

# Diversity Statement\*

Nawaaz Khalfan<sup>†</sup>

Department of Economics, University of Pennsylvania

I am a product of my Australian heritage, the values embodied by the scientific tradition, and my experiences in pursuing higher education in the United States. At the core of my principles is a deep respect for diversity, a high value for equity in opportunity and treatment, and a great appreciation for individualism. I'd like to further nurture these principles as I develop my career in academia, and broaden the impact of my efforts to make the social sciences accessible for all.

Australians embrace multiculturalism and egalitarianism, and I have been a beneficiary and an adopter of this quality. I grew up in a Muslim family, in rural New South Wales, and from the age of 12, I attended an Anglican boarding school in Canberra. The standard of behaviour that I have overwhelmingly received encompasses a welcoming, inclusive, and overtly positive demeanour towards outsiders and newcomers, and an insistence on sharing collective resources.

Through this, I'm acutely aware of the benefits of inclusion. A crucial factor in the embrace that new communities have provided me has been active support from members who are outside my social group. It has always been the encouragement of those that are themselves different that have made me feel the most comfortable in my own differences. In the classroom, I've felt most free to contribute when the emphasis has been placed on the class's shared differences - our backgrounds, our experiences, our priors - rather than when the emphasis is on the class's common standing.

In my recent role as a lecturer at the University of Pennsylvania, I have embraced this lesson to create an inclusive classroom. By highlighting my own, diverse background - using my South Asian family names in examples, providing evidence from Australian industries, sharing my passion for particular applications - I've found my students have recognized the value they bring through their diversity, and the class has been more cohesive and productive as a result.

A lesson that modern Australians have been grappling with, as well as many other communities, is that the privilege of being a custodian of the vast resources we get to share - whether it be physical, like wealth and land, or non-physical, like education and privilege - comes with the responsibility to regularly reflect on the historical and ongoing costs our proprietorship has come at. This necessitates the search for ways to amend for these costs and minimize harm moving forward.

I hope to make progress in this respect by exploring important social questions with my research agenda. Topics of direct relevance to this program include effective altruism, natural resource employment, and public funding design. These questions necessitate cross-disciplinary work and engagement

---

\*Compiled in preparation for the 2022/2023 Academic Job Market.

<sup>†</sup>email: [khalfan@sas.upenn.edu](mailto:khalfan@sas.upenn.edu); website: [www.nawaazkhalfan.com](http://www.nawaazkhalfan.com)

from broader communities, a process that has been lacking in much economic research. This challenge then not only addresses important pressing questions but promotes diversity in economics.

The academic values of honesty, openness and accountability are also features of my heritage. A goal of mine is to be a steward of the scientific tradition, from Socrates to Kant to Samuelson. Following this tradition in some respects is easy: be curious about the truth and question what we cannot satisfactorily explain. Advancing this tradition, however, involves opening doors to diverse perspectives and amplifying quieter voices. As I pursue a career in academia, I would like to ensure that the departments, research groups and teaching communities that I am part of embrace the challenge of openness in the service of generating innovative ideas and creative accomplishments.

I've found in teaching, it has been more effective to provide attention to the individual student, and personally relate my passion for the subject, than to primarily treat the group as a whole. When my students have felt personally valued, they have naturally developed a curiosity for the material, formed study groups, and motivated themselves to work for a greater understanding - a core tenet of the scientific tradition. In this respect, diversity, equity, and inclusion are not just add-ons to my teaching philosophy, they are central to the way I see education as being most productive.

Finally, in my time pursuing a doctorate in the United States, I have learnt the importance of encouraging individualism and independence. In an academic setting, this means opening access and allowing dissent in return for innovation and breakthrough. In social settings, this means tolerance and patience in return for colour and understanding.

I've experienced this culture directly through the mentoring I have received from my academic supervisors. Their support has pushed me to be my best and helped me develop critical research skills. Where I would have thought they would be protective over their time and ideas, they have instead been open and willing to meet me where I am with my own ideas. This has allowed me to seek them out when I make ground or need advice, regardless of the topic, as well as to take time away when I need a break. I am excited to mimic their efforts, learn more about tailoring this process to the individual, and practice this in broader professional activities.

I have already seen the benefits of this open approach through coaching my students to conduct fantastic pieces of original research. In my most recent course, I encouraged my students to study their own topics in social science with the tools of game theory they acquired in class. Topics ranged from clientelism to deforestation, and the final projects were of very high quality and taught me about new areas of academic inquiry. This process of guiding and learning from their output makes me particularly excited to continue to pursue these activities in my future teaching and mentoring roles.

My heritage and experience have shaped me into a relentlessly optimistic, honest and accepting person, whose core principles reflect the importance of diversity, equity and inclusion. As I develop my academic career, I hope to extend my influence in promoting diversity by administrating and contributing to inclusive learning environments, broadening my research to address important social questions and engage with wider communities, and expanding my scope as an effective and encouraging mentor.

Updated: November 7, 2022