

I am committed to fostering meaningful human connection that, attuned to individual differences, promotes equity and social justice. As a white male, I have undeniably benefited from material and symbolic power. It is incumbent upon me to continue to better understand the life-worlds of marginalized people and work to improve cultural, social, political, and economic conditions. In the following, I draw on my teaching experience and research agenda to describe my approach to diversity, equity, and inclusion that benefits the academic and professional development of students.

As a university instructor of communication writing and media theory, I have learned that listening to students in the environment that surrounds them precedes the delivery of any lecture. By paying attention to cultural, economic, religious, and familial factors students live with outside the classroom, I can build a safe, dynamic space for learning. In exercising empathy, I remain sensitive to individual student needs while pushing them to do their very best. My diverse teaching experience also includes serving as a gender equity/health educator in West Africa and a radio and photojournalism trainer in Central Africa.

In my classroom, I welcome diverse viewpoints (unless hateful or violent). I promote and model willingness to hear different ideologies and believe the classroom to be a place for productive disagreement. This sometimes requires working with students to finesse points they want to make. In addition, I welcome students who apply their experiences to course materials, especially those by marginalized students. When and where needed, I address counterarguing by non-marginalized students and encourage their openness.

My research focuses on various social groups and strives to tell their story authentically, often in their own words. In building relationships with wildland firefighters as interviewees for my dissertation, I embedded in a predominantly rural, conservative, and working-class culture.

As a result of my efforts, I conducted over forty interviews with wildland firefighters using snowball sampling. This data set notably includes diversity by gender and race/ethnicity, which I hope to expand upon in future research. My research has also focused on LGBTQ youth and families; two papers are currently under review for academic publication. This interview-based research has been profoundly enriching, especially when, through Zoom, I was invited into the homes of teenagers wrestling with sexual identity and transition. Through publication, I hope that my increased appreciation for what LGBTQ people face in daily life increases that of others.

Finally, because I seek to prepare students to cooperate, compete, and thrive academically and professionally, I encourage them to challenge my thinking. Moreover, I work with them to develop their arguments to push back. I do this for two reasons. First, it is important to help students articulate their ideas based on critical thinking rather than emotion. This seems to be increasingly important in a culture prone to swift elimination of ideological opponents. Second, it is important to prepare students to tactfully question authority, such as future supervisors. This means empowering students to better understand expectations in the workplace, improve labor conditions, and integrate manager feedback to become decision-makers themselves.

Through my efforts putting diversity, equity, and inclusion into practice, I hope to inspire greater tolerance and compassion among students so that they can tackle crises and issues affecting the human family.