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Diversity Statement

In the classroom, department, and profession, I work to create supportive, inclusive environments, and to mitigate harms. It's crucial to not only react to challenges, but to be proactive in taking concrete steps to promote transparency, equity, and respect. This requires a substantial amount of effort and time, and in my case, this has most significantly manifested in my work as Co-Chair of my departmental Climate Committee, and in my work as Director of Undergraduate Studies.

In what follows I'll focus on describing a collection of things I've done. More information on my approach to diversity and climate is also available in the diversity section of my pedagogy seminar website, and also in my resource on mitigating climate-related harms.

In My Department

In 2016 and again from 2021-2024, I was the Co-Chair of USC's Climate Committee. Both in 2016 and in 2021, the Climate Committee was formed in my department as a result of my asking for it. We have made a significant amount of collaborative progress on a number of issues, and are hard at work on many more. Climate (i.e., diversity, equity, and inclusion -related) issues come in many forms; sometimes they are about how individuals treat other individuals. Sometimes they are about more systemic patterns of (often measurable, material) unequal treatment. In both cases, these issues can exist even if no one draws attention to them, or even when no one notices. Thus, I think it's important for institutions to be proactive in examining climate across many dimensions, to promote transparency and equity, as well as an atmosphere of respectful collaboration.

In line with this approach, central objectives of our Climate Committee have been: (i) increased transparency in our department's rules and decisions, (ii) more equal distribution of goods, such as teaching assignments and course releases for faculty, and TA assignments and fellowships for graduate students; and more equal distribution of work in the form of things like service, (iii) re-examined job search methodology in pursuit of increased diversity in hiring, (iv) revision of our graduate program structure to minimize avoidable anxiety for graduate students (most significantly, revising our 2nd year paper review structure, and revising our proseminar structure), and (v) fostering more paths for communication about climate issues.

The department has accepted several climate-related proposals I've made. For instance, here are a few related to communication: In 2021 I proposed that we have a climate survey, and I was then in a leadership position of developing and administering that survey. I also proposed that we allow graduate students to communicate directly with faculty prior to graduate review meetings, through submitting documents describing their research and service activities and their current interests. I managed the logistics of this for the department for years until we developed an automated system. Finally, I proposed that the department have climate liaisons, who are faculty with the assigned service roles of proactively making themselves available for discussions of climate issues. (So, though any faculty member can be approached at any time, students know that there's someone who is actively seeking to hear from them.) I have frequently been one of those climate liaisons.

We have also made other revisions to promote greater equity with respect to measurable goods. For instance, we revised our faculty merit evaluation guidelines to make them more

transparent and objective, reducing the potential impact of biases while also explicitly making space for things like graduate supervision and service to matter for evaluation. I also noticed there were long-standing inequities in teaching distribution (with respect to graduate teaching loads, with respect to more work-intensive kinds of undergraduate teaching, etc.), and now when the department asks for teaching preferences, it asks for options in each of several relevant categories so that assignments in those categories can be more evenly distributed across faculty while still giving everyone some things they asked for. Not all suggestions are fits for all departments, of course. But I appreciate that my department collaboratively reflected on these issues and determined responses that it was happy to adopt given USC's particular features.

Some larger things, such as how to structure equitable service distribution, and how to reduce the effects of biases in hiring, are more challenging. Broad collaboration on these issues is crucial in both helping everyone understand the need for work here, and in actually implementing change, as it's too much for just a few people to take on (and the people who take on the work are too often those already struggling with climate issues). Having many people share the work also allows the department to take on tasks of proactive trend-tracking, to work to identify inequities and issues that we may otherwise remain ignorant of.

Beyond my committee work, I also strive to create a happy, supportive environment in the philosophy department. For instance, I have organized weekly lunches for all of the students studying Metaphysics in my department. These lunches gave students a regular, low-stakes opportunity to discuss their work with one another (I was the only faculty member present). Graduate students face insecurity due to imposter syndrome, coursework in areas outside of their comfort zone, anticipation of the job market, etc. My aim was for these weekly lunches to provide a supportive environment that boosts confidence and builds a sense of community. And the lunches encouraged students, no matter what else is going on, to stop, relax, and chat about the topics they love most. (For a while I also organized similar weekly lunches for faculty.)

I've organized a wide range of other events for graduate students and faculty, to promote interaction about Philosophy outside of the classroom. These have included picnics, departmental hikes, art walks, pumpkin carving, ice skating, reading groups, summer work groups, and laser tag. Having a lively department is great for everyone, but it is also relevant for diversity. When I was a graduate student, the default means of interacting outside of school was to go to bars. Many women expressed disappointment in this; bars are not always safe places, and late-night socializing also made it harder for some (who expressed worries about walking alone in the dark) to get home. This meant that the default means of socializing was unintentionally exclusive. Since then I've always intentionally organized a wide variety of events.

In The Classroom
I am a first-generation college graduate from a blue-collar family. I was also a transfer student, starting at a college in my hometown in Alaska. I tell students this, and invite students with similar backgrounds, or even those who simply have questions about what to expect in college, to come talk to me. It is rewarding to interact with students about their experiences, and I'm also happy to constitute an example that challenges some stereotypes about academics.

I also take steps to help students combat stereotype threat. Studies in 2009 and 2010 have shown students perform better in class and on exams when periodically given short writing assignments asking them to describe what they value. The suggestion is that students who are members of marginalized groups face the stereotype that they will not perform as well as their peers, producing anxiety. The writing assignments appear to counteract this. So at the start of my

exams, I have students answer extra-credit questions, describing what they value most in a person, who has had the biggest positive impact on their lives, or something they're proud of.

Learning about students' values and getting to know them as individuals (through these questions, other assignments, and discussion) can also be helpful for students who have faced trauma. A surprisingly large portion of students experience trauma while in college, and many more have experienced multiple traumatic events before college; these can include abuse, assault, serious illness or injury, sudden death of a loved one, and so on. Giving students ways of feeling seen can contribute to resilience. As does building safety-nets and flexibility into courses, so students have greater predictability and control over their environments and situations.

There are many other things I do in relation to undergraduate teaching. I've completed Safe Zone training and communicate this to students; I use blind grading to limit the impact of my implicit biases; I often hold my office hours outside of the classroom before class starts to make it easier for more tentative students to talk to me, because I'm showing up where they'll happen to be anyway; I use a variety of teaching methods (lecture, visual aids, handouts with activities, group discussion) to keep students engaged and to make things easier for students for whom English is not a first language. There is more I should be doing; improving my classroom environment is an ongoing task and I learn more each term.

In My Profession
I also regularly organize Philosophy conferences: I have organized fourteen conferences, and have co-organized six more. I keep my conferences inclusive and accessible. Attendance is open and free to everyone, and for students travelling from out of the area I offer an official role in the conference so that they can get help with funding from their home institutions.

I am also interested in thinking of ways to make the written philosophy we produce more accessible. For instance, one of my former professors had problems with his eyesight that made it difficult for him to read, and he would have his computer's clunky text-to-speech software read out the papers for him. Because of this, I now regularly record and post audio versions of my papers.

As noted above, working out ways to support diversity is an ongoing project for me; I look forward to learning more about how I can contribute to our professional community.