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The Effective Diversity Statement

Tanya Golash-Boza gives faculty job applicants eight tips for writing a stellar diversity statement that

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By [Tanya Golash-Boza](#)

Faculty job postings are increasingly asking for diversity statements, in addition to research and teaching statements. At the University of California at San Diego [website \(http://facultyexcellence.ucsd.edu/c2d/\)](http://facultyexcellence.ucsd.edu/c2d/), “they want to identify candidates who have professional skills, experience and/or willingness to engage in active *diversity and equity efforts*” (emphasis added). In general, these statements are an opportunity for the search committee to learn about the distinct experiences and commitment they bring to the table.

So, how do you write an effective diversity statement? If you are a job candidate who actually cares about diversity, how do you convey that commitment to a search committee? (Note that if you do not care about diversity, you should not apply to a department that does, don’t waste your time crafting a strong diversity statement -- and you need to write a strong essay.)

My first piece of advice is: do not write a throwaway diversity statement. Some job applicants think that a statement that shows they actually care about diversity and equity may be too political. Thus, they write a bland statement about how they encourage students to come to class in pajamas if they feel comfortable. That is not an effective statement. It does not show a genuine commitment to diversity and equity.

Of course, it is true that many faculty members overtly reject campus efforts to enhance diversity and equity. But it is also true that search committee members who do not care about diversity do not read diversity statements. And search committee members who do not care about teaching gloss over teaching statements, those who do not care about research gloss over research statements. So, don’t bother writing a statement directed at faculty members who do not care about diversity and equity. Write a statement for faculty members who will take the time to read your statement carefully.

I can assure you that many faculty members truly care about diversity and equity and will read your statement carefully. I was in the room when the diversity statement of every single finalist for a job search was scrutinized. The statements I read were about their experiences teaching first-generation college students, their involvement in campus diversity efforts, their commitment to equity, and their commitment to creating a

that. If you grew up walking uphill to school carrying two 20-pound sacks of rice on your back, by all means with a silver spoon in your mouth, acknowledge your privilege. Either way, use your story to explain how you confront challenges on their way to achieving their educational goals.

- **Focus on commonly accepted understandings of diversity and equity.** Concentrate on issues such as sexual orientation. Don't try to tone down your statement by writing about how it is hard to be a Kansan. Write about racial oppression, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism or some other commonly recognized issue.
 - **Avoid false parallels.** By that I mean do not equate the exclusion you faced due to being a Kansan in a predominantly African-American faces at a primarily white institution. You do not have to be an African-American to have experienced racism, but if you do not have experiential knowledge of racism, then do not claim it. Instead, focus on what you feel comfortable getting personal, you can write about your own experiences of privilege or oppression. I can cite statistics or studies to make your points.
 - **Write about specific things you have done to help students from underrepresented backgrounds.** If you have anything to help anyone, then go out and do something. Sign up to be a tutor at an underperforming school, teach Human Geography or incorporate [antiracist pedagogy](http://www.stcloudstate.edu/arpac/workshops/default.aspx) (<http://www.stcloudstate.edu/arpac/workshops/default.aspx>) in addition to having a rewarding experience, you can write about it in your diversity statement.
 - **Highlight any programs for underrepresented students you've participated in.** If you have had any (e.g., McNair Scholars Program), describe that involvement in your statement. This involvement can either be as a mentor or adviser to someone who has participated. These kinds of specific examples show that you understand and how they work.
 - **Write about your commitment to working toward achieving equity and enhancing diversity.** Describe how you contribute. You can mention your willingness to contribute to pre-existing programs on the campus or your new programs based on models at other campuses.
 - **Modify your statement based on where you are sending it.** Your statement for a land-grant institution is not the exact same one you send to an elite institution in urban California. Look up the demographics of the institution and mention those demographics in your statement. For example, if the university you are applying to is in a predominantly white area, it should be aware of that. Or if it has a well-known scholarship program for underrepresented minorities, mention it.
- Diversity statements are a relatively new addition to the job application packet. Thus, search for common assessment tools for such statements, and many campuses lack clear guidelines. Nevertheless, you can gain an advantage by writing a stellar statement that emphasizes your record of contributions to diversity and your commitment to future efforts.

BIO

Tanya Golash-Boza is an associate professor of sociology at the University of California at Merced. Her book, [Immigrant Policing, Disposable Labor and Global Capitalism](#) (NYU Press, 2015). She runs the blog [Get a Life PhD](http://getalifephd.blogspot.com/) (<http://getalifephd.blogspot.com/>) and tweets as [@tanyaboza](https://twitter.com/tanyaboza) (<https://twitter.com/tanyaboza>).



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