

## Diversity Statement

After I graduated with my bachelor's degree in math, I went to law school and then private practice for about a year. I enjoyed running a business, but law itself was not for me. While legal research had been interesting in law school, my days as a lawyer were routine, and I found I wasn't really helping anyone or making a difference. I went back to school since I missed math and learning. I'd been away from math for four years, and there were struggles. It was amazing to me how much I had forgotten, with vague memories of details I just couldn't put my hand on as I tried to learn new material. There were about twenty of us in the program, and I was one of two nontraditional students. Suddenly, I was older than everyone, married, and had different priorities. Diversity matters because we all have unique backgrounds and experiences that shape our paths, our values, and our perspectives.

In my first teaching appointments, I always had students who were older than myself, parents, first generation college students, or veterans, in my classroom. All of them had different backgrounds, learning styles, and life circumstances. But at the end of the day, all of them had to learn the same material. This quickly helped me shape the type of instructor I wanted to be, leading me to want to make material as accessible as possible, and have a classroom that was inclusive of everyone. This led to my teaching style of asking questions, and getting the students to think about material as a group, learning and interacting with one another. By considering all proposed approaches to a problem, different aspects of the problem can be considered, which increases all students' understanding of the material, and informs students how to think about problems differently. My belief is that by considering all approaches and questions positively, every student is more willing to share their thoughts or ask any question they wish.

But, how diversity shaped my approach to teaching is not limited to classroom interactions. By having students with varying backgrounds, I learned that not all students are in the same circumstances. Furthermore, I do not always know the circumstances of my students' lives. At Youngstown State University, I had an excellent student who happened to be repeating a trigonometry course. He was a veteran and battled towards the end of every semester with coming to class and staying on top of the material. I don't know what struggles he was facing, but he missed the department wide final. I went to the course coordinator and fought to have a make-up exam arranged. Repeating the course would have served no purpose, as he knew the material and was ready to move on to the next course. At North Carolina State University, I had a student fall behind in an online introductory calculus course during the Covid-19 pandemic. I worked with him rearranging due dates and altered exam requirements so that the course could be completed on time. Generally, I'm flexible on make-up exams and working with students as issues arise. My goal is not just to give every student the best opportunity possible to learn the material, but also to demonstrate that knowledge to me. I do not hold them back simply because life got in their way. As instructors we want to teach responsibility, but learning how to navigate life is often first experienced in college, and by being flexible, I hope to ease my students' transition.

Through interactions with peers from different backgrounds, I have come to appreciate the opportunities available to me. For instance, a previous office mate was from Ghana, and I got to learn about universities outside the United States. One detail that has always stuck with me is that universities in Ghana accepted students into a specific major. To change majors, you had to be accepted into that major, and then had to start your entire academic career over from the ground up, which resonated with me, having started over myself. When you're just starting out, it's hard to know exactly what you want to do, and our values and goals change as we get older. I can relate to the fear of the transition, but am able to appreciate the happiness that comes from changing course. When students talk to me in office hours, and as I move into advising positions, I want to mentor my students with the following in mind: encourage them to make use of opportunities, to appreciate their options, and to not be afraid to change paths if it is something that is meaningful to them .

As a faculty member providing service to the university, representation is one of my key values, whether it be from student perspectives, or other faculty or staff on organization boards. I am involved in organizing the Undergrads Union Grads program at North Carolina State University. This program pairs undergraduate students with a graduate student mentor who could answer questions about graduate school itself, as well as the application process, and hosts panels throughout the year on applying to graduate school, jobs outside of academia, REU's, etc. A program I would implement at the undergraduate level would be focused on a similar idea, but pairing academically younger students with those closer to graduation. Recruitment has been a focus for STEM, but retention can be just as hard. The organization would bring together students of different races, religions, sexualities, and identities, giving them a sense of belonging. The students could take courses and grow together, while also having student mentors to rely on for advice and support.

I try to take advantage of professional development opportunities, such as Accessibility in the Classroom, the Inclusive Teaching Certification, and the ITLC Lilly Online Conference. All of these have helped me grow as an instructor, and provided knowledge on how to make lectures and course materials more accessible. Even something as simple as using different colors in lectures and notes is beneficial to all students. I am still learning how to best approach diversity, and that education will never be complete.