

# Diversity Statement

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Growing up in Nigeria, my parents taught me to be receptive to the ideas and views of others. In an environment with people from diverse cultures, I was educated in a system which brings students from different tribes into college based on academic performance. Amid competition, I made friends with people from different parts of Nigeria, which helped me understand their values and beliefs. I was trained to stand up for my colleagues irrespective of their background and treat others with respect and dignity. Thus, my core values of social justice, service and integrity have a firm foundation in my home and my interactions with others. I also endeavour to keep myself up to date on issues of race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and gender identity and incorporate them into my activities.

As a first-generation college student moving to the United States for graduate studies, I had to figure out my place on campus. Nevertheless, I realize that the challenges vary across locations, institutions, and individuals. During my time at the University of Mississippi, I have been in the midst of different groups of people I have worked with and continue to work with. For instance, I was the only Black male student in my cohort in my department. I quickly developed a strong bond with my colleague, such that my German classmate flew to Nigeria with me for my wedding and served as my best man. In addition, my department prides itself on having students from different parts of the world, and we share the same office and learn from one another while accepting everyone else's beliefs and values.

Even though I am African, I recognize that my experiences in Nigeria are entirely different from what African Americans and other groups face in the US. Thus, I have been a member and volunteer for the Black Graduate and Professional Students and the African Caribbean Students Associations. Some members of these groups have shared their feelings and experiences of being marginalized, and these interactions have helped me better understand the circumstances marginalized groups face. In addition, serving as a senator in the Graduate Student Council enabled me to share my international experience and organize well-received, inclusive events across departments.

Despite the state's largest share of Blacks in the US, my classes as an instructor at the University of Mississippi did not represent it; less than ten percent of the students were

not white. From my interactions with under-represented students in my class, some of whom are also first-generation college students, some have shared the difficulties they encounter in my class and their daily lives. I have always counted it an honour to share my experiences and challenges coming from a developing country to motivate them and let them know about the boundless opportunities they have despite the challenges they continue to face.

In addition, I have an interest in studying race and minority groups. In one of my work in progress, I investigate and quantify the effect of racial-gender imbalances in access to financial markets on entrepreneurship and the misallocation of productive inputs.

Looking ahead to the future, I plan to include more group projects and discussions in my teaching so that students engage organically across their narrow groups, overcome the feeling of isolation, and become aware of personal challenges and successes. To understand themselves and their beliefs, I also intend to assign a low-stake essay to reflect on their beliefs. This will assure students of their uniqueness, which is treasured by everyone in the class – united in diversity.

I look forward to implementing concepts and serving on committees that work to achieve a diverse, equal, and inclusive society.