

Statement of Diversity and Inclusion

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The values of diversity and inclusion are central to my identity as an educator. I see my work as an educator as an attempt to show that philosophy can be for everyone, especially those who have long been kept out of the conversation. My dedication to diversity and inclusion is illustrated in the topics that I choose to teach and in my work to increase access to philosophy and humanities education.

For the past several years I have served as an instructor in the Clemente Course in the Humanities, a program that is dedicated to furthering the educational goals of adults from economically underserved populations. In my time there, I have worked with a diverse set of individuals, most of whom have no association with philosophy beyond it not being “for them.” After all, the thought goes, philosophy is conducted by privileged members of society, who have the security to discuss issues that bear little relevance to daily life. Throughout my time at Clemente, I have aimed to prove to these students that philosophy belongs to them as much as it does to myself – an aim I have carried through the rest of my work as an educator. At least with my Clemente students I have succeeded – so they tell me!

Another way I practice inclusion in the classroom is through my interest in disability studies. My experience working as a direct care counselor for adults with disabilities helped me realize that many people are uncomfortable not only with questions about what is owed to disabled people but even with disabled people themselves. It is imperative that we have conversations about disability in higher education to combat this stigma. I taught an interdisciplinary course on the topic of physical disability, “Society, Technology, Disability.” My students were initially hesitant to discuss these themes because they were ashamed of their own views. However, as they discovered their own implicit biases, I witnessed how the students courageously faced their own misconceptions and sought to revise them.

I encountered a similar set of issues when teaching Environmental Ethics, particularly when discussing topics related to indigenous peoples (e.g., land rights, environmental justice). Even though students are sympathetic to the plight of indigenous peoples, few of them have any familiarity with the history or lived experience of these peoples. Encountering this lack of familiarity forced me to reflect on my own indigenous background and tribal affiliation, with the Choctaw Tribe. I came to recognize that students were eager to learn and to grapple with the experiences of others, even if it meant also acknowledging their ignorance in the process. This recognition instilled hope in me, as well as an obligation to provide students the opportunity to learn about indigenous peoples, their culture, and thought. To this end, I have crafted a course on indigenous philosophy that I am eager to teach.

By realizing the aims of diversity and inclusion we can ensure that every person is able to explore the central questions of human life with the depth, fervor, and joy that too few people have enjoyed to this point. Only when this opportunity is expanded can the promise of philosophy be fulfilled.