

Diversity Statement

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My own background: My parents made certain sacrifices so that I could go to college. I am a first-generation college student, so I see the best way to return the favor to my parents is to pay it forward with each future generation of students. I have mentored a number of students from backgrounds similar to and very different from my own and one defining characteristic among them all is a desire to advance their knowledge and improve their situation in life by making informed decisions (be it in elections, a professional environment, etc.). When I teach, I tell my students that the mathematics is important, but more so is the unique skill of critical thinking that they will develop. Many students struggle with mathematics, because they do not learn to think critically along the way. Being able to think critically about statements is what allows someone to make an informed decision. An education gives one a chance to improve their situation in life. I advise and mentor students with this message, because many people have done this for me.

An epiphany: I distinctly remember the moment when the necessity for other viewpoints and inclusive excellence was made vividly clear to me. I was having a conversation with a colleague at the University of New Mexico about the latest advances in genetics and how scientists have been able to successfully combine the DNA of three people into a single embryo (loosely speaking; I'm not *that kind of doctor*). I commented on how this gave many couples the chance to reduce the probability of passing on genetic illnesses (mental or physical). My colleague, being a lesbian woman, commented on how she and her wife would finally be able to have a child that would be made up of each of their DNA. This was not a perspective I could have, but could certainly appreciate. This was a situation where someone, because of their background and life experience, had an entirely different perspective and saw an application of a new science that was different from my own.

The conversation was rather innocuous. The affect on me was tremendous. There is nothing inherent in an education that gives one power over another. Rather, it gives a person the power to improve their situation, as well as the situations of those around them. I am not better than someone else for my realization on inclusive excellence, but I am a better person for it. This is the sort of education one receives when we open up our ears and close our eyes to the world around us.

The difference: There is one student evaluation that has had a lasting impact on me and how I communicate with students. I taught Real Analysis one semester and this is what a student had to say about me.

I truly enjoyed this class. I feel like I actually learned a lot and was encouraged to ask questions when I didn't understand. This has been the best classroom environment I have ever experienced. Rob is one of the only professors that I felt treated me truly as equal to male students in the class. It is uncommon that I feel this way in a math class, and it absolutely made me more comfortable in the class and confident in my ability to learn Real Analysis. If I could take another class with this professor, I would do so in a heartbeat. The heavy work load ensured I kept thinking about the material on a daily basis, which I absolutely benefited from. Thank you for a great semester.

I strive to make my students comfortable. One way in doing this is to speak in gender neutral terms and allow students to freely express their unique identities. I had never treated any student different from another, but I never knew such a choice on my part was so critical in a student's learning. It perhaps isn't obvious to the outsider, but being told that my behavior has helped someone learn as an equal to their peers is by far one of the greatest compliments a student has ever given me and one that I will always treasure.