

Commitment to Justic, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

Jesse Wheeler

October 11, 2024

I aspire to be a researcher and educator who supports, promotes, and defends diversity in all its forms. This aspiration is driven both by a desire to be equitable and inclusive of all people, and by the understanding that diversity is an effective driver of innovation. Without diversity of thoughts, opinions, and backgrounds, higher education would be destined to fail its purpose of advancing scientific discovery.

The primary reason I have chosen to pursue a career in academia is my strong desire to positively influence society. However, I am aware that my contributions in academia—whether through research, teaching, or service—will only have a truly beneficial impact if they are inclusive and considerate of all groups within our society. As such, I am committed to fostering an inclusive and diverse environment in each of my teaching, research, and service roles.

As an educator, I am committed to cultivating a classroom environment where all students feel safe, welcomed, and capable of learning. A key to achieving this is becoming an effective mentor. To develop a mutually beneficial mentor-mentee relationship, I prioritize getting to know students personally and adapting my mentoring approach to fit their individual needs. In a classroom setting, this type of relationship can be developed by encouraging students to take advantage of office hours and providing a safe space to discuss topics related to student success and well-being. My hands-on experience as a graduate student instructor in a lab section allowed me to create an environment where students felt comfortable reaching out for help, knowing that I would approach their situations without judgment. Helping students feel seen and heard empowers them to set and attain personal and academic goals.

My approach to mentoring, particularly towards underrepresented groups, has been shaped by various experiences I have had as a PhD student. One relevant example is my involvement as a tutor to master's level students in the Rackham Merit Fellowship program, which supports diversity and inclusivity in graduate studies at the University of Michigan. Additionally, I have had the opportunity to mentor undergraduate and master's students from diverse backgrounds on their research projects. Through these experiences, I have learned the importance of attentive listening to address the specific needs of those I mentor. This includes paying attention to both verbal and nonverbal communication, which enables me to create an inclusive mentoring environment where students feel valued and supported.

I further intend to prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion in my own research. Recognizing the importance of diversity of thought in scientific research, I actively seek out collaborations that offer perspectives distinct from my own. One of my primary application areas is the modeling of infectious diseases. Working in an area with potential applications to public health, I understand the importance of considering how my research may impact marginalized groups within our society. I believe that our efforts in this field have the

potential to contribute to more equitable health solutions and policies, creating a positive impact that extends beyond academia and benefits diverse communities around the world. To achieve this, I am committed to engage in open discussions with stakeholders to understand how scientific recommendations based on research findings may affect their communities.

I acknowledge that I do not fully understand all of the challenges that members of underrepresented groups face within and outside of academia. Therefore, I am dedicated to continuous learning and growth in order to become a more effective ally and advocate for these communities. As part of my commitment to fostering an inclusive and diverse academic environment, I am currently enrolled in the University of Michigan's Professional Development in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Certificate program, which I will complete by December 2024. I am confident that this program will profoundly enhance my ability to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in all aspects of my career. By equipping myself with the necessary knowledge and skills, I aspire to make a lasting, positive impact on the academic community and beyond.