

Statement of Teaching and Mentoring Students of Diverse Backgrounds

A student knocks on my door, “I have been interested in Korea for a few years now and I really enjoy the class, but I’m feeling overwhelmed and at a loss when I read the textbook. There are so many dates, names, locations, and customs thrown at me that I have no idea what is important.” Later during our conversation the student reveals another problem: “And I dread speaking in front of the class. Is there a chance I do not have to give a presentation?” To me, encouraging diversity in the classroom is learning to improve my class so that there is a way for each student to participate and feel they are making a meaningful contribution. Promoting diversity also stands for adjusting the class in such a manner that it is not about “resolving the issue” of one particular student but about creating inclusive environment from which any student can benefit. Based on my conversation with the above-mentioned student, I posted on the webpage of the Korean civilization class a set of guidelines to reading a history book and discerning the most important information in it. In a matter of weeks not only did that student appear more confident in the class but the quality of discussions in general significantly improved. I also posted an announcement that students may experiment with different formats of presentations, including doing in-person only the introductory and concluding parts while showing the rest through a pre-recorded video of a role-play, interview, etc. Hardly could I imagine then how many ideas for class activities I would obtain by observing innovative forms of presentations by my students. For example, one student prepared a Kahoot! game to check students’ understanding of factual information at the end of a lecture.

In addition to varying my teaching methods, the contents of my lectures can stimulate diversity. My subject itself, historical science, embodies the value of appreciating diversity. Studying a country’s history can be compared to a trip to an unfamiliar world where by discovering differences and similarities, you deepen your understanding of your time, your society, and yourself. I seek to assign reading materials that examine Korean history in a comparative perspective or explore its links to the rest of the region and world history. I give tasks and suggest discussion questions that encourage students to draw parallels between Korea and cultures they are familiar with and to learn empathy toward subjects of analysis. While most historians of modern Korea specialize in either North or South Korea, I am able to introduce students to perspectives of both, due to my research scope encompassing the regimes both in Seoul and in Pyongyang. My educational background and research and teaching experience in and outside of Korea have equipped me with comprehensive knowledge of works by Korean, American, Western European, Russian, Japanese, and Chinese historians of Korea, which gives me a further advantage in showing students a variety of angles to look at the same historical event. For example, in my Korean civilization class, by getting acquainted with conflictual opinions of North and South Korea, China, and Russia on history of Barhae, students learn about the complexity of issues faced by the East Asian region and the US in its East Asian policy-making.

My own experiences of growing up in a migrant family, naturalizing in Korea, a country where I look different from 99% of the population, and building my career in the heavily male-dominated fields of history and political science have positioned me to know firsthand the meaning of being a minority. I have also been fortunate to teach in highly diverse environments. I worked as a

Sample Diversity Statement - Area Studies

lecturer in Seoul National University, Dankook University, Konkuk University, and the National University of Singapore, gave guest lectures and mentored students in Thailand's Chulalongkorn University, and am currently teaching at Indiana University. The composition of students in my classes has ranged from Korean students majoring in Korean history to non-Korean students having no prior academic knowledge of Korea or East Asia.

My background and diverse experiences, however, do not automatically make me good at encouraging diversity. I always seek the meaning of diversity in the society I live and the school I teach. If class differences tend to be the most popular topic on university campuses in South Korea and ethnicity has emerged as a major issue in Singapore, race and gender seem to be on the minds of students in the Midwestern United States and perhaps other regions of the country as well. Just last week, a student in my course turned in a reflection paper on a film about the current situation of Korean "comfort women," where she compared their struggles to those of African-American authors and the Black Lives Matter Movement. Once the concern is defined, I can identify areas for improvement and work on them by participating in faculty training sessions. Sharing my observations with colleagues, reading on the topic, and seeking professional advice also helps me to find alternative approaches. This fall alone, I attended two diversity-related workshops organized by Indiana University's Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning. Through the workshops I have been able to enhance my teaching by incorporating techniques for the creation of brave and safe spaces in the class and selecting reading materials that represent racial and gender diversity both in their contents and authorship.

In addition, through interactions with faculty members of Indiana University and several other American schools, I have realized that one of the biggest challenges confronting many universities in the US is the rapid increase in the number of international students who cannot express themselves well in English and have been raised in educational environment that does not promote speaking up. My colleague shared with me his disappointment when a discussion panel of international students failed to produce a lively debate he intended, because the students prepared and rehearsed their questions and answers. Having been educated in East Asia, I would interpret this situation as reflecting how much effort students invested in getting ready for the class and thereby being a positive indicator. To integrate international students without compromising the highest standards of universities in the US, I believe it is possible—at least in my field—to adjust assignments and evaluation criteria so that international students become gradually initiated in the American educational culture without getting punished for being different. American students can also learn from their foreign peers some positive studying habits and enhance their ability to appreciate diversity. Instead of marking down a debate for having been rehearsed, I would include in the evaluation rubric and let students know in advance that to get the highest grade, they need to answer additional questions from the class and the instructor.

I look forward to cooperating with my colleagues to take up this and other challenges and making an influential contribution towards building an inclusive environment in Emory University through teaching, programming, and research.