Diversity Statement

As an educator and a scholar, I am committed to inclusive teaching and research and I firmly believe that we have a responsibility to be representative, both topically and personally, of the society in which we live. As academics, we influence how others perceive our disciplines—through decisions about course content and selection of research topics. The exclusion of particular subjects, whether conscious or unconscious, sends a strong message about who and what we think are important. Likewise our choices of which teaching methods to use sends a message about who is welcome in our classrooms. These decisions determine who sees the discipline as interesting and relevant and who feels welcomed to the discipline. To ensure that all potential scholars successfully negotiate the educational system and become professionals requires that we also consider whom and how we encourage and mentor newcomers.

Curriculum Transformation

I have already begun the process of transforming my courses to make them more inclusive. I want students to feel equally valued and I work to create a learning environment that is respectful and comfortable for all by getting to know each as an individual. I ask students to share with me information on their background, preferred learning style, course expectations, and content knowledge. I also use a variety of teaching techniques, learning activities, and evaluative methods to ensure that one kind of student is not privileged over others. I am currently working with a group of students taking a course on curriculum transformation to critically examine my courses, identify resources, and diversify my curriculum. One area I am exploring is how to involve students in my courses in the diversity critique and place that discussion in the context of disciplinary ethics.

Public Outreach

I carry this inclusive philosophy into my public outreach work making school presentations and serving as a role model and mentor scientist. I work with educators to ensure that my material is relevant for the audience and linked to specific learning outcomes. I make a particular effort to interact with groups that are typically not encouraged to pursue degrees or currently underrepresented in the academic community. I was drawn to the Rural Girls in Science Program because it brought me into contact with girls who rarely encounter strong female role models and are seldom encouraged to become scientists. My most recent workshop at the Expanding Your Horizons conference focused on helping girls manage the challenges of college science and engineering courses.

Institutional Change

I have helped increase awareness of diversity issues at the departmental and institutional level through my instructional consulting. Diversity issues are always paramount in my work with faculty and TAs. Helping instructors create more inclusive courses has encouraged me to reexamine my own teaching and to explore diversity issues at a wider scale. As coordinator of the UW Lead TAs, I instituted a monthly Diversity Working Group. The group’s goal was to share information and resources and to encourage inclusive teaching practices by graduate students across campus.

At the national level, I am lobbying my professional society to establish a committee on diversity that would be responsible for raising awareness of the issues and make suggestions for action. While the society recognizes its lack of diversity, the leadership is unaware of whether and how to proceed. I am also involved with the society’s Task Force on Curriculum and will be working with that group to encourage teachers to attend to diversity issues and move toward inclusive teaching strategies.

While this kind of action is important, our best efforts will be toward changing the culture of the next generation of professors by urging attention to issues of diversity throughout their training. Accordingly, I strive to encourage participants to consider issues of diversity and inclusive teaching throughout all aspects of my work and Preparing Future Faculty activities.