

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Statement

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As I approach cultivating diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in the classroom, I draw much from my own experience. I was privileged in many areas of my upbringing, but not all. In terms of privilege, I am white, cisgender, able-bodied, (relatively) neurotypical, and a native English speaker. I grew up in a safe, non-abusive household, and I had access to a solid public education. However, my grandparents were migrant farmworkers from Mexico, and we struggled financially. Thankfully, my mother got the support she needed and was the first in her family to attend college. No one in my family had studied a STEM discipline, let alone received a doctoral degree. As I continued my education, I noticed certain peers having the social capital in the form of mentorship for navigating STEM in higher education, something to which I did not have immediate access. In my graduate years, this culminated in extreme imposter syndrome and feelings of isolation. I felt as though everyone else was in on a secret that I didn't know: the secret of how to succeed as a PhD student. As I continue to pursue a career in teaching, I bring my story with me so that it can inform my choices and approaches in creating an inclusive learning environment with support for all.

In early 2021, I had the opportunity to complete a yoga teaching certification, which involved a strong emphasis on racial justice. This training opened my eyes to the degree to which wellness spaces cater to white, young, able-bodied, neurotypical individuals with financial means. For LGBTQ+, trans, BIPOC, and many other marginalized identities, these spaces are incredibly inaccessible. Continuing to grasp the oppressive nature of this exclusivity, I reflected on the pervasiveness of the same dynamic mirrored in educational institutions. Capitalism demands a high level of productivity, warranting competition via rewarding those who can learn material quickly. Dictating the structure of courses in higher education (e.g. placing heavy emphasis on test grades as a metric of success), this status quo leaves little space for diverse learning styles and perspectives. In my teaching career, I am committed to working towards changing this.

To ensure DEI in the classroom, my ultimate goal as a teacher is to prioritize attending to the needs of students from marginalized backgrounds, to ensure they have the best possible opportunities to excel in the same way as their privileged counterparts. Specifically, I commit to 1) creating content based on individual needs of students, 2) creating a brave-space learning community welcoming all identities, and 3) working to disrupt stereotypical norms which often arise in STEM-disciplines.

To identify student needs, I invite each student to my office hours for 5-10 minutes at the beginning of the semester. By learning about individual career goals and learning styles, I can cater group activities and supplemental material to fit these needs. When I taught mathematics at Miami Dade College, there was a woman named Brianna in my calculus course. Brianna commuted to school and was taking calculus as a prerequisite for nursing school. On the first day, she told me she couldn't make it to any office hours since she had to pick up her two kids from school at that time. So, we organized a ~15 minute period after class for her to ask any questions she had on the material. We met almost every week, and she showed substantial

improvements in her understanding as time went on. I think that the key was helping Brianna create a mental map through which she could approach many different problems. I helped her create a framework around solving derivatives, using a graphical approach whenever possible and emphasizing the derivative visually as the slope of a curved line. She expressed immense gratitude at the end of the semester for all the support. I was happy to create time for this, as I could tell that individual guidance was crucial for her learning. As another example, during my time in college, I identified that I was a visual learner rather than auditory. That is, I retain almost no information from spoken presentations such as lectures, particularly those with majority text on the slides. With traditional lecture styles consistently leaving me frustrated and overwhelmed, I taught myself to read the textbook on my own and seek out extra help in alternate forms of course material (i.e. YouTube video tutorials, Khan Academy, etc.) While I was able to innovate and advocate for myself, many students may not make it as far to access supplemental material on their own. In support of this common learning style, I commit to emphasizing hands-on activities, visualization, and building intuition in all teaching.

To create community in the classroom inclusive of all voices, I commit to creating a brave space. The classroom is a brave space rather than a “safe-space”, because I cannot guarantee anyone’s safety despite my best efforts. One crucial aspect of the beginning of each course is providing a list of assumptions and agreements for our class environment. This list includes items such as only speaking from one’s own experience (i.e. using “I-language”), maintaining privacy and confidentiality for ideas shared within classroom walls, and respecting others. These agreements will form a living document, which I’ll encourage the class to amend or add on to as they see fit. I often refer to Iowa State University’s [discussion ground rules](#), which can be broadly applied across disciplines (i.e. not only when having discussions specifically involving racism). All individuals have the right of feeling seen and heard, and as an instructor, this begins with a practice of inclusivity in the classroom.

Stereotypical (and often gendered) role assignments arise frequently in STEM-based group work, and I’ve found that statistics and data science are no exceptions. Assigning group roles is a tool to disrupt these norms, foster improved collaboration, and move towards an equitable learning space. For example, in a group of four working on an exploratory data analysis, roles might be facilitator, recorder, spokesperson, and reflector. The facilitator ensures the group stays on task, the recorder writes down critical points of discussion, the spokesperson reports ideas verbally to the class, and the reflector helps the group arrive at a consensus. Specific roles can lead to improvement in communication skills, especially if students are assigned a role they might not have chosen naturally. This type of structure also provides a clear route for participation for each student. If a student has a specific responsibility in group work, they may not be as likely to feel left out of the assignment.

When historically silenced voices are uplifted and celebrated in the classroom, I’ll know I’ve made a small success in creating an equitable learning environment. As I benefited from many points of privilege in my upbringing, I continue each day to reflect and educate myself on best practices for fostering inclusivity.