

Diversity and Inclusion Statement

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Representational inequality is pervasive, longstanding, and can only be successfully addressed in academia through a compassionate, holistic approach. I have been a volunteer educator and mentor for a wide range of youth and young adults as they work on community-based conservation projects. We often talk about aspirations, college, and careers. While serving in this capacity at the Missouri Botanical Garden, I met and worked with Chris, a hard-working and motivated young man who had aspirations of learning Spanish, a popular language in Jamaica, because he wanted to travel there. Chris' high school afforded him neither of those opportunities: no foreign languages were offered, meaning that Chris both could not follow his desire to travel nor could he attempt to enroll in most colleges, which require high school foreign language. Students who arrive at college having surmounted these challenges often find that their peers and instructors have had different experiences and that their perspectives seem not to fit within this system. My objective as a scholar and as a teacher is to establish an environment of mutual support by creating a collective political scientist identity, empowering students to relate political science to their own lives and to issues they care about, and setting up appropriate support structures for each student.

My research investigates how diversity — primarily ethnic diversity — impacts perceptions of, attitudes about, and collaboration with others. Using interviews, surveys, and experiments, I show that diversity has neither a pre-determined positive nor negative outcome. This is good news: it means that longstanding ethnic intolerance in certain societies can be successfully addressed through interventions like increasing ethnic group voice and political power and fostering an environment conducive to inter-ethnic friendship. At the same time, diversity can exacerbate disadvantage and discrimination. Active guidance and leadership are the keys to creating inter-ethnic cooperation in political institutions. Though classrooms are not filled with political elites, many lessons remain relevant. I have taken an active leadership role promoting diversity and inclusion in my classroom, and I am excited to expand my focus across courses to build an inter-departmental support system promoting and mentoring student work on diversity issues.

One of my goals is to encourage students to develop a collective identity, that of a political scientist, that empowers and enables students in their college careers far beyond my course. We know from research including my own that establishing a common ingroup identity among a diverse set of individuals promotes inter-group friendships, mutual understanding, and increased tolerance. How can I develop a common ingroup identity when my students come from a range of ages, majors, ethnicities, backgrounds, and levels of interest in political science? I present students with a challenge to, by the end of the semester, produce a research article akin to published work. By pursuing individual research, I encourage students to work on topics that they are deeply and personally invested in — these topics often revolve around life experiences including diversity and inclusion issues. Students develop their articles collaboratively in order to foster personal connections with others in the course, to identify and build off of each others' strengths, and to help students identify as researchers who bring a diverse set of identities to their work. Pre- and post-test surveys implemented in my Introduction to Comparative Politics course show that students increased their identification as social scientists. Students noted how the research article and in-class

activities surrounding it supported and motivated them to study issues they cared about using political science. I hope to track these students' progress after my course to measure how this initial emphasis on valuing diversity and building a collective identity translates into long-term feelings of acceptance and accessibility in the department and college in general.

Local community engagement is a key way to make issues of diversity and inclusion part of the way students go about their lives and to support organizations doing community-based diversity work. My recent collaboration with the program Chris attended involved designing workshops to help youth increase their representational voices. After working on a project to develop training materials empowering youth to contact their local government representatives, students' understanding of the importance of diversity substantially increased. Students need to apply their knowledge to concrete situations to fully illustrate how equity can inform everyday decision-making.

Many students from diverse backgrounds need support structures that can help address inequalities and integrate them into college life. These structures should be collaborative and personal. When I mentor individuals, my aim is for us to work together to develop a plan that we can implement in stages, over time. When teaching a student whose first language was not English, we identified sentence structure as an area where she needed help and worked on revising one paragraph of her written work each week. Likewise, I have advised young adults on conservation projects for the last ten years. Here economic inequality is the biggest barrier, as most individuals I work with live in rural areas. This means that I need to work to fully understand the situation, what resources are available, and work with the individual to help make their project stand out despite these barriers. Successful faculty mentoring for students with similar experiences requires a willingness to invest in understanding their story and to develop an individualized plan to help them succeed.

I plan to continue demonstrating my commitment to diversity and inclusion in several ways. First, my research lends itself to student involvement with complex issues of identity-based inequality and lack of representation. As I often work collecting new data on political representation, there are many opportunities for students to become a part of my research team and to deepen their understanding of and contribute to solutions addressing identity issues. Beyond my own research, I want to continue and strengthen several collaborations that I have already started in the courses I have taught. I intend to create a research mentoring group focused on representation and identity-based inequality where students who start their own research in my Introduction to Comparative Politics course can continue their work. This group will be a space where we will highlight new and innovative work on identity and diversity, create cross-disciplinary collaborations to attract students typically under-represented in political science, and develop a supportive environment for students interested in studying identity-based issues. I also want to expand the accessibility of the political science major to students of all types of backgrounds by enhancing the community-based partnerships with underserved youth-based organizations that I have created for my Representation, Identity, and Dissent course. Finally, I want to contribute to improve my classroom and department climate. I will do this by offering a broad variety of courses about diversity and inclusion of many identity-based groups that use inclusive pedagogy, work on measuring the impact of community climate contracts that I ask students to develop in all of my courses, and prioritize cross-disciplinary collaborations to attract a more diverse set of students and instructors into the political science discipline.