Statement on Contributions to the Success of Students from Underrepresented Backgrounds

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Working with, teaching, and mentoring people with diverse backgrounds and identities is an integral part of my job as teacher and scholar. I say this not just as a statement of values but also of fact. My current institution is a land-grant university which exists to make high quality education widely available and serve the greater public good through research and service. I am pleased to know that ▨▨▨ shares a similar institutional commitment to service, the public good, and a diverse academic community. These are central components to the academic profession as I conceive of it.

In this line of work, there is nowhere more important than the classroom for fostering diversity and ensuring equity. A focus of my efforts at self-improvement as an instructor has been making a more inclusive classroom. I elaborate in some more detail about my several efforts at inclusive teaching in my teaching statement, so here I will share some of my motivations for doing so. As an undergraduate, I attended a small, liberal arts college in which most classes shared some features: participation in instructor-led discussion as a major factor in final grades, rigid attendance policies, and near-total intolerance for late assignments. It bears mentioning that my undergraduate institution had a diverse student body in several respects, but it was comprised of only traditional students, included only very high fluency speakers of English, and students with children, caring responsibilities, or outside work were very few in number. Feeling positively about the education I received, I adapted some of these policies for the first classes I taught.

I quickly realized that the distribution of student grades was (in my view) far too determined by struggles with these policies rather than mastery of the materials. Moreover, these penalties seemed to most affect students from marginalized communities. These policies that were satisfied with moderate effort for most students at my undergraduate institution were just not well-suited to the student body at Ohio State where many students have to work, are raising children, struggle to participate in fast-paced English-language discussions, and so on. I am sure that others have been able to have such policies and course designs in a way that did not conflict with goals for diversity and equity, so I will only say that for my own situation I felt a change was needed. I now design my classes to use many methods of assessment and participation, have lenient late policies, and I make clear to students that deadlines are flexible if need be.

This last point relates to my own experiences as a first-generation college student. Although I had and have many advantages, there were aspects of the so-called "hidden curriculum" that were unknown to me. For instance, I had no idea what "office hours" were until a professor insisted that I go to them, leaving me with no choice but to ask. More pertinent to my prior example, as I would sometimes struggle meeting deadlines, I was surprised to learn that many of my classmates not only would routinely ask for extended deadlines or exemptions from the attendance policies, but sometimes got them. In my own courses, I work to demystify these things for similarly-situated students to avoid having students of some backgrounds getting what amounts to special treatment while others are unaware that such treatment is available. One of the meta-lessons of my experience, of course, was that sometimes we do not know what we do not know; while I strive to get to know my students so I know where they are coming from, I want my policies and conduct to be equitable even when I do not know the challenges someone is facing.

My research is also focused on issues of identity as well as the effects and prevalence of communi-

cation across difference. Although much of my research has focused on *political* difference, in the U.S. context this is not easily separated from other kinds of social differences. One line of research I am involved in concerns discussion of political issues across racial lines, for instance. My collaborators and I are probing the way people make decisions to discuss hot-button issues with someone (or not) and the extent to which those decisions are driven by the race of self and other. One initial finding from this research is that, with all else being equal, Black respondents much preferred discussion with other Black people compared to discussion with White people. On the other hand, the preference among White people for White discussion partners was much less pronounced. I puzzled over this finding at first, but what we realized — and some members of the collaboration expected from the start — was that people from marginalized groups have much more reason to be reticent to reach across these divisions because of the power dynamics at play. This research will not itself give us the keys to foster more (and more productive) dialogue across difference, but it is important to characterize the problems accurately in order to solve them.

At ▨▨▨, in addition to supporting a diverse student body in the classroom and helping to understand our diverse society with my research, I hope to get more involved in mentoring students and contributing to the university's mission in other ways as well.