



Heather Yang PhD Candidate

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Teaching statement



TEACHING STATEMENT

Heather Yang
PhD candidate, MIT Sloan School of Management

My experience in teaching, mentoring, and developing my own curriculum across a diverse range of business school classes and institutions has built a strong foundation for me to teach at Yale University's School of Management. As a teaching assistant in 6 distinct courses over 9 semesters, I have coached students at the Bachelors, MBA, non-MBA Masters, and Executive Education levels, and am excited to bring my expertise to shaping the next generation of future leaders.

I am interested in teaching organizational behavior, negotiation and influence, the future of work, ethics of artificial intelligence, power and negotiations, people analytics, and diversity and inclusion courses. For every class that I teach, I aim to engage students in critical thinking, data-driven decision-making, and to rouse their intellectual curiosity. I seek to do this by cultivating a culture of radical engagement: encouraging collaborative learning, emphasizing active participation, leveraging diversity, and providing personal mentorship.

Collaborative Learning

I believe that collaborative learning, such as small groupwork and action-learning, can enable students to practice the crucial interpersonal skills that will be invaluable for their careers.

Action-learning, where students apply classroom insights to solve real-world problems, is a key facet of collaborative learning. As the teaching assistant for MIT Sloan's Entrepreneurship Lab class for three years, I recruited and shortlisted the most innovative, high-tech (e.g., cryptocurrency, blockchain, autonomous vehicles) startups from Harvard and MIT. Student teams were partnered with these startups so that they could apply their learnings in entrepreneurship to help their host. I also was the first point of contact for students for any issues with course material, peers, or their startup partners. Through coaching the students on how to best navigate these situations, I learned the importance of team-based learning for their development, where students practiced how to negotiate through conflict, restructure unequal workloads, and communicate more effectively. I have maintained these company connections and would be eager to contribute to an action-learning experience like this for students at Yale. (Teaching evaluation rating 6/7).

Active participation

Students learn best when they feel empowered to contribute their own experiences within the classroom and in settings that value intellectual openness and exploration.

In order to assess students' difficulties with the course material, I employ strategies to create a culture of question-asking. When I assisted in teaching the core Introduction to Operations course in the MIT Leaders for Global Operations program, I found that many of the bright students were worried about asking questions for fear of appearing stupid. To get around this, I



solicited anonymous questions and learnings after each class (with an almost perfect response rate) and answered them all in a digest sent out to the whole class. By allowing students to see their peers' questions, I cultivated an atmosphere of openness, with students feeling more comfortable and asking more questions in class over time. It was very rewarding to see the success of my students, with one struggling student, who benefited from my one-on-one coaching, ultimately scoring an A in the course. (My teaching evaluation rating was 6.6 on a 7-point scale.)

I also found it crucial to foster such openness even with cohorts of advanced career students, as I learned from being on the teaching team for several Executive MBA courses. These included two semesters (one in-person, one partially remote) of Global Strategy (teaching evaluation rating 6.1/7) and three semesters of the Executive MBA Capstone Global Operations Lab class (rating 5.7/7). The executive MBA students routinely included executives from pharmaceutical and tech firms, chief doctors at the best medical institutes in the world, and ranked military officers. From conversations with students, it was clear that the anxieties of imposter syndrome did not go away despite their achievements. Building rapport with students was crucial to facilitating informal conversations to address concerns before they became a problem. In these courses and many others, I used strategies such as warm-calling and case discussion preparation before class. I was able to increase student participation and help students feel empowered to contribute their unique perspectives.

Learning to meet students where they are was a skill I developed early through my undergraduate teaching experience at Carleton College (ranked #1 in undergraduate teaching by the [US News and World Reports](#)). As the sole sectional instructor for the Intro to Psychology course with Prof. Neil Lutsky, I designed my own curriculum and independently taught sections twice a week to complement the large class lectures. The small format allowed me to accurately gauge how much the students understood the material (from the Milgram experiment to basic inferential statistics), and I encouraged students to come up with examples of their own to demonstrate mastery of the concepts.

Leveraging diversity

I look forward to bringing representation into the classroom by being an international, multicultural, woman scholar. In addition, I am committed to using examples in my curricula that reflect the diversity of the students taking the course and the reality in which they will lead. As a teaching assistant for MIT's MBA Business Model Innovation course, I saw how well students responded to diverse case examples and the guest speakers that I facilitated, with students from Sloan and Harvard regularly maxing out the auditorium's capacity. In my own classroom, I will challenge students' assumptions about the generalizability of their experiences and ask them to explain any cultural references that they use. In addition to enhancing classroom learning, this strengthens the sense of community in class – one of the most valued parts of the MBA experience. (Teaching evaluation rating 6/7).

Technology can also help create a more inclusive classroom environment. As the teaching assistant for Prof. Jared Curhan's "Negotiation and Influence" intensive course at MIT Sloan, I



managed over 50 students divided into smaller groups for negotiations and helped facilitate live, on-screen performance analytics, displaying negotiation outcomes and trends. I will extend this technology in my own classroom to guard against any potential implicit bias by using a projected random name generator to call on students. In conjunction with complementary support to students (detailed below), this will ensure that the class can learn from a broader set of perspectives than just those who are comfortable enough to speak.

Research and Minority Mentorship

Throughout my research career, I have trained over 25 research assistants and have also mentored underrepresented students through the process of adjusting to foreign academic climates. Building on my own experiences as a minority and international student, I have formally mentored over six students from underrepresented backgrounds at both MIT and Carleton, and am happy to have had all of them graduate (or be on track for graduation), with some now thriving in PhD programs at Caltech, Brown, and UC San Diego.

At MIT, I also built and managed my own undergraduate research lab team. I independently trained my students through the research process (from conducting literature reviews to designing and running studies), and stoked their passion for research. Students I have mentored from my lab and earlier have gone on to prestigious research positions (such as at the University of Pennsylvania and Johns Hopkins) and to top PhD programs (Stanford, Rotman). I am particularly proud of a female student who started off too reticent to ask to sit down at her initial interview, but who grew so much in her self-confidence and ability (and with a bit of my coaching on some principles of negotiation) that she was ultimately able to gain a 16% increase in her base pay for her first salary offer.

In sum, my experiences mentoring, teaching, and developing students at all levels (from undergraduate to seasoned executive MBAs), have set a strong foundation for me to draw from. I hope that I can contribute to the excellent teaching at Yale's School of Management with my enthusiasm, energy, and experience, as well as my teaching philosophy of creating a radically engaged classroom.



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Diversity statement



DIVERSITY STATEMENT

In this historic time of the Black Lives Matter movement, we need now more than ever faculty who are willing to engage directly with the issues of race, identity, and justice. Faculty who have deeply interrogated their own biases and are able to facilitate student-growth. Faculty who can move with compassion and advocate for justice within the sphere of higher education as a facet of societal progress. My background and experiences as a female, immigrant, low-SES, scholar-of-color uniquely inform the perspective that I can add to the collective experience at Yale and the contributions that I can bring to help *all* faculty work towards greater diversity, equity, and inclusion throughout the institution. In this statement, I outline how my identity and my experiences have informed my commitment to diversity and my plans for my diversity efforts as a new professor.

As diversity efforts should not be limited to a short statement, you will also find in my teaching statement concrete strategies for building an inclusive classroom and details of my mentorship of underrepresented students. My research statement also shows how diversity informs my research agenda in multiple ways; from re-centering the research literature to consider a more intersectional understanding of social identities, highlighting identities previously neglected in the literature, and to give voice to issues of representation and bias within emergent technologies by challenging the ‘objectivity’ of algorithms.

My formative experiences have instilled in me an inalienable commitment to diversity. I still clearly remember, as a young girl, helping to lift my mother from her wheelchair onto a table at the back of a classroom, where she could lie down for her adult education class. Although the sight of a woman lying down for a lecture must have been jarring for the instructor, I was grateful for the accommodation that allowed my mother to continue her education and find financial independence to support herself and her children (as a single-parent) in a new country. I understand the importance of accommodations in a system not designed for individuals outside of the archetype. And although I will be sensitive to my students’ needs, I do not believe that individual sensitivity is sufficient. At my next institution, I will work towards changing structures to be more inclusive by default, so that the culture of inclusion can outlive the individuals that create it.

My experiences also enable me to empathize with students from a range of backgrounds and help me advocate for them. Having spent many afternoons accompanying my mother to the welfare office, I understand the anxiety of waiting for the case worker to determine the week’s groceries and can empathize with students who come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. I was able to leverage this in my managing of undergraduate research assistants, advocating to the lab PIs for cost-free lab activities and finding sources of funds for student reimbursements so that no student was singled out due to their inability to pay. Connecting the barriers in the seemingly small assumptions of being able to afford an ice cream or museum



ticket to the greater message of shutting out students from low socio-economic backgrounds is crucial to understanding the societal level issues that prevent students from entering, staying, and flourishing in higher education.

Although I am now a Green Card holder of the United States, I came to this country as an international student and bring with me experiences of navigating a complicated immigration process as a teenager. From culture shock to the acronym stew that they confront while finding internships (F-1, J-1, OPT, CPT), I can personally relate to the challenges that international students and new Americans face. Academic culture is a specific and foreign culture to many, and an additional layer of country- or class-based culture shock (and reverse culture shock when returning 'home') can result in an overwhelming sense of not belonging. Although my mentorship of other students only formally began in my undergraduate studies, I have been mentoring peers since high school through the difficult transition of adjusting to a foreign academic climate, and foresee myself continuing to do so throughout my career.

As the departmental representative for the institute-wide Graduate Women at MIT group, I helped connect other female students to advanced-career mentors and feel a sense of belonging within our very male-dominated institute. During one mentorship roundtable with multiple female, advanced-career alumni, I was able to share my research-based knowledge of the gender gap in negotiation outcomes and how that could influence women starting out in their careers. In a role-reversal of sorts, I also ended up teaching the older female alumni mentors about how the challenges for white women differed for women of color, sharing research on how intersectional identities affect evaluations of Black women differently than White women. I also explained the concept of mental load of domestic responsibilities and the ways that a disproportionate amount of invisible labor falls on women in the household.

In the same vein, a lot of the invisible labor around issues of race and diversity in institutional settings unfairly falls on visible minorities. It is incumbent on individuals from groups other than the marginalized group to advocate for greater equity and inclusion, and for all faculty to embrace. As a cis-gender individual, it was my responsibility to educate faculty (as I did) at a departmental meeting about respectful ways of discussing gender identity when professors incorrectly referred to transgender individuals as intersex (using dated language). After the meeting, I sent out educational materials to the group of faculty and students and continued one-on-one conversations with faculty who wanted to push back. Only through the sustained efforts of all faculty members will the university become closer to an inclusive and equitable organization. Furthermore, this is not limited to the initiatives within the university, but also at the conferences and workshops where invaluable networking, career advancing events and information is shared. University departments are an obvious place for catalyzing change in an otherwise informally connected academy. I would push for tenure reviews to include faculty to list efforts related to increasing diversity and inclusion at conferences that they held power over.



I believe that I can also add symbolic value by becoming a professor, and that representation within the academy serves as a reflection of the health of a society. Even though East Asians in the US benefit from the Model Minority myth, the discrimination against non-white individuals within the academy has prevented the representation of Asians and other Scholars of Color in the professoriate. Throughout my education, I have only been taught by three Asian professors (of which two taught Asian studies). Even now in 2020, it is alarming how great the mismatch between the student body and the faculty still remains. I want to change the face of ‘what a professor’ looks like by giving students a professor who looks like them.

Although I acutely face racial discrimination, I also recognize the educational privileges that I am afforded by the ‘positive’ stereotypes associated with being Asian. These insidious and racist stereotypes allow for stereotype ‘boosts’ at the cost of non-Asian individuals, mostly from Black, Indigenous, and Latinx students. The resultant atmosphere leads not only to the reduced retention of faculty and students from these groups, but one that actively damages the advancement of science, which requires tackling concepts in novel ways and addressing gaps in the extant literature that has been formed by the demographically homogenous voices that have dominated academia. Through my position of privilege, I am committed to raising the voices of those who are not being heard, and ensuring that PhD students and faculty are not burdened by systemic bias and stereotypic assumptions. While serving on faculty hiring committees and PhD student admittances, I will push for inclusive recruitment practices, the retiring of informal practices that invisibly lead to disparate outcomes in the hiring process, and for measuring rates of retention of students of different social identities to ensure that diversity efforts are not solely tokenistic gestures.

There is no shortage of talent from individuals from underrepresented groups, but there is a shortage in the willingness and effort to find and recruit them. It is a priority for me to specifically advertise student positions for my own lab (using less conventional sources such as social media, my informal networks, affinity groups, as well as established initiatives like the PhD Project) and offer informational interviews about the PhD process with students from underrepresented backgrounds.

Through my varied experiences, I bring a unique perspective that can enrich not only the excellent research produced at Yale, but also aid the success of faculty initiatives and student quality of life. By increasing the diversity of perspectives within the academy, research becomes more representative and closer to the truth. But far from simply a way to improve research-diversity, inclusion, and equity are fundamental for the progress of not only the academy, but of society as a whole.