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Diversity statement:

Creating equity should be a priority in academia. As teachers and scholars, we must be aware that certain groups in the United States (including women and people of color) have historically been deprived of the same resources and opportunities as others. Growing up overseas as a first-generation college student, I understand that there are enduring barriers – both formal and informal – that can make academia feel uncomfortable and even unwelcoming. As a teacher, I am proactive about supporting students from diverse backgrounds, encouraging inclusivity and empathy in the classroom, promoting pluralism, and adapting my teaching and mentoring to students' needs.

One part of the problem is performance related. The implicit (or explicit) biases by supervisors and peers can create an environment that feels hostile to students from diverse backgrounds, reducing their engagement with the course material. This can create racial, gender, and cultural gaps in academic performance. In the classroom I try to foster equity through inclusive policies and practices. Interactive feedback and polling tools make it possible to elicit input from all students and help to lower barriers to participation. I also made the decision to replace participation grades in my taught classes with short weekly quizzes as a more equitable way to gauge student learning outcomes. This not only made assessment more transparent, but helped me and the students to monitor progress and identify difficulties in the course material. Having previously studied at the graduate level in France and Russia, I also empathize with students who are studying in a challenging linguistic and cultural environment and am proactive in taking the time to help students with their language and writing skills when they write their assignments.

I also strive to foster pluralism in our classroom practices. This begins at the very first meeting, where I encourage students to discuss norms and practices that make for an inclusive environment. During my time as the teaching fellow for the Politics & Values Program, I learned how to foster discussion among a diverse group of enthusiastic first-year students, but also how to navigate disagreement. As researchers, we recognize that disagreement can be an important engine for new discoveries. As an instructor, I try to create an environment in which students are supported and feel comfortable considering alternative perspectives or interpretations to hone their analytical skills. When engaging in discussions, I encourage students to avoid personal language if they disagree with others, and to first establish the nature of any disagreement before providing a counterargument.

Pluralism also extends to what we study. As instructors, it is our responsibility to reflect upon which voices and perspectives are elevated in our classes and whose remain marginalized. One strategy I employ to encourage pluralism is to elevate marginalized voices in my syllabi. Beyond encouraging my self-reflexivity as a scholar and teacher, I find that such pluralism enhances the quality of my teaching. For my seminar in Russian politics, for instance, I sought out Russian voices and perspectives from beyond privileged zones of knowledge production. I encourage students to consider positionality – including being based in Washington, D.C. – when thinking about what it means to “study” a country, which I believe further fosters empathy and pluralism in our approaches to understanding political phenomena from a global perspective.

I also adapt my teaching and mentoring to meet the needs of my students. Many incoming students, especially those from underprivileged socioeconomic backgrounds, struggle to navigate some of the more opaque norms and institutions at college, causing additional anxiety and impacting performance. I try to demystify and explain these, ranging from providing primers on how to read journal articles to explaining deadlines and plagiarism. Solving problems of diversity, inclusion, and equity in academia will not happen overnight, but instructors have agency to make a lasting impact by cultivating inclusivity and fostering an equitable environment that can help positively address existing gender and racial biases in scholarship and teaching.