

Diversity Statement

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Today, educators are faced with the difficult task of making an always changing, diverse classroom inclusive and accessible. Challenges in these areas do not always present themselves right away making the creation of an inclusive and accessible classroom that much more difficult to construct. However, I believe the challenges of these classroom needs can be easily solvable if the correct preventative strategies are in place. The first strategy is to have an encouraging, welcoming classroom environment where students feel they can discuss issues they have relating to diversity and inclusivity in the classroom and amongst classmates, but also willing to share possible ways to overcome these issues. The second strategy is to be an “adaptable sponge”. What I mean by this is to be able to take any circumstance and feedback a student or the class has and come up with an adaptive solution so the classroom environment can continue to be that accessible, inclusive place for the students.

It is my belief that the building of an inclusive and positive classroom environment is set day one of class. Therefore, making accessibility and inclusivity a priority the first day is a necessity! To address this head on, I like to end my syllabus talk by telling students with any hardships, disabilities, accessibility problems, or other concerns for the class that they can come talk to me after class that day or any day about these issues. At the University of South Carolina, students in need of accessibility can fill out paperwork through the university to make their needs clearer. I like to mention that any students who have done this should still come talk to me to make sure there is not anything more that could be done to make the class more accessible. For example, after making this speech day one of my college algebra class, I had a student come up to me and mention a concern they had about narcoleptic episodes they have at times. After some discussion about seating, lighting, and more, they mentioned they had a friend in the class. We asked if the friend could attempt to wake up the student if they did have an episode when given a signal from me as a quick action plan. In the case that the student did not respond to the friend, we decided sitting in the front of class will make it so less students could see an episode happening in the case a quick solution does not work. This helped make the student more comfortable in the class amongst their peers even though the school could not formally give accommodations.

Now it is not always the case that these hardships or inclusivity problems present themselves the first day. Thus, being an “adaptable sponge” is the key to promoting inclusivity on the fly. For example, I filled in for a colleague of mine to teach a precalculus class for a couple days. In the class there was a handicap student who sat at one of the professor tables in the very front of the class. This was one solution to help with accessibility for the student. After teaching the first day I noticed the student craning their neck back to look up at the very close board and screen, but also that the student was very far from the other students in the class. Not only was the student visibly uncomfortable, but they were appearing isolated and uninvolved. The next class I moved the table back in line with the other desks in the class and added a couple chairs to the table so the student could be more comfortable and interact with the other students. In this class I had them work on a worksheet in groups and the group of the table and some others were excited to be working at the table since it was more desk space for them. In this circumstance, not only did I adapt the previous solution to be more accessible, but the adaptation was beyond gave an even better outcome than anticipated. The student thanked me after class and mentioned he appreciated the adjustment mostly because he did not have to ask for it. I mentioned this to the true instructor of the class, and he made the change for every class after. This demonstrates a time when the student may not have come forward about a diversity issue, but the goal of a continually inclusive classroom was enough to bring this solution to light.

As an employee amongst colleagues in mathematics, issues pertaining to diversity are certainly not just an “in the classroom” problem. As a peer mentor, I got to work with a diverse population of first-year graduate instructors and help them via observations, one-on-one discussions, and group discussions in an effort to improve their catalog of possible techniques in the classroom and improve their current practices. The three mentors were assigned groups to meet with and, after the first meeting, I noticed that one of my mentees was not contributing much to the conversation. When talking with her after the meeting, she mentioned that she felt uncomfortable talking in our group. After some brainstorming of solutions, I realized that she was the only girl in the group and also the only international student in the group. I addressed this issue with the program organizer and the groups were switched so that my group was more diverse. In the

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next meeting, the student shared valuable information from her class about how she had dealt with grade disputes from students. Although I feel like I handled this well, I now know in the future to be aware in all circumstances of the workplace for diversity issues and to employ my inclusivity and accessibility practices outside of my classroom as well.

I intend to move forward with these methods to keep my classroom inclusive and rid of issues of diversity. I believe I can use these same approaches with my colleagues and in life by keeping inclusivity in mind when creating an environment. To be inclusive and rid of diversity issues is a constantly changing topic that needs attention. I plan to follow the changing climate and literature on what it means to be an inclusive educator and how to deal with diversity issues in the classroom. Not only am I as an educator and researcher focused on presenting information to a class, but also how my class is able to take in that information. Part of this process comes from designing an inclusive, worry-free environment. Although diversity is ever-changing in our classrooms and workspace, to be aware of this and, most importantly, being a good person are always a good place to start when dealing with issues pertaining to diversity.