

# TAYLOR J. WEIDMAN

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## DIVERSITY STATEMENT

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As someone with dyslexia in academia I've had something of an outside view. Like I mention in my teaching statement, dyslexia has been an important part of my experience in school. In college I typically needed to put in a bit of extra work to develop something of a translation layer between myself and a course's content. As I've developed as a teacher I've realized there is always a translation layer, and how this layer impacts whether students are both motivated to learn and have the resources to do so.

This dual, knowing I was a capable student but that I needed to develop my own translation layer, has infused my own teaching with a level of empathy for students' differences. I firmly believe that many students who may have traditionally struggled can succeed with the right translation layer. There's no silver bullet here since this often involves tradeoffs (everything relates to economics after all). But in addition to delivering quality material I view my teaching as providing an adaptable translation layer.

From this vantage point, during my undergraduate I [publicly](#) advocated for a move toward a more inclusive educational environment. At the time I didn't have experience on the delivering side and only had general requests of the institution. As I've developed as a teacher I've started finding specific ways to expand these access points more broadly. Some of this is highlighted in my teaching statement, but I'll highlight two areas here: a welcoming culture and more inclusive assessments.

First, on a basic level students need to know they, individually, are welcome. Feeling like one doesn't belong has a profound impact on both whether a student's views are valued and whether the course content feels relevant. I value making sure people from all backgrounds, races, genders, and family histories feel welcomed. I try to do this in many ways, like explicitly mentioning the use of preferred pronouns, correct pronunciation of names, and being patient with those less familiar with English, which are all parts of the culture I develop on day one of class. I've heard this come through for students both directly and on course evaluations.

*"I felt that he genuinely cared about the class material, but us as humans as well."*

*- Anonymous Student 1, Fall 2021*

And second, let me point to a more specific course-level change. Many students experience anxiety and/or panic that makes it hard to perform on evaluations. Over the years I've had numerous excellent students tell

me they got nervous and didn't perform well on an exam, despite knowing the material well. This isn't ideal as an evaluation tool, but more importantly this mismatch between evaluation and knowledge can create a vicious cycle within a student over a semester. To respond to this, I've built on two exam structures, one from both Neal Becker and Kevin Shaver, to set a lower temperature on exams. One student mentioned how this impacted their learning a course evaluation. Here's an example from Fall 2021.

*[The class's evaluations] "made the testing environment relaxed which caused me, personally, to focus and thoroughly enjoy the material."*

- Anonymous student 2

Students seem to respond positively to many of the ways I've included these values in my courses. Here are two more examples of how students have responded to this classroom environment in course evaluations after the Fall 2021 semester.

*"The classroom's atmosphere was not competitive in nature but rather collaborative because of all of the support and resources Taylor gave us. Taylor Weidman demonstrated what education should really be about."*

- Anonymous Student 2 (cont.)

*"How the class was structured .... It set the students up to focus on learning the content, and not just to get to a certain grade."*

- Anonymous Student 3

I'm committed to creating welcoming and inclusive environments and broadening the accessibility of scientific and economic communication to all learners regardless of abilities and backgrounds. Understanding issues of equity and inclusion is a continuous process. I'm excited to continue to work toward and improve my approach in collaboration with other educators.