

Diversity Statement

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In my research and teaching, diversity and equity have always been major components. As an economist, one chapter of my dissertation is about the governmental decisions on land acquisition and the resistance of affected households. I give special attention to the power difference between authorities and average people. With this chapter, I aim to find a way to bridle the authority to avoid the case where “absolute power corrupts absolutely.” Another chapter in the dissertation explores the YouTube Premium membership, which viewers can purchase to enjoy ad-free video services. With this membership, YouTube can better infer the preferences of its viewers and then imposes “price discrimination”. By bringing attention to the academic field about another price discrimination strategy and suggesting an effective counter measurement, I aim to diminish the disparity of market power between the monopolistic platform and its viewers. This is another example of how I integrate the topic of equity into my research.

When it comes to teaching, I have more thoughts about diversity, equity, and inclusivity. I believe that discrimination is caused by hastening to conclusions based on stereotypes. To dismiss the lack of mutual understanding, I consider it most important to have good mutual communication. Good interactions in class come from encouraging students to exchange opinions and questions freely. In courses I taught, I appreciated every question and answered with respect, even for the ones that students might consider as “silly questions”. I took every conversation as a great opportunity to give me a better understanding of students’ needs and confusions. By catering to them accurately, I substantially improved my teaching efficiency. This attitude helped create an inclusive class environment where students could feel comfortable to question and communicate without the fear of making mistakes and getting embarrassed.

As students feel more and more comfortable to share their thoughts in such an environment, they even posed challenging questions to me sometimes. Given that I am Chinese and there is currently a tense relationship between China and the US, when coming into international trades in macroeconomics, students were extremely interested to hear my personal opinions, which appeared to them as coming from a Chinese perspective. A challenge happened when I was introducing how the Bretton Woods system helped to establish a leading role of the US dollar in the global economy. Students might take this illustration as a condemnation of US strategies in international affairs. They questioned whether China was taking a similar strategy by increasing the influence of its currency with the “One Belt One Road” policy. I was glad to sense their strong motives to learn. Furthermore, their question gave me an opportunity to share my insights on these events. I answered them that from the aspect of economics, both strategies were effective as long as they served their goals well. What we focused on in this class was to evaluate effectiveness but not giving moral judgment. Additionally, I introduced students to the concept of zero-sum game and told them that not every strategy was zero-sum. Students learned that competition and collaboration could possibly result in a better social outcome, which was my opinion on the trade war. We enjoyed many discussions like this. Sometimes, students did hold some biased viewpoints, but because they were eager to speak up, I was able to respond and dismiss these biases by promoting understanding. I think this is one important function of education, to cultivate younger generations. Moreover, I firmly believe that to convert students into more understandable people is much more meaningful than superficially propagandizing diversity.

Another way to improve inclusivity and equity is by diminishing the distance from students. I take teaching as a service job and I aim to provide students the most considerate and empathetic service. Therefore, I always try to put myself into their shoes and often ask students for information about what they need. This makes teaching a collaborative work between the lecturer and students, which motivates students to engage. Moreover, I ask students for their understandings of culture, language, social and legal regulations, etc. Students feel

accomplished when they can contribute. This makes them more active in class discussions. In addition, they learn from me that learning is a non-stop process.

My experience makes me an easy-going and caring lecturer too. I sometimes share with students my struggle as a first-generation university student and the difficulties I have undergone with a newborn baby during graduate school. This gave students the feeling that I could understand their lives and hence be a good resource to seek help from. Some international students came to my office hours and shared their struggles with language barriers. My patient explanation and constant encouragement helped them to gain mastery of the knowledge and to establish confidence again. I feel my past struggles are a big benefit as they are good measures to give students empathy and help them out of various difficulties.

In my class, I treat every student with the best respect. This is my principle of equity. Within the first three weeks of each semester, I always try to remember as many names and personal features as possible, including majors and hobbies. This made my courses more specific to the audiences and was thus more inclusive. I have taught at different regional campuses for the University of Connecticut, a huge university with great diversity. On the Storrs campus, a large portion of students in my class were athletic so I used many sports-related examples to illustrate concepts like opportunity cost and price ceiling. For students on the Avery Point campus, where the majority of them came to this class with the interest of history and public policies, and many of them had a connection with the army, I used numerous war-related examples. I found that mindfully arranging the course material to better relate to students' lives is a way to show respect to students and hence engage them.

My understanding of diversity in the context of teaching is that every student deserves great care. From this consideration, I design several approaches to ensure that every student should have sufficient study supports. For instance, I write lecture outlines on the side of the blackboard to provide visual guidance. I also employ animations, slides, and videos to make the class more vivid. In the case of struggling students, I post weekly summaries online, and I am always available during office hours. I also design an assessment mechanism that takes a comprehensive account of all possible student strengths and abilities, which also encourages the development of them. Outgoing students can benefit from extra credits for their active participation in class discussions while silent students can still be appreciated for their perseverance with good performances on assignments and exams. Additionally, I understand some students may not always have the best performance. I make an extra-credit paper available to give them an additional opportunity to show their understanding of economics. I try my best to evaluate and reward all students for their efforts.

In addition to providing general help to all students, I also give special care to students with specific problems. For example, one student in the principles of macroeconomics class drew my attention since the first class. He was the only computer science major in the class among many students of business and economics majors. I intentionally used some examples related to his major to make sure that he did not feel isolated. For instance, when teaching about workers negotiating for higher wages under an economic boom, I used fast-growing artificial intelligence as an example. As the IT industry expands, graduates from computer science majors are able to negotiate for a higher wage. I saw from his face that he felt excited when I paid to him some special attention. With my help, he gradually asked more questions and became more active in class discussions. I was thrilled to find that although he was the "minority" in the class who had no preexisting knowledge about economics at all, my inclusive and encouraging teaching successfully enticed him and eventually converted him into the top student in my class.

These are my understandings of diversity, inclusivity, and equity. I aim to leave no student behind. I also work hard to adjust my teaching and evaluation mechanism to anticipate and respond to the diverse needs and preferences of all students. My experience gives me strong empathy for students with various difficulties, and I take fostering students of all kinds as my mission, regardless of their age, gender, race, major, learning preferences, etc.