Diversity Statement
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Fundamentally, I would argue that diversity is the basis for all life on the planet. Even biologically, it is the mixing of genes, the making of new hybrids, changes large and small, that drive evolution as life of any kind works to survive (and thrive) in shifting environmental contexts. From this perspective, homogeneity produces stasis, stagnation, lack of growth, lack of movement — the exact opposite of life. Conversely, diversity produces movement, growth, and potential long-term survival. This isn’t just biological either. In humans (at least, if not in other animals too) it is also social and cultural and historical. What we are today, our languages, our cultures, our institutions, are the products of both harmonious and contentious heterogeneous mixing along the way.

Now, to be clear, I’m not naive. Diversity does not necessarily lead to progress and healthy growth. Toxic environments and systems can compel us to grow in toxic ways. But even on a scientific level, change and development are an inevitable part of what it means to exist. Indeed, this is where both the scientific sense and political sense “conservative” aligns: Being conservative fundamentally means trying to keep things where they are, resist change and development. In science we see conservation of matter or energy - things trying to hold their form, stay the same. In politics we see those trying to “conserve” status quo relations, typically inequitable, in the face of pressures to grow, expand, or change.

Relative to other institutions, UW Bothell is fairly progressive when it comes to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Or, at least, there are many staff, faculty, and students who hold onto and speak towards more progressive commitments of supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion on campus. We see this in the creation of the Student Diversity Center and the UWB Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. We see this in our curriculum, where in the School of Educational Studies, for instance, we continually push on the radical edges of educational justice in many forms in our classes (settler-colonialism, anti-racist education, critical race theory, supporting trans and queer students, supporting immigrant and undocumented students, etc.).

That said, the University of Washington Bothell is an institution of higher education, and so despite its progressive political leanings, it is also cautious and protective of existing institutional relations. Yes, we have stated commitments to diversity, but it took massive student protests on campus to get the UWB administration to finally agree to the formation of the Student Diversity Center. Similarly, when I formed it, the entire UWB Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion was funded on temporary monies, and they didn’t find the money until I strategically stepped away from the role of Dean of Diversity to force the institution to find permanent resources. Likewise, every move regarding curriculum is weighed down by intense bureaucracy that makes growth and movement so slow and laborious as to feel almost impossible. In these ways, UWB is like all institutions of higher education in that it is institutionally conservative – it protects itself from radical changes. This conservatism is the nature of public institutions generally, particularly within the limits placed on them in the context of settler-colonialism and racial capitalism, as
well as all those systems imply with regards to gender, sexuality, patriarchy, and the environment. This is just the contradiction we navigate in K-12 and higher education.

You might view the above as pessimistic, but to me, it isn’t. Our world only presents us with contradictions and contradictory relations, and all we can do is figure out how to make our way through them. However, what we do have is some control over the ways we make sense of and use the limits and opportunities in front of us. In this context, I also hold onto our fundamental, human capacity to change and grow and develop because, after all, we are alive. This is why I became an educator.

My entire career – from before I became a credentialed teacher working in Upward Bound programs servings the South Puget Sound and Seattle regions, to my teaching in Seattle and Berkeley public schools, to earning my Ph.D., to who I am now as a professor and current interim dean for the UWB School of Educational Studies – has been based on a foundational commitment to education for social, racial, cultural, and political justice. This has manifested in a myriad of ways, including, but not limited to: developing K-12 and teacher education curriculum that is anti-racist specifically and intersectionally anti-oppressive generally (being supportive of the intersectionality of student identities in areas of class, culture, gender, sexuality, and disability); offering professional development for current teachers in areas of multicultural and inclusive education; teaching UWB undergraduate and graduate courses on a wide range of issues related to multicultural and critical education; continuously producing academic and public scholarship that challenges inequities and inequalities in education and society; and organizing with parents and teachers for equitable and just education policies.

I have consistently brought similar commitments to educational justice to my institutional work. For several years I led campus diversity initiatives as the Chair of the UW Bothell Diversity Council (which at the time was the only university infrastructure for diversity work), and later I served in the role of the Acting Dean of Diversity and Equity overseeing diversity initiatives for UW Bothell for almost 3 years. In my capacity of Acting Dean of Diversity and Equity, I supported all areas of DEI work for the campus, including but not limited to: staff and faculty hiring practices; managing bias incident complaints among students, staff, and faculty; providing, contracting, or co-sponsoring with units across campus for workshops, speakers, and professional development on DEI issues related to students, staff, and faculty; stewarding two campus Diversity Action Plans that focused on key issues raised by UW Bothell students, staff, and faculty; working to increase resources and capacity available for DEI work on campus; producing a UW Bothell DEI report/inventory of diversity initiatives across campus units; and, most importantly, establishing UW Bothell’s first ever Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, which helped to focus campus resources in a unit devoted to DEI work.

Additionally, in my role of the UW Bothell Dean of Diversity and Equity, I regularly advised the UW Bothell Chancellor’s executive team on strategic responses to campus crises, and I worked closely with the leadership at the University of Washington system as a member of the UW President Cauce’s Race Equity Initiative Executive Committee. In the process, I built strong relationships with students, faculty, staff, and administrative colleagues across the UW Bothell
campus, the UW system, and with community partners as I became a leader working to move DEI initiatives forward with various stakeholders.

All of this work has been guided by my commitment to supporting students, staff, and faculty at UWB in ways that further institutional capacity for equity and justice while developing a workplace culture of professional support and growth. This has also required directly addressing issues of race, class, ethnicity, gender identity, sexuality, accessibility, immigration status, generational status (1st gen student, faculty, or professional staff), and culture, since the university exists simultaneously as a community of education and employment.

Further, my commitment to DEI and anti-racist leadership is core to how I approach my work. I’m a strong communicator and relationship builder, and I operate out of a politics of educational solidarity. In other words, I recognize how relationships are paramount to effective learning and leadership, and I generally see the work as something we have to do together if we are going to be successful. For me, this means bringing a critical, self-reflective lens to all my relationships, including a recognition of how subjective aspects of my identity as a cis-het, Asian American male, for instance, play out in my interactions and communication with my faculty and staff colleagues. As just one concrete example, I am highly cognizant that education as a field is populated by people that identify as women, and so I know that in the context of a patriarchal society, I need to be very conscious of my interactions, language, and power-sharing in ways that disrupt, rather than reproduce, patriarchy. Similarly, I ask my faculty and staff colleagues to also develop their own critical, self-reflective lens as they engage with each other (and students) in our shared work. Sometimes I do this explicitly through difficult conversations, and other times I do this through implicit modeling in my relations.

As an educator, my commitment has always been to reach all students. As an administrator, my commitment is to strive towards as much equity and justice is possible within relatively limited institutional constraints. As a person in the world, my commitment is to critically work on myself and my understanding of diversity as a constantly growing human being and orient myself towards justice in everything that I have touched.

And that is just it. DEI doesn’t really live in statements or proclamations. It exists in how we live our lives, how we treat each other, how we use our resources, budgets, and policies, who we hire, who decides to stay, who we hold accountable, how we behave, what actions we take, and how we choose to do our work in a messy and fundamentally unjust world.