

It is my firm belief that promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion is fundamental to our roles as academics. Though much has been done within political science and international relations to advance DEI, such efforts still need to be foregrounded in innovative and intentional ways. In a pluralist society, we all tangibly benefit from increased diversity and equal opportunities, but successfully achieving this requires effective commitment to inclusion. I have learned through my experience at the University of North Carolina that individuals must take personal responsibility, often against implacable institutional barriers, to redress systemic inequities through deliberate effort. Openness to diversity is insufficient; attaining equal opportunities requires effective actions, by individuals and by communities. I strive to take such concrete steps through my departmental service and my pedagogical practices.

My commitment to action deepened during my time at UNC. The night before my first class in graduate school, Silent Sam—an infamous Confederate monument erected on UNC’s campus in 1913—was torn down by protesters. I was new to the area and so celebrated its toppling while focusing on my studies, expecting that university officials would justly dispose of the statue; instead, the Board of Governors proposed building a museum to house it and then, when that was met with backlash, made a backdoor deal to hand it off to a neo-Confederate organization. The behavior of high-ranking officials at my university made plain to me the extent to which existing institutions could actively and effectively obstruct diversity and equity; the perseverance of individual protesters inspired me to do more within my department and classroom to undermine systemic privileges.

I committed first and foremost to direct action to ensure equitable opportunities for diverse individuals in our department. I joined a graduate student working group, Removing Inequities in Political Science, and worked with a team advocating changes to our comprehensive exams so they would serve as a springboard for all students rather than a chokepoint for a few. I was invited to be one of two graduate student representatives on the department’s Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee, where I served as a liaison between faculty and graduate students. We as a committee began an ongoing study of racial and gender diversity of the department’s syllabi, empirically cataloging the over-emphasis on white male scholars within all political science subfields. Finally, I worked with a faculty member and another graduate student to develop a new academic concentration within the curriculum for the interdisciplinary Peace, War, and Defense major, which will explore how systemic inequalities affect and are affected by conflict.

I have also striven to ensure other forms of diversity are respected and included through everyday department services. As the graduate student coordinator of the international relations subfield, I brought in guest speakers that represent both identity-based and intellectual diversity. As a member of two faculty search committees, I pushed for minority candidates, especially from non-elite institutions, to be fairly evaluated and included in interview invitations. Finally, as both a department-assigned mentor to students in my subfield and the primary teaching assistant for first-year students in our graduate program, I have sought to ensure that students of different racial, linguistic, and national backgrounds feel welcomed into our community and supported in their early courses.

I have always prioritized making my classrooms inclusive and equitable environments. I mix in many forms of class discussion, including low-stakes conversations about current events,

sharing of reflection paragraphs, and small group exercises, to facilitate an open and comfortable environment for all students, and especially women and students of color. For students who have anxiety about speaking in class or who are more at ease in written English, I always provide an online discussion forum alongside our class to give everyone an opportunity to find their voice. I make sure that our courses converse about relevant international events that might go unnoticed by American students—such as coups in sub-Saharan Africa or economic crises in South Asia—and use examples from the Global South to both demonstrate the relevance of our theoretical content and launch discussion of the structural legacies of European colonialism and American financial hegemony. I assign readings by women and people of color and set aside time for explicit discussion of race and gender in international relations, but also weave regular discussion of racial and gender-based inequity into international relations content, such as the under-discussion of sexual violence to define a militarized conflict. In so doing, I strive to create an open atmosphere in which students can relate abstract course content to their own lives while offering grounded critiques from their personal experiences when pre-existing analytic frameworks fall short.

Though I wish my commitments to DEI occurred in better circumstances, I have appreciated the way my experiences at UNC have spurred me forward. I look forward to continuing my growth in promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education at other institutions.