and open racism.

Living, studying, and working in the U.S. increased my awareness of the importance of DEI in the education field. My first American academic institution was St. Cloud State University (SCSU) in Minnesota. SCSU has a significant population of international students, and it was there that I was blessed to meet my future wife, an international student from Singapore. Since Minnesota has long been a leader state in the resettlement of asylum seekers, I was privileged to also meet people from different diasporas. Volunteering in a local mosque allowed me to befriend members of the Somali community, and I became aware of the challenges first- and second-generation immigrants face as university students. Getting introduced to the Ukrainian community reshaped my views on Russian past and contemporaneous policies, which became of utmost value a decade later, with understanding the true reasons behind the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Pursuing my doctorate at the University of Washington (UW) and living in Seattle with its incredibly diverse populations further emphasized the importance of creating an inclusive environment in the academic world. However, it was also in Seattle that I understood that DEI should not be limited to only various ethnic groups and immigrants, people with different religious beliefs, sexual orientation, and gender identity, but should also take into account people from less economically privileged parts of society. Seattle is facing a dramatic increase in the number of unhoused citizens, and this problem became even more dire during the pandemic. As an educator at the UW, I have tried to incorporate these topics into academic discussions, like examining Boston’s Pine Street Inn homeless shelter as a case study in a Business Statistics class that I assisted in teaching.

I strive to ensure that I bring as many voices to the table as possible so that no one feels excluded in my class. Among different tools that I utilize are warm call lists and smaller discussion groups which allow students to feel more at ease, in turn encouraging them to be more confident in speaking up in class. I notice that these strategies result in more non-native English speakers as well as female students speaking up. It is certainly important that female voices are heard in class, especially when the overwhelming majority of works we discuss in class tend to be written by males. I also encourage foreign students to participate in class as much as possible, because their opinions are typically non-American-centric and add value and insight to our class discussions.

Continuing to increase DEI within the student population is a move that should be supported and encouraged. I aim to execute in my future work in the realm of academia the knowledge I have received from several DEI workshops conducted at UW Foster School of Business and the best practices for economists summarized by the American Economics Association. Namely, I would be honored to serve on committees aimed at increasing the diversity in the student population of my department/school. Looking forward to my role as an educator and a college faculty member, I hope to be part of this larger mission to foster a university-wide culture anchored in trust and mutual respect for all.