

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Statement

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My teaching philosophy is rooted in my upbringing in Turkey, a crossroads of regions, languages, and religions. This environment taught me two durable lessons. First, that students from diverse starting points can reach shared intellectual goals when the learning environment is designed to support them. Second, that rigorous thinking is sharpened when required to engage with multiple perspectives. These lessons are the foundation of my commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), and they guide my approach in the classroom: I plan for a plurality of viewpoints and cultivate a respectful, collaborative intellectual community where all students can achieve academic excellence.

My approach to DEI is practical and iterative. The aim is to remove avoidable barriers, give every student a clear path to succeed on the course outcomes, and maintain high standards with transparent support. At the University of Connecticut's Waterbury, Hartford, and Stamford campuses, I taught students from varied socioeconomic backgrounds, many of whom were first-generation college students. To make participation safer and more productive, I instituted weekly "discussion days" that were purpose-built for questions and clarification, used anonymous question drops for those who preferred privacy, and ran short skills labs on how to read arguments and how to disagree productively. The effect showed up in both participation and evaluations. Students who had been quiet began to use office hours, ask for draft feedback, and present in small groups. My most recent courses in that period earned 4.8 out of 5 overall, with written comments pointing to clarity of expectations and respectful climate as reasons for stronger engagement.

In all my courses, I apply these lessons through a systematic focus on creating an equitable and accessible learning environment:

Inclusive design and access. I design courses using a universal design mindset, recognizing that students learn in different ways and at different paces. This is especially crucial for supporting neurodivergent students and students with disabilities. Each module states its learning goals in plain language, explains how the assessments measure those goals, and offers multiple ways to demonstrate mastery—for example, short written analyses, oral presentations with slides, or structured problem sets. All required files are screen-reader friendly, captioned when multimedia is used, and distributed in advance. I coordinate proactively with the Disability Services office so that accommodations are in place early. When religious observance, caregiving, or work schedules conflict with due dates, I provide equivalent alternative windows that preserve the learning target and the integrity of the assessment.

Assessment and feedback. Equity requires transparent criteria. I publish rubrics with examples of satisfactory and excellent work, grade with anonymized identifiers when feasible, and separate achievement from behavior that can introduce bias in scoring, for example attendance beyond clearly communicated participation activities. Frequent low-stakes checks provide quicker feedback loops, reduce performance anxiety, and allow students to adjust their approach at their own pace. When students fall behind, I use brief learning plans that specify one or two concrete actions for the next week, such as revising a claim with a targeted source or reworking a data interpretation.

Representation and materials. Reading lists include a range of voices and contexts. In philosophy courses that means pairing canonical texts with contemporary work by scholars from a variety of backgrounds and with case studies that connect abstract issues to lived problems. In psychology and neuroscience units it means highlighting methodological diversity and showing how research questions and samples have changed over time, including the implications for generalizability.

Mentoring and pathways. Students enter with different knowledge of academia. I hold short optional workshops on topics like “Applying to graduate school,” “Finding research opportunities,” and “Writing to a professor.” For first-generation and international students these sessions demystify hidden curricula and encourage early planning. I maintain clear office-hour structures, invite group visits to reduce anxiety, and coordinate with campus resources for tutoring, counseling, and financial aid when those supports would help.

Ongoing improvement. Each term I collect brief mid-semester feedback and act on it publicly so students see the loop close. I keep a small DEI change log for my courses that records what I tried, what worked, and what I will change next time. I also review disaggregated grade patterns when available. If a pattern suggests unequal outcomes that pedagogy could address, I adjust structure or support while keeping standards stable.

Examples in practice.

- *Waterbury discussion days:* anonymized Q&A, rotating small-group leads, and a weekly skills lab increased participation from students who had previously avoided speaking.
- *Flexible demonstrations:* in Social Psychology, students could show mastery through a short policy memo, a data commentary, or a mini-presentation. All options hit the same rubric targets.
- *Religious and cultural scheduling:* assignment windows and make-up options respected major observances and family care responsibilities without lowering expectations for evidence and reasoning.
- *Access to materials:* all slides and readings posted 48 hours before class, with plain-text summaries and page references for students using screen readers or mobile devices.

My view is simple. DEI is part of good teaching and research culture. It asks for clarity about goals, fair access to the work, consistent standards, and reliable support. I will continue to learn from students and colleagues, study the evidence for effective inclusive practices, and revise my courses accordingly. The result I aim for is straightforward: a classroom where every student knows what is expected, has a fair way to meet those expectations, and sees their work taken seriously.

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