

Diversity Statement
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As a first-generation scholar of immigrant and working class background who has worked and studied in a variety of institutions of higher learning, I believe in the promise of what higher education institutions can deliver when they are genuinely committed to fostering and serving a diverse, inclusive, equitable and thriving social community. I was fortunate to receive an undergraduate liberal arts education at an institution that believed in providing financial support to level the playing field for all incoming students and fostered an egalitarian and inclusive approach to campus activities. I benefited from the institution's pre-enrolment outreach and its spirit of public service which created avenues and funding for a low-income student like me to forego summer employment to conduct undergraduate overseas research and volunteer in the former-Yugoslavia as well as study abroad. I was trained and inspired by a cohort of bright, compassionate and diverse faculty who were strong role models and led by example in fostering critical debate and campus civility at the height of the lead up to the US occupation of Iraq. These experiences were transformative and speak to the potential for centers of higher education to alter life trajectories and the realm of what is imaginable when institutions and campus communities come together to promote cultures that allow all members to thrive.

As a woman, ethnic minority and immigrant who studied for a doctorate in the UK, particularly during years of Conservative immigration reform which publicly and deliberately targeted foreign students as 'soft targets' for expulsion, I have experienced and come to intrinsically understand the ways in which banal and subtle practices work to marginalize and exclude. Positionality notwithstanding, I am devoted to raising awareness to encourage better practice and recognition of the rights, safety and well-being of the least advantaged and underrepresented in university life. From 2017-2018 I served as a visiting instructor and Acting Programme Director for the BSc in Politics, Philosophy and Economics degree at University College London where I was responsible for pastoral and academic supervision. Long run inequalities in quality of secondary schooling in the UK meant I came across students from underrepresented communities who struggled to keep up with coursework because of training they had not previously acquired in certain subjects. Their private struggles and the weight of family and financial pressure became apparent when they were at risk of probation or losing their scholarship, by which point the stress had taken its toll. I raised these issues to colleagues and administration as part of the Departmental Teaching Committee and Chair of the Staff-Student Liaison committee, working to develop better policies for identifying and accommodating students in need of support and raising awareness amongst faculty of the undue impact on student health and well-being of excessively stringent posturing. I provided input to the university's Widening Access and Participation department in setting up and strengthening its first-year transition mentorship and support programme for incoming freshmen.

In the classroom, I model and promote a civic culture and design activities to foster peer to peer learning in and outside the classroom in hopes it will create ties and networks of trust, safety and support. In one example, from 2016-2017 I taught an MA course that included a few mature students and a student with a physical disability. When the scheduling of classrooms meant that the seminar room was across campus from the lecture hall, I requested a room change to accommodate all participants. Students self-organized to petition in support of the room change to support their classmate and a group escorted the classmate from lecture to seminar so that the seminar would not reach quorum and start without the slowest member. With quiet support and a letter of reference, that member later went on to join the Cabinet Office of the UK government working on disability issues. Outside the classroom, I encourage students to come by office hours and have provided mentoring, guidance to further support, or sometimes just a compassionate ear.

Some matters are more entrenched. At one point in my graduate experience, I was the only woman in an advanced graduate seminar in my subfield where the classroom dynamics oscillated from being solicited 'for a female view' to being marginalized. I was the only person in my graduate cohort studying Southeast Asia and one of two people of Asian descent in my grad program that year. I was made to formally and repeatedly defend the legitimacy of studying Southeast Asian cases vis-à-vis larger and more prosperous cases. During the prospectus defence for my cohort, which was evenly divided in gender, every candidate whose advancement to candidacy was delayed was a woman studying non-European cases. Two colleagues transferred to another program. Even now, as a post-doc, I am the only woman amidst twelve men from the social and engineering sciences on my campus research team.

To get to this point, I have studied thousands of miles away from home when two members of my family fell ill in succession and died. As a woman from a traditional family, gender expectations meant I was expected to drop out of my PhD programme to take the lead in their care, schedule radiation treatments, & liaise with medical professionals. UK student visa restrictions meant I could not take time off from my studies for mitigating circumstances or even a pause for well-being; I tried to manage things from afar. They passed away. I carried the guilt of continuing my studies in the last days of their sickness. Immigration and visa headaches and money were always a worry. In my final year, a close female academic mentor abruptly passed away. Navigating these challenges in an apathetic institutional environment was isolating. As someone accustomed to the margins but unaccustomed to asking for help, I made it through the rest of grad school by building a support network out of crisis and learning to self-advocate, for which I am grateful. That such extreme lengths were necessary is a learning experience I take forward and motivates me to pay it forward in a myriad of ways while taking issues of positionality, roles and responsibilities seriously.

In the future, I would work to develop and/or promote faculty and student awareness training around micro-aggression and discrimination, taking inspiration from the training now offered at US medical schools of this kind. I support recent efforts to decolonize the curricula in economics and certain quarters of political science. While I practice this in my research, I have further to go in honing my own craft and syllabi. And lastly, working to normalize and lift the stigma on attaining support in a myriad of ways- hardship funding, tutoring, and access to mental health support is something I am open to students about and hope to further champion from future positions of leadership.