

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Statement

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I hold diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) among my most important values. I believe in ensuring that each person in our community is comfortable, safe, and valued, whether they are a student, an advisee, a colleague, or another member of the university community. This especially holds for people who might face indignities, slights, and other negative situations in their daily interactions, including people from historically marginalized backgrounds in academia, as well as people with neurodivergences or disabilities. I seek to promote these values in all of my interactions, including teaching, advising, campus life, admissions, hiring, and research.

1 DEI Experience

Personal experience being nonbinary I have directly seen the necessity of DEI goals through my experience as a nonbinary individual. I began questioning my gender in high school, explored but remained uncertain in undergrad, and solidified my identity and came out to the general public in graduate school. I have personally experienced the importance of supportive spaces for members of marginalized groups, both mutual support within the LGBTQ+ community, as well as support and welcoming from the graduate school community. As a professor, I will work to extend the support I received to members of all marginalized groups.

I also contributed to advocacy efforts with CMU's TINA organization (Trans, Intersex, & Nonbinary Alliance). For example, we created new guidance for campus police in the event of calls in which someone complains about trans and nonbinary people in gendered spaces such as bathrooms. Our guidance focuses on defusing the situation and validating trans and nonbinary individuals' right to use such spaces. This advocacy was effective because TINA brought together undergraduate and graduate students with university staff members. As a faculty member, I will continue bringing together groups from across campus to contribute to policy that affects trans, intersex, and nonbinary people, as well as other historically marginalized groups.

Humanist League President For the past 3 years, I have been the president of the Humanist League, a CMU club which seeks to bring people together to discuss life's big questions, promoting dialogue over dogma. We hold weekly discussion meetings about weighty philosophical topics, while promoting a positive, welcoming environment where everyone's views are valued, and people are safe to share their perspectives. We have brought together people of very different ideological, religious, national, and socioeconomic backgrounds, while maintaining that positive, supportive, and mutually respectful atmosphere. We have also brought in speakers on a variety of humanist and DEI topics to give talks to the CMU community. Our speakers have included Daryl Davis, a black R&B musician who has convinced dozens of KKK members to leave and denounce the KKK, and Prof. Jonathon Haidt, who spoke about ideological diversity and inclusion in academia.

A DEI Course run by Graduate Students The CMU computer science department had a problem: many female graduate students were being harassed by male graduate students making inappropriate romantic overtures, and the department was incapable of addressing the problem. Therefore, students got together to improve the situation by creating a new student-led DEI course, 15-996 (then called 15-920). Of course, the course covered a much broader set of topics including systemic disparities, intent vs. impact, self-support, and allyship.

Before the class was rolled out to the student community at large, I beta-tested a trial version of the course and provided extensive feedback. For instance, I provided feedback and suggestions on

handling situations where students are not immediately on board with the direction of the course. I proposed an approach focused on accepting the difference in opinion, and finding common ground on core values. This feedback became relevant when the course was rolled out to the first-year cohort, when there a student disagreed with the purpose of the class and expressed their disagreement in an email to the entire class. The situation was handled fairly well, avoiding derailing the entire class experience. I hope to support or create similar programs as a faculty member, because I believe in the importance of DEI courses in all departments.

2 Future plans

As a professor, I will support LGBTQ+ undergraduate and graduate student groups as a faculty advisor. I have seen firsthand the value that a faculty member can provide to students of a shared background, especially when students are feeling isolated, stonewalled by the university apparatus, or nervous about the future. In addition, I will support these student groups in advocacy efforts, as such initiatives are most effective when they are promoted by individuals spanning the university community.

I am excited to join the department DEI committee or equivalent. As a member, I plan to try to help with several areas related to DEI topics based on my experiences at CMU. First, I have seen female students being chased out of offices or off research projects by other students making inappropriate and unwanted romantic overtures. I envision three potential avenues to try to improve such situations: Supporting students targeted in this way, providing advisors and other authority figures with best-practices in handling such situations, and providing clear guidance for students on what is and is not appropriate behavior in a department context. Second, I have seen the difficulties faced by students whose name in daily use differs from the “official” name that the department has on file. This includes students who adopt a different name when moving between countries or changing languages, as well as trans and nonbinary students. I will help such students navigate the bureaucracy to ensure that people in the department know the right name to use on a daily basis, as well as the right name to use when issuing a check or writing an official document. Finally, I will help build an inclusive and nurturing space for students giving talks, alleviating nitpicking and derailing questions and comments, which I find are disproportionately directed to less comfortable presenters, who are often members of marginalized groups.