

Diversity Statement

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Contributing to diversity in our field means creating an atmosphere with equal access to resources, advising, and interpersonal interactions. Due to my experiences as a first-generation college student and a woman in a male-dominated field, I am committed to accomplishing this to make economics a more effective and inclusive discipline.

I grew up in a low-income single-parent household in rural Georgia. Unlike many of my peers in PhD programs, my parents did not go to graduate school. They did not graduate college at all—in fact, they barely graduated high school. My father, who passed away when I was eleven, worked as a foreman on Atlanta’s construction sites. My mother was an aspiring artist turned homemaker. While they were helpful with creative endeavors,¹ they had never been academically motivated themselves. Thus by the time I was in third or fourth grade, they were no longer able to help me with my school work. This turned me into a fiercely independent and successful student; however, I believed that I alone was one hundred percent responsible for my educational successes and failures for many years.

During middle school, high school, and my undergraduate education, I didn’t know how to ask adults or teachers for help. I never attended office hours, emailed teachers to ask questions, or asked for extensions when personal issues made completing assignments on time difficult. These tendencies common among first-generation college students who are not acclimated to the culture of higher education represent significant disadvantages that often cause us to underperform academically and leaves us more vulnerable in academic settings. During my graduate studies, I was still hesitant about asking for help and feedback on my work. I went to office hours before and after exams but was often too intimidated to ask questions; most of the time, I felt like I was a burden to my professors.

Eventually, I started forcing myself out of my comfort zone by emailing professors more and going to office hours. One of my biggest regrets is waiting until the second year of my PhD to do so since these positive interacts and opportunities to discuss my classwork and research translated to improved coursework and increased confidence for me as an academic. Shortly after I learned how to ask for help, I started teaching undergraduates myself. Since I understand what it’s like to feel out of place in academia, I have always been very clear that I am open to chat with students and always welcome them during my office hours. I have also tried to be visible as a first-generation student by putting a placard on my office door and mentioning my first-generation student status. Since I have struggled with feeling

¹My love of mathematics comes, in part, from my father’s background in construction. I spent a lot of time as a child helping him with carpentry projects, and he often made me calculate where and how he should cut wood for the projects.

like I belong and asking for help, I always try to reach out and aid others so they don't have to ask. I try my best to meet the more junior graduate students and learn how I can help them.

One specific barrier I faced due to my insecurities and my position as one of the only women at Oregon in my field was bullying from a peer in my graduate cohort. This individual made sure I never had one-on-one time with professors. They would also work on group projects with me and push me to work on assignments that were due weeks out, knowing that I still needed to finish homework that was due the next day. I realized what they were doing when they prevented me from talking to the only seminar speaker Oregon hosted during my PhD, who was a woman in my field. When this happened, I realized that they had been bullying me, isolating me within the department, and placing me at a disadvantage academically. As a woman and first-generation student unsure of my place in academia, I was particularly vulnerable to this mistreatment. I now have a better understanding of how people, like myself, can be subjected to harassment and bullying when they are vulnerable and unsure if they belong in academia. Since this happened to me, I am vigilant and reach out to other students that might fall prey to bullying and harassment.

This experience has focused my desire to make economics a welcoming discipline for all people. I actively contribute to diversity among my peers by reaching out to support and elevate first-generation graduate students and individuals from under-represented groups, including myself, as a woman and a first-generation student. I frequently help other students gain the confidence to email or approach professors about research, both in my department and through the mentorship program I took part in via the promising scholars' professional development group. Also, I am now one of the most outspoken graduate students in my department. I use this to help promote people who are too shy to nominate themselves to elected graduate student positions and encourage women and people in under-represented groups to be vocal and visible within my current department.

My advocacy for under-represented groups in economics extends beyond my peers. At the University of Oregon, I have taught intermediate macroeconomics and introductory macroeconomics. Before teaching intermediate macro, I had graded for it several times and noticed that the class's top achievers were always white men. Consistently, the high-scores in the classes I teach come from students with diverse backgrounds and genders. For instance, when I taught intermediate in Summer 2018, Fall 2019, and Spring 2020, my highest-scoring student was a woman each time, with an even mixture of male and female students obtaining the ten highest scores (this has been true for my intro class as well). For me, two of the most rewarding parts of teaching are helping students learn one-on-one and mentoring them. I always email my high-achieving students to encourage them to study more economics and to let them know they can reach out to me in the future. Many of these students have done so to find out more about becoming an economics major or for help applying (successfully!) to graduate school. I try to make my class a welcoming environment to all students by not letting individual students dominate discussions and tying in real research created by economists of all backgrounds.