

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Statement

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I am a straight white Irish Catholic male Ivy-League-educated Ph.D. from a two-parent, second-generation grad school family in the biggest city of the richest country in the history of the world. I am advantaged.

My privilege is the product of centuries of systemic inequalities. It is my responsibility to use these advantages to affirm and empower those for whom the cosmic lottery has been less generous.

I have done this throughout my career, across positions in government, think tanks, and academia. In my first job, I worked for the New York City Office of Management and Budget, where I helped oversee the finances and policies of the City's social service agencies during the Great Recession. I gained valuable insight into the vast array of programs intended to help the disadvantaged, but the stark contrasts between the offices where the decisions were made and the shelters, jails, and neighborhoods people inhabited made me uncomfortable—especially when these decisions were based on instincts and assumptions. Later, at The Century Foundation, an independent think tank that strives to improve people's lives by embracing equity, I engaged in more direct advocacy, analyzing and writing at length about poverty and inequality. My work included pieces spotlighting racial disparities in the labor market and integration in charter schools.

As an academic economist, I have crafted an agenda focused on the homeless, the poor, the sick, and the otherwise disadvantaged. This is work that by its nature embraces diversity: with few exceptions, impoverishment is an affliction of the marginalized, the outcome of discrimination by design. To take one example, my job market paper studies homeless students in New York City, where the statistics are staggering. 97 percent of homeless families in NYC are non-white. These students face stiff educational challenges (most are chronically absent; very few are proficient), and my research identifies one policy—placing students in shelters close to their schools—that improves their circumstances. I am proud to say that none of my active research does not focus on a historically marginalized group.

The course of my work sometimes—as was the case in planning a study of cash transfers for homeless youth—involves collaboration with people who have lived experience of social ills. In roomfuls of professional experts, rare is the case than anyone utters more powerful

words. Respect leads to learning. But at a time in history when aggressive intolerance is all too salient, it is not enough to respect diversity, equity, and inclusion. It must be actively embraced. I've found several strategies that make it more likely I'll practice what I (non-denominationally) preach.

First is to be self-aware and mindful of my preferences, conscious or not. This exercise in introspection is made easier by an (uncharacteristic for me) experience I've had being the "minority"—in grad school. As it happens, I was one of only three native English speakers in my cohort of 16. While it was commonplace that I could not understand the conversations going on around me, what stands out the most about these temporary encounters with outsider status were the other students' unfailing efforts to go out of their ways to include me. I remain grateful.

The second strategy is to be welcoming. In the classroom, it's about creating a warm environment that encourages engagement from all students, especially those who, for whatever reason, are marginalized or disempowered. Despite my advantages, I am shy. I know how it feels to be afraid to speak up. As a teacher, I must lead by example, instilling the comfort and confidence that allow students to flourish. I can do this by endeavoring to make the material accessible and relatable to students of all backgrounds and learning styles, but I must also remember to learn from my students, seeking out perspectives and experiences that are different from my own. As a colleague, being welcoming means being collaborative and constructive, celebrating peers and ideas that challenge my status quo—and bearing in mind that our charge is to advance the state of what is known in the service of the greater good, not to augment our own egos. In trying to make sense of the world, there are few dangers more omnipotent than bias through omission.

Strategy three is to capitalize on moments. Consider binary variables. Gender, like many complicated things, is often discretized. When I discuss gender dummies in my econometrics course, I'm careful to emphasize that *a* proper coding is not "female/male," but rather "female/non-female," precise diction that makes a difference. Rare is it in social science that answers are unambiguous. Every regression result is an opportunity to make progress understanding the intricate relationships comprising lived experience.

Fourth is to appreciate the barriers we may not see. Maintaining hospitable lecture halls and seminar rooms is important—but so is expanding the community to include those whom academia has traditionally excluded. Too many economists look like me. If I teach up to the standards I aspire, students intimidated or overlooked by economics will enroll in my classes; I must also do the outreach necessary for them to know they belong. As a researcher, I must continue to pursue subjects of social value, and consider it an honor to be told that my work is not "of sufficient general interest."

At times when I get discouraged, I find it helpful to remember why I chose this path. Like many people, I was unsure of what to do after college. My mom, who has long served Staten Island's homeless, aged, and sick as a social worker, made things simple. "Help others," she said. And so it was that I took a job in municipal social services, learned that the field lacked scientific rigor, and set out to study my way to better solutions. I work on issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion because I like to, but also because I *need* to. It's what my mom told me to do.