

DIVERSITY STATEMENT

Reflecting on contributions to diversity is never a neutral undertaking. In fact, the very definition of the word “diversity” is under constant scrutiny by feminist scholars, particularly feminists of color. In her book, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*, Chandra Talpade Mohanty argues that discourses about diversity often endorse “benign variation,” promoting pluralism without an accompanying analysis of power. With this critique in mind, one way I contribute to diversity is by actively resisting a narrow definition of diversity that simply celebrates difference without also thinking critically about the experiences of people who embody diversity. For me, contributing to diversity goes beyond simply working with students from different backgrounds. Rather, it requires focused, insistent, and proactive advocacy and solidarity with minority students, faculty, and staff. As a feminist scholar who is deeply committed to theories and practices of justice, contributing to diversity requires me to reflect on my own identities, help students navigate the visible and invisible structures of the university, utilize pedagogical approaches that interrogate power, and continue to educate myself and others about ways to make the university more equitable at all levels.

First and foremost, a commitment to diversity requires recognizing my own relationship to power and privilege. As a first-generation student, my own path through the university has never been taken for granted. I was accepted to my undergraduate program as a student-athlete and, while this opportunity brought many privileges, it also meant staying on campus during holiday breaks 2000 miles from home when I couldn’t afford a flight or going straight from my job as an overnight prep cook to 5AM morning practice. I quickly learned the importance of building a community of people who were willing to support me through the hidden curriculum of the university and help me achieve previously unthinkable goals, such as pursuing a Ph.D. Now, as a Teaching Assistant and Teaching Associate, I have the honor and responsibility of helping *my* students to navigate their transitions to and through college. One way I do this is by requiring students to come to office hours at the start of the quarter, welcoming them with tea and snacks, and taking the time to explain what office hours are for and how they can be used to find mentors and to learn about research and job opportunities. Since over 40% of UCSB students are first-generation,¹ this demystifying work is incredibly urgent.

Although I share a first-generation identity with many of my students, as a white woman, I am keenly aware that our lives differ on many other axes. As part of my commitment to feminist and antiracist pedagogy, I deliberately design my courses in a way that centers difference. As the majority of my Feminist Studies students are women of color, and many of my students identify as queer or trans, I keep intersectionality at the center of my course design and pedagogy. My classes both discuss and follow the approach of “trickle-up social justice” advocated by legal scholar and activist Dean Spade, which suggests that addressing the issues faced by the most

¹ <http://bap.ucsb.edu/institutional.research/campus.profiles/campus.profiles.2017.18.pdf>

marginalized and most vulnerable populations is the clearest path to systemic and transformational change. For this reason, I prioritize issues that affect multiply marginalized populations, examining how systems of power overlap and interact and how grassroots organizations and community groups have approached these issues.

This commitment to diversity is ideological and theoretical—but also deeply practical. In her book *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*, Sara Ahmed argues that institutional commitments to diversity are frequently “non-performative,” failing to actually bring about the change they name. In my classroom teaching, I ensure that I not only teach *about* feminism and feminist theory, but that I also *use* feminist theories to inform my classroom policies and my interactions with students. Because Feminist Studies courses so frequently engage personally and politically divisive discussions about race, gender, and sexuality, a significant contribution to diversity involves creating a strong classroom culture that allows these challenging discussions to occur between students with vastly different experiences.

Recognizing the enormous diversity of students in the classroom also means building flexibility into the classroom, from creating alternative assignments for students who must be absent for caregiving or occasional work responsibilities to holding video office hours for students who commute to campus. On first day of every class, I ask students to share their preferred names and pronouns and make sure that all students know and can correctly pronounce the names of their classmates. These basic dignities create a critical foundation that allows learning to occur across difference. Additionally, part of contributing to diversity also means recognizing the roles that I cannot fill for students and continuously educating myself about campus resources that allow students to find support or community in personally and culturally relevant ways. Each of my syllabi contains a two-page list of different student support services, along with contact information and a description of services. Each quarter, I painstakingly walk my class through this entire list so that they are aware of the many places they can turn to for mental health services, academic support, and cultural or affinity belonging. When I teach first year students, I often bring my entire class on field trips to the counseling building, the academic support check-in, the food pantry, and other student resources, simply to reduce the stigma or barrier of asking for help or seeking out community.

Beyond interacting with students, I remain committed to issues of diversity and justice through my own academic research. Each of my research projects have explicitly looked at issues of gender, race, and sexuality. Currently, my dissertation examines how comics can be used to make feminist theory more accessible and more shareable, for example, to non-college audiences or to audiences who don't self-select into a Feminist Studies course. In combination with the day-to-day work of doing diversity—in the classroom, in my department activities, in my instructional consultation work—this research-driven approach to issues of diversity allows me to inform myself and contribute to a broader discussion of justice in the university.