

## Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Statement

Aliyar Ozercan

Growing up in Turkey, a country that connects Asia and Europe, I was exposed to a wide range of cultures, religions, and traditions. This experience has instilled in me a deep appreciation for diverse perspectives and experiences that each individual brings. As a result, I have developed a nuanced perspective on the value of both collectivism and individualism. As an Asian, I learned the importance of family and community, and how these values can help foster a sense of belonging and support. As a European, I learned that through hard work and determination, individuals can make a significant impact on their communities, and that their accomplishments can inspire others to do the same. As a Turk, I learned how to amalgamate such different perspectives into a welcoming life philosophy. That being said, as scholars we must critically consider which perspectives are represented in our field and constantly advocate for inclusion of all for a richer scientific community. I have been constantly trying to improve myself on this area.

During my time teaching at the University of Connecticut at Waterbury, I had the privilege of working with students who came from low socio-economic backgrounds. These were the students who were often dismissed by their teachers but, through ambition and hard work, made it into college. I realized that nobody had actually sat in front of them and said, “ask your questions freely. I am here to answer them and help you become successful.” When I added ‘discussion days’ to my syllabus, I thought I would be just clarifying some concepts for my students. To my surprise, they not only used this opportunity to fill the gaps in their knowledge, but to learn more about philosophy, grad school, and how to be successful in academia in general.

In both the Waterbury and Hartford campuses, I observed that Muslim students often enrolled in my classes, likely due to my Turkish background. They seemed to assume that I would understand their international challenges and be more sympathetic to their unique approaches to philosophical problems. Many of these students showed a unique blend of creativity and potential, resulted from their background. Recognizing this, I adapted my teaching to focus more on developing their analytical skills. My goal was to help them channel their creative insights into well-structured, articulate arguments and analyses, thereby empowering them to excel academically and professionally. In my course evaluations, students rated these courses much higher than the previous ones, e.g., my last course got 4.8 out of 5, one of the highest graded classes in the University of Connecticut.

With each semester, I continue to learn more about other cultures and different ways to increase equity and inclusion in my classes. I still have much to learn about various cultures around the world and I am committed to making sure that all of my students feel respected and valued in my classroom. To this end, I will

- Welcome the full identity of my students and colleagues. This includes calling out discriminatory behaviors and microaggression.

- Help my students not by punishing them but by guiding them towards correct behaviors and encourage them to be open-minded in future scenarios.
- Continue to critically evaluate my own behavior and comments in class, and update my syllabi to match it.
- Be flexible in my teaching and examination methods. As I mentioned above, different cultures have different priorities, which lead to different learning techniques and showing that they learned the material. Our goal is not to stereotype our students by applying fixed techniques, but to make sure that they indeed learned the material. To this end, I commit to try out different teaching and examination methods based on my students' needs.

I hope to continue learning and growing, while also leveraging my unique back-ground to help build bridges between different cultures, communities, and perspectives. I am committed to working towards this vision.

December 14, 2023

Aliyar Ozercan

*Storrs, CT*