



Giordon Stark

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Statement

“Giordon will not ever achieve beyond a 3rd-grade reading level,” all the teachers told my parents when I was young. Now, I have a Ph.D., but I’m not sure that says anything about my reading level. I continue to get discriminatory and stereotypical comments to this day. I was born with a severe-to-profound hearing loss, and I grew up calling myself “hearing impaired” or “hard-of-hearing”. The entirety of my childhood relied on the advocacy of the adults around me: my parents, my teachers, the principals, and the school district Board of Education. In South Florida, where I grew up, there wasn’t a deaf community, as most of the folks there with hearing loss are the geriatric crowd (and this is still pretty true today!). I got by with the tools we found at the time, such as getting an Individual Education Plan (IEP), getting speech therapy to “fit in” with my oral environment, using an FM system for sound amplification, and trying to keep my class sizes small. Often, my parents would change the school if there were issues with access to my education.

Once I entered Caltech for my undergraduate studies, this story changed into developing my self-advocacy and not relying so much on others. I started calling myself “deaf” as I learned more about my community and became more involved in the disability rights social movement that has been slowly taking root. I didn’t quite find my footing until towards the end of my 2nd year in college, when I learned about the availability of real-time steno captioning, often called CART (Communication Access Realtime Translation), and requested this more often. I also relied on a letter that I sent to my teachers ahead of time explaining my needs, such as requesting that the teacher never speak facing a wall because I can’t lip-read the back of their head. Looking back today, I am shocked by how little access I got to the world-class education there.

Since starting my physics career in particle physics at the University of Chicago, I call myself part of the “Deaf” community, taking advantage of American Sign Language (ASL) interpreting services and CART. There is a great deal of experience gained from learning to interact with the university bureaucracy when it comes to arranging services and making sure my education, and later my work, remains accessible. The additional effort is on top of self-advocacy, and so I recognize the challenges that students coming to a university setting will face when they need to reach out for their access.

In 2018, I started on the US ATLAS Diversity and Inclusion committee and contacted for anonymous concerns reported by the US members of the ATLAS Collaboration. My role was to help US ATLAS management make the US ATLAS Collaboration an inclusive environment to do science. For example, a meeting checklist [1] was put together for organizers to go through and ensure that an event followed the recommendations set forth by the committee. This list had items for the organizing committee, such as ensuring the venue was physically accessible and providing guidelines for promotional material, registration, and the agenda/program itself. I have also been pushing the committee to ensure that the diversity of our members is improved, notably from the Latin American countries and Native Americans.

UC Berkeley has done a great job since 2007 in establishing the Division of Equity and Inclusion to combat the racial disparities in access to higher education. In particular, a key piece is to provide demographic information to understand where to focus these efforts. However, I believe that everyone at an institute is responsible for promoting a more inclusive environment and must be proactive about DEI. At UC Berkeley, I

will enhance diversity and opportunity for individuals from historically underrepresented backgrounds and communities. I will actively seek resources to support students in my research lab and my departments, such as being a sponsor for Summer Bridge and the Transfer Transition Program.

I believe my unique experience as a Deaf Ph.D. in Physics - the only one in America right now - provides me with insight into the spectrum of challenges faced by minorities and underrepresented populations.

References

- [1] G. Stark, *Diversity and Inclusion: Making Physics Accessible*, December, 2020.
<https://kratsg.github.io/snowmass2021-loi-commf/artifact/main.pdf>.
Snowmass Community Frontier Paper Draft.