

Diversity Statement

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Learning about Diversity

I am a scientist by training, but I am also a dancer. It is partly through my dance scholarship that I have gained a deeper understanding of diversity overall, and more importantly about how different groups may experience what are considered cultural norms. One of the most transformative courses I have ever taken was “Dance, Gender, and Sexuality.” Throughout this course, we discussed how the modern dance community has historically been a safe haven for those with non-heteronormative gender identities, and through documentaries heard from members of marginalized communities about their experience. This course along with the rest of my dance training gave me a glimpse into scholarship around gender identity and the effects of labeling marginalized groups as “other.”

When I joined my graduate lab, I gained an even deeper understanding of how “othering” affects individuals in marginalized communities. Half of my colleagues in lab are Hispanic and some of their families immigrated to the country. In the United States, my time in graduate school has been a tumultuous time for immigrants in general, particularly with respect to Hispanic immigrants. Because we are a close-knit group and because of the political environment, we have had many discussions about race, ethnicity, and identity. As a straight, white, female, these conversations have been invaluable in teaching me more about how marginalized groups experience the world. My colleagues have provided insight I would not be able to build on my own and provided a very real, very human context for the academic training I received in my dance courses.

Promoting Diversity through Outreach

Because of these experiences, I sought to help promote diversity and equal opportunity through my position as the Graduate and Professional Student Council Director of Community Outreach. The long-term goal I set out to achieve was to establish a partnership with the Durham Public Schools to provide tutoring and college preparation for high school students. As a graduate of the Durham Public Schools and through previous tutoring experience, I knew that the majority of the student body came from minority backgrounds and represented a wide span of socioeconomic classes. I had first-hand knowledge of how difficult the college application process was for students who had very limited resources, whose parents were unable to help them navigate the application and financial aid, and who had little insight into life at a post-secondary institution. While we still have a long way to go in addressing these issues, I am proud to say that I was able to tap in to the local school network to make connections with educators and administrators in the Durham Public Schools. As a result, I identified tutoring programs that warmly invited graduate and professional student volunteers. I also connected with a high school principal who I plan to work with in the fall to provide graduate student hosted college preparation sessions during their Saturday tutoring program.

In addition to my work with the public schools, I worked closely with Duke’s Out in STEM student group to promote diversity and inclusivity while benefiting the Durham community. To do this, we organized an Amateur Drag Show for charity. This event was a huge success boasting over 200 attendees and raising over \$2,200 for the Durham LGBTQ Center. As a direct result of my involvement with this event and my close interaction with Out in STEM, I

learned more about why pronouns matter, how to use them, and how to ask appropriately for someone's preferred pronouns. Furthermore, I learned that it is often difficult for members of the LGBTQ community to identify allies. To indicate to my students that I am an ally, I include my pronouns on my syllabi.

Creating an Inclusive Learning Environment

I use these experiences in my classroom to create an inclusive environment where everyone feels their contributions are valued. As an example, I have learned that students from marginalized communities often do not feel confident speaking up during discussions. To boost their confidence, I have my students talk with their neighbor or table before calling on students to share. Calling on students by name prevents one or two individuals from dominating the conversation and ensures that all students have the opportunity to share. Providing the opportunity for students to discuss answers among themselves allows those I call on to feel more confident sharing either their own or another student's response.

By helping to organize awareness events and encouraging my students to participate in diversity events on campus I hope to expose them to opinions and experiences that differ from their own. Without the help of my friends and colleagues, it would have been much more difficult to develop my current understanding of diversity and it would be much more difficult to continue building on and deepening that understanding. Overall, these relationships and experiences have been very valuable, and I will be a successful teacher if I am able to pass on to my students the same commitment to diversity.