

As an economics researcher, I share the growing concerns about the underrepresentation of minority and historically disadvantaged groups within my discipline. For example, Black, Hispanic, and Native American people in the US earned only 17.7% of the economics degrees awarded to the citizens and permanent residents of the country in 2019-2020, despite comprising 31.9% of the population.¹ In the case of research, only 28.7% of authors in international economics and 13.6% of authors in macroeconomics and finance were women between 2011 and 2020.² The underrepresentation of various demographic groups in economics is a worrying issue. Because the field is uniquely influential in policymaking, a lack of diversity and inclusion can lead to biased policy outcomes by marginalizing a significant share of the population in the relevant study and discussions.

In addition to the situation within economics, my understanding on the matter of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) has also been enriched by personal experience. As an instructor at UC Berkeley, I have seen firsthand how my students are stratified across identities in terms of not only race, ethnicity, and gender, but also socioeconomic status, disability, and culture, among others. As an international student growing up in a working class family, who also faced differences in language, culture, and class, I understand that the heterogeneous backgrounds of my students can come with barriers that prevent an equal access to education and other resources. It is my firm belief that the alleviation of such barriers in higher education, especially by educators, is vital in helping individuals achieve their full potential. My belief makes me act accordingly during my time at UC Berkeley.

As a concrete example, in one of my upper-level classes about macroeconomics and international finance, my office hours tended to be dominated by sophisticated questions from students with advanced work/internship experience. Meanwhile, students without the relevant background knowledge struggled to participate on an equal level. I realized the situation after collecting personal feedback from a female student with learning disability. I also learned from an African American student that she was “too shy to attend my office hours.” To ensure a full participation from all of my students, I rearranged and extended my office hours to include dedicated one-to-one meeting slots. I then informed all of my students about the change, while privately reminding the relevant students the option to sign up for the meetings. It did not take long before I realized that many of the students without the relevant background knowledge were among the hardest working ones in class, including the student with learning disability and the African American student. The one-to-one office hours allowed me to teach them more effectively by accommodating their different experience with the financial industry. Many students by the end of the semester informed me that the one-to-one meetings was a valuable addition to their learning experience.

Asides from teaching, I have promoted DEI in research whenever possible. During the four years I have spent mentoring undergraduate students’ research through the departmental Undergraduate Researcher Program, I have made a point to introduce international economics, finance, and macroeconomics to promising students whose identities are underrepresented in the fields. Three of these students have gone on to further their research careers by working at government/policy research institutions or applying for graduate schools.

Last but not least, I have shared, and learnt, the practice to advance DEI in higher education through services. For instance, I have presented in the departmental pedagogy workshop repeatedly to exchange techniques on collecting feedback efficiently and anonymously in large classes from students with disadvantaged backgrounds. The knowledge I have gained from the workshop helped me earn the Outstanding Graduate Student Instructor award as one of the top 10% of instructors in the graduate division of UC Berkeley.

For future efforts to foster DEI within and beyond economics, I plan to take the following steps. First, I intend to minimize barriers faced by students with diverse identifies and ensure each individual has the opportunity to achieve their potential inside my classroom. Secondly, I aim to continue my efforts in mentoring students from underrepresented groups in research, especially in the fields of international economics, finance, and macroeconomics. Thirdly, if the budget allows, I would like to lead reading groups to identify scholars from underrepresented groups who are doing promising work and invite them for a seminar. In the end, I will support institutional measures to combat discrimination and harassment.

¹ Hoover, Gary A., and Ebonya Washington. 2022. “Report: Committee on the Status of Minority Groups in the Economics Profession (CSMGEP).” AEA Papers and Proceedings, Vol. 112, pp. 768-785..

² Bansak, Cynthia, Ellen E. Meade, and Martha Starr-McCluer. 2021. “Changes in Women's Representation in Economics: New Data from the AEA Papers and Proceedings.” FEDS Notes. Washington: Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System.