

Commitment(s) to Diversity

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I am determined to labor towards more equitable writing courses, programs, and systems of higher education. I strive to support all students and colleagues, especially those from underrepresented racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. For me, this labor entails interpersonal, classroom, and policy commitments.

INTERPERSONAL COMMITMENTS

Listening and learning across difference are important. Academia has been difficult for me as a first-generation, returning student who has struggled with financial hardship and mental health. At one point, I planned to leave my graduate program because I didn't know how to "do school" and was afraid to show vulnerability and ask for help. I am honest with undergraduate students and graduate peer colleagues about these experiences in order to open space for conversation and de-stigmatize struggle. Supporting graduate students and faculty colleagues, however, cannot *just* about seeing my own experiences in others or developing empathy because of the things we have (or I perceive we have) in common. I believe that one of the most important capacities educators can develop is the ability to listen outside of one's own experience. This means I begin all teaching and professional interactions, whether 1-1 or in a group, by listening, learning, and building trust. I want to see people how they wish to be seen.

I have a responsibility to educate myself. I have taught in three U.S. regions, including the west and west coast, and I always start by learning about the campus community. I find financial aid policies, institutional resources, and community spaces for immigrants and those with DACA. I prepare for conversations about food insecurity, homelessness, and trauma in case a student or colleague wants to approach me. And, as a white teacher who supports the academic success and well-being of students and colleagues of color, I remind myself to listen closely and be especially mindful of the barriers and teaching challenges that I may not experience or may be experiencing differently because of my privilege.

CLASSROOM COMMITMENTS

In the classroom, I build a curriculum that includes materials that offer diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural perspectives. My job as an educator is to make sure that all students are able to use our class to explore and share issues most relevant to their lives and futures, especially students of color, students with disabilities, and others who face discrimination and erasure on campus (see #therealUW and #HomelsWhereWiArent). For example, UW-Madison, my current institution, has a large Hmong population. It is important that Hmong students see themselves and their interests represented in the writing classroom. I also want to be mindful of supporting Hispanic/ Latinx, Indigenous, and multiply marginalized students when race is often flattened into a black / white binary. One strategy I use for building a culturally responsive curriculum is to seek the expertise of student organizations and resource centers that are supporting diversity and inclusion on campus (e.g. LGBT Center, Multicultural Student Center). The themes of my writing courses—often place-based—represent this commitment to affirm student diversity, achievement, and activism in local contexts.

I am invested in the success of every person. Designing courses *with* students means I am responsible for creating the conditions where everyone can participate fully in the classroom activities if they would like to. In order to design for a range of learners and circumstances, I employ principles of universal design for learning (UDL) that allow for flexibility and feedback. This can be important for English language learners and also for returning students, students with disabilities, and others who may benefit from additional time. For example, I have flexible deadlines—"deadline windows"—that lessen anxiety and encourage a range of

students to complete assignments to the best of their ability. I also collect brief feedback from students, as a class and in anonymous writing, so that I can revise course activities as the term progresses. Finally, even with a high teaching load, I meet with individuals as much as possible throughout a term to better understand and support their needs. During the first meeting, we go over their “access statement” so that I know why someone is in the class, what they hope to learn, and what they require of me to be successful. For me, teaching requires building a rapport with each person and drawing upon the unique set of abilities and interests people bring to their work and to our classroom. When even one student is not present or fully participatory, we all lose an important member of our learning community.

I frame assessment as a dialogical framework for learning about difference. Since 2009, I have been researching and employing grading contracts in order to bring collaborative feedback and critical self-reflection to the forefront of the class. In the version of contract grading I use, students do not receive letter grades on individual assignments and, instead, end of course grades are earned through the number of assignments they successfully complete. This allows students to draft shared rubrics for each project that reflect their own values and priorities. These rubrics, placed alongside course outcomes, form a starting point for the verbal and written feedback they receive from me and from one another. In this way, students leverage assessment for goal-setting and self-reflection, a process that mirrors many working environments where people are asked to evaluate their own performance and determine how and why a project is successful. Furthermore, developing a rubric also encourages students to name and problematize dominant cultural standards bound in racism and linguistic discrimination. This means students practice writing as a rhetorical activity, situated and responsive instead of objective and static. In this way, assessment extends from the expertise, experiences, and values each person brings into the classroom.

POLICY COMMITMENTS

Assessing and improving policies that support teachers, students, and staff are necessary. While interpersonal relationships are vital to the success and well-being of students and colleagues, people’s diverse circumstances and needs must also be reflected in institutional policies. Just like in the classroom, I use collaborative assessment as a tool to explore spaces where we (educators) can do better and deliberately incorporate more diverse perspectives. For example, professional organizations can play a crucial role in the success of graduate students, providing them with opportunities to network across programs, apply for scholarships, and find community. However, there tends to be a majority of R1 and resource-rich representation in membership. In order to interrupt this pattern in the Council of Writing Program Administrators graduate organization (WPA-GO), as its chair, I coordinated with faculty mentors, members, and graduate students outside the organization to host a “de-norming” session. As a group, we close read WPA-GO’s founding documents to identify and change normalized policies that might prevent new graduate students from joining (e.g., requirements to attend the annual conference). When managing University of Wisconsin-Madison’s Greater University Tutoring Services (GUTS), I did something similar: the co-director and I worked together alongside our staff to change the language and policies of our recruitment and hiring so that our office reflected the racial and linguistic diversity of the students we were supporting. In these efforts, I’ve seen that policies not only impact the material conditions of teachers and students but also communicate value—who was being imagined when a class/ program was designed? Whose needs are (not) being met? We should collectively and continuously ask these questions so that academic spaces adequately respond to larger social inequalities.

I strive to co-create equitable academic spaces through listening, educating myself, and regularly evaluating classrooms and institutional policies. In future roles, I will continue to use my teaching, research, and service to support and amplify the work of people of color and multiply marginalized and underrepresented groups. This learning and doing are never over.