

DIVERSITY STATEMENT

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A common response when I tell people that I study math is “Wow! I’m terrible at math”. All too often students, particularly girls/women and students of color, are told subtly or outright that “people like you are not good at math”. We see the ramifications of these statements reflected in our own classrooms. While New Jersey is one of the most diverse states in the nation, it is not lost on me that at the flagship state university my department and classrooms do not come close to representing this diversity.

I try to draw on my own experiences to empathize with students from a variety of backgrounds. I remember how demoralizing it felt as a seventh grader to be told by my teacher that I would never be good at math, the isolation I continue to experience as a woman in math, and the frustrations in having to justify the importance of my religious holidays as they do not occur during standard academic breaks. However, having attended a women’s college I also understand the power of seeing someone who shares your identity as a leader both in and outside the classroom.

I recognize that I will likely never be able to fully understand my student’s experiences and how their various identities interplay with their educational and career aspirations. However, I make it clear to all of my students that they are welcome in my classroom, and I do my best to accommodate all students and work to be aware of what outside factors could be affecting their performance. In my problems and examples I make a point to vary the names and pronouns. This is a small and easy way to create a more inclusive classroom. Additionally, the active group-work components of my class allow me more individualized time with the students where I make a point to always be encouraging and push my students — particularly those who belong to some underrepresented group(s) — to speak up first in their small groups and then, ideally, in front of the whole class. I have seen students who, at the beginning of my course, would not speak unless I specifically approached them volunteer to present a problem at the board by the end of the course. I hope the confidence students develop in my classroom stays with them and emphasizes that they do belong in math classrooms and STEM fields at large.

Outside of the classroom, I have been actively involved in the Rutgers math women’s group (recently formed into an official chapter of the AWM). As a part of this group the graduate students have reached out to the undergraduate math women’s group to provide mentoring, advice, and a friendly ear. Additionally, last year we took part in “Rutgers Day” (an annual event where the broader New Jersey community visits our campuses and learns about our university) by running a tent on women in math. We had games, puzzles, and posters of various female mathematicians. The tent was largely staffed by female graduate students, and I hope exploring math puzzles and seeing multiple young women passionate about math made an impact on how the children (and parents) who stopped by view mathematicians. This fall I will also be serving on a graduate STEM panel for the Rutgers chapter of the Louis Stokes Alliances for Minority Participation. I look forward to meeting with these students and sharing both my experiences and what I know about the necessary steps to pursue graduate studies in STEM.

As I take my next steps as a mathematician I am committed to increasing my involvement in diversity initiatives both within the campus and broader community and learning more about how to better implement my commitment to equity in my own classrooms.