

STATEMENT ON DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION — KAYA FERENDO

As a queer and transgender mathematician, I hope to inspire and encourage students from all minoritized backgrounds toward a love for and confidence in mathematics. As a teacher, an academic, and a citizen, I take pride in working to make my corner of the world more welcoming, more inclusive, and more just.

Outside of the classroom, I have volunteered on my department's Diversity and Inclusion Committee, my union's Social Justice and Accountability Committee and Organizing Committee, in local inner-city schools serving primarily underprivileged youth in an afterschool mathematics enrichment program called Math Circle. On my department's Diversity and Inclusion Committee, I have participated in initiatives to promote inclusive teaching practices among Brown's faculty, to tabulate and diagnose the causes of attrition rates among students from underrepresented backgrounds in the department's undergraduate courses, to establish channels through which undergraduates can provide the department with anonymous or non-anonymous feedback, especially pertaining to matters of inclusion, and to make the department a more welcoming place for prospective graduate students from underrepresented backgrounds. In my work with my union, I have endeavored to make graduate labor and graduate education fair and accessible for graduate workers of minoritized races and genders, who come from dangerous situations abroad, who come from non-traditional backgrounds, who are parents or caregivers, or who are experiencing economic hardship. This work has involved urging the university to implement policies and structural supports to better address the needs of graduate workers in vulnerable circumstances as a whole as well as participation in campaigns advocating for colleagues in especially dire straits. In Math Circle, volunteers teach self-contained lessons about interesting mathematical concepts accessible to middle school or high school students. I have taught several lessons with Math Circle and have served as a facilitator for additional lessons.

As an educator, I know that diversity and inclusion means more than bolstering enrollment in math courses among minoritized students: much more important is ensuring that those students know that they are capable and welcome. In the classroom, I practice radical grace in the sense of Candice Price by showing my students compassion and tireless patience at all times. Mathematics can be an intimidating subject because of the sharp delineation between correct and incorrect, because of its entanglement with social perceptions of "smartness," and because of the stereotype threat experienced by students from underrepresented backgrounds. My first priority as a teacher is to dissipate anxiety about mathematics so that students can learn in a safe and supportive environment. When I solicit solutions to a problem in class and a student volunteers an incorrect answer, I empathize with the student's thought process and highlight all of the correct insights that the student made along the way before explaining where the error occurred. I make sure that my students know that I am always available and eager to help them learn. By offering students patient and personalized support, I have had success fostering and maintaining student engagement and interaction in my classes among students of underrepresented genders and ethnicities and have reduced rates of students dropping challenging math courses.

One of my most important roles as a mathematician and educator is to counteract the inestimable harm that has been done by centuries of excluding much of the human population from the study of mathematics, and this crucial dimension of my professional identity is inseparably entwined with my personal determination to make the world a better, fairer, more compassionate, and more just place in every way that I can.