

Diversity Statement

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Throughout my life, I have benefitted from access to opportunity at every stage. I do not take it for granted, and recognize that the systems that structurally advantage me also simultaneously marginalize others. As a professor, and as a person, it is my goal to illuminate how these systems operate in both my research and teaching, as well as actively participate in addressing these disparities inside the classroom, department, university, and larger community.

The documentaries I worked on prior to graduate school addressed a number of social and political issues. As a producer of those films, I witnessed the racial and economic disparities entrenched within the justice and health care systems in the United States; teenage girls facing the choice of sex work or factory labor in Thailand; indigenous Peruvians ignored by the state as their loved ones disappeared during the “dirty war.” The people I met and the stories they shared on film connected me, and the film’s audiences, with the everyday impact of discrimination. They have stuck with me.

Living and working in South Africa off and on for nearly 20 years, beginning as a college student and most recently as a parent conducting dissertation fieldwork, has also deeply informed my awareness of systemic inequality. I have learned first-hand that the answers to questions such as “Is it safe to live there?” and “Where does your child play?” are highly contingent on the color of one’s skin, economic resources, local capacity and, too often, long-standing feelings of mistrust and anxiety. I see the United States, and institutions of higher education, through the lens of my experiences at universities in post-apartheid South Africa, both in 2000 and 2015.

Issues of inclusion and access are thus central to my research and teaching. My work is at the intersection of international migration and electoral politics; I explore how governments enable, or prevent, citizens from exercising their right to vote. I also strive to broaden our knowledge of comparative migration beyond the Global North to focus on how mobility impacts the Global South. Further, as I primarily work with people who were born in a different country, I am sensitive to issues concerning citizenship, especially the vulnerabilities inherent within insecure legal status.

I incorporate diversity into my classroom at multiple levels. I design courses oriented around questions of rights, representation, agency, and access, assigning readings from women and minority scholars (I find African politics syllabi without African scholars particularly vexing). I include a wide range of learning activities and assessments to accommodate different learning styles and abilities; as the semester progresses I frequently check in with my students to assess what’s working (and what’s not) and adjust lesson plans to better meet the interests and needs of the class.

Access to knowledge is a fundamental right, and one that is denied to so many people, here in the United States and around the world. I am committed to broadening this access at all levels. I recognize that students arrive on campus with a diversity of experiences, challenges, and responsibilities. As a teacher and mentor, I will support students to succeed in achieving their educational goals, especially those who have had a more difficult journey to be here. As a colleague, I will work to make sure the department, and university, actively engages to increase inclusion and is intolerant of discrimination. Outside of the university, I will continue to support causes that address inequality, from immigration services and justice reform to educational initiatives in South Africa.