

“What the educator does in teaching is to make it possible for the students to become themselves.”

— Paulo Freire

The academy often concentrates power and excludes diverse voices, especially as it pertains to natural resource management. Women, students of color, and many other marginalized peoples do not advance in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. In addition to being wrong, this systemic failure to include diverse voices hinders our society’s ability to intelligently respond to the Anthropocene. For these reasons, I use my educational and skin color privilege, combined with my life history as a gender queer, blue-collar scholar, to support and encourage diversity in the academy. I do this through service, teaching, and research.

My Understanding of Diversity: I think of diversity in the academy as functions of equity and inclusion. First, equity, which reflects the institutional support needed for a variety of people to coexist on a campus. This is not just equal access, but differentiated support depending on individual and group needs. In ecological terms, this is reflected in the richness and evenness of different groups on a campus. Enrollment numbers often illustrate that female faculty and minority student groups are underrepresented on campuses, for example. However, diversity also incorporates inclusivity, which is the meaningful and authentic participation in academic and social life. While a campus’s Latinx population may reflect percentages of the state’s Latinx population, for example, a student’s experience may be isolating, degrading, or dismissive, resulting in attrition. Professors spend the most time with students out of everyone in the campus ecosystem, giving us a unique opportunity to create equity and inclusion in our classroom.

In Service of Diverse Voices: I have built a record of service to issues of equity and diversity through dedication to students of color; Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, and Asexual/Aromantic (LGBTQA+) students; and women in academia.

I demonstrate dedication to black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) students through institutional and interactive means. For example, to encourage better awareness in the classroom at UCSC, I taught a diversity-focused pedagogical workshop for faculty and graduate students in my department. I used a strategy called Forum Theater, designed to role-play solutions to difficult dialogues. Colleagues were asked to redirect and correct conversations that had stumbled into micro aggressions, taking into account classroom dynamics and issues of race, class, and sexual orientation. Attendees were so pleased with the workshop that our vibrant discussion continued for a half hour beyond the end time. Similarly, in my first year at Manhattan College, I attended the Annual New American Colleges and Universities (NAC&U) conference to learn how to better serve BIPOC. The conference was inspiring, and upon returning to campus we formed an NAC&U advisory committee for our campus, for which I became an “equity ambassador.” This position entails looking at retention data for BIPOC students and targeting high impact interventions, such as research experiences and paid internships. I have learned skills for curricular and program-level goals that combat many of the issues facing higher education writ large.

I am also passionate about LGBTQA+ issues, and have been an advisor for the Lasallian Women and Gender Resource Center (LWGRC) and the Campus Climate Group at Manhattan College. I organized a survey to find out how transgender (trans) students are feeling about our campus and communicated the results to the administration as part of the larger effort to improve our awareness and policies for LGBTQA+ students on campus. The results of the short survey showed that trans students want raised awareness amongst faculty (e.g. if you don't know my pronoun, just ask!), safe spaces (e.g. gender neutral bathrooms), and a way to systematically use the name they want on campus (i.e. erase their dead names in the registration, orientation, and degree-granting process). To address these problems a small task force of faculty is working on a college-wide policy, including getting gender-neutral bathrooms on campus and revising the naming standards. I also organized an annual panel called "Queer in Academia," which covers topics of intersectional experiences at Manhattan College. The panel has been quite successful, offering a safe space in a relatively conservative, Catholic campus. You can find coverage of the first year’s panel [here](#).

Finally, I am passionate about supporting women in academia, particularly in STEM fields, and particularly women of color. Since coming to Manhattan, I organized a panel called Women and the Blockchain, exploring how women can invest and revolutionize blockchain technology. The event was sponsored by Women in Business and Student Engagement, and featured two prominent young women in financial technology positions. I also serve on the Board of the Feminist Geographies Specialty Group of the American Association of Geographers, where I co-wrote the response to the killing of George Floyd and subsequent attacks on protestors. You can find the letter [here](#). Finally, I recently secured funding for a new program called Jasper Geographers. The funding will support five summer interns who will work in public and private geographic information systems (GIS) positions in the New York area.

Teaching a Diverse Student Body: I create a safe and inclusive learning environment by communicating rules of conduct and facilitating activities that dismantle conventional topics.

We discuss the rules in my class at the outset of any debate, discussion, or presentation that involves human beings. The rules are simple, but effective. First, I ask my students to speak up – share ideas, confusion, and questions. Second, I ask them to be respectful – treat peers and the professor with kindness, and do not interrupt. Finally, I ask that students think critically – critique ideas, not people. We use these rules to discuss extremely delicate topics that hit home for many students. For example, in my Adaptable Human course, we discuss how intersectional experiences of nature may influence how students perceive or experience climate change. We delve into issues of cultural norms, income, and race. Some students go camping as children, while others think of Central Park as an escape in nature. I facilitate the conversation to underline these drastic differences in a classroom, critiquing dominant narratives about the U.S. environmental movement. We conclude this exercise with a short paper on students’ construct of nature, in which they reflect on how they perceive nature and how their peers’ experiences differed from their own. By using the rules of speaking up, being respectful, and thinking critically, students are able to communicate how their perception of nature is subconsciously influenced by privilege, or a lack thereof.

Engaging students across categories of difference is a classroom imperative. Not only do I attempt to explicitly create a safe learning environment for all students; but I also use intentionally inclusive content to reach out across categories of race, gender, class, and sexual orientation. For example, I worked as an NSF Teaching Fellow at Watsonville High School, a predominantly first- and second-generation Latino student population. I developed an inquiry-based exercise designed to uncover gender stereotypes in popular media. Students were asked to decode an image that spoke to them, analyzing implicit and explicit messages communicated to the audience. We learned a tremendous amount about gendered assumptions in teenage Latino culture, and I was able to engage students with non-conforming gender identities. Several students gave me individual feedback that, as gender queer individuals, the lesson helped them feel safer in their community.

Inclusivity in My Research My research program is dedicated to improving equity through research design, mentorship, publications, and supporting community partners.

One of my primary research foci is that of how race, gender, and poverty fit into the story of sustainable agriculture. I use my research topic to inspire students to pursue research of their own on issues of climate justice, gender justice, and food security. During fieldwork, I use participatory methods as much as possible to ensure that the people I interview have an equal voice to those with privilege, as well as a voice in my published research. This is particularly illustrated in my most recent manuscript, currently under review at *Geoforum*, titled “As husband and wife: tradition and modernity in the Vietnamese Portable Family.” This article explores the enduring family unit in Southern Vietnam, exposing the heartbreaking effects of long-term migration on gender performativity. I am also committed to increasing the capacity of scholars who are vastly underrepresented in international academia by training graduate students in the process of research design and publishing. I built my previous research crew with undergraduate and graduate students at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, as well as Nong Lam University in Ho Chi Minh City. This research culminated with two co-authored journal articles, one with three of my Vietnamese colleagues. Finally, I use my position in the academy to serve community partners in food

justice. I worked with a team this summer to conduct a literature review for Soul Fire Farm in New York. The goal of the review was to answer the question: “Can small-scale agriculture feed the world?” The farm is a BIPOC-centered educational center working to uproot racism in the food system and they will use the review to answer visitor’s questions.

Personal Dedication to Diversity: In addition to my professional dedication to diversity, I have pursued anti-white supremacist enrichment activities for several years with the aim of learning about my position in systems of oppression. I lead a small group of colleagues in a bi-weekly discussion of anti-racist reading materials. We are currently working through the book *Me and White Supremacy*. I also participated in the weeklong training this summer called Academics for Black Survival and Wellness, which purposefully stopped productivity for non-Black academics for a five-day workshop series examining bias, privilege, and institutional racism in the academy. Finally, I am part of an ongoing specialty sub-group of the American Association of Geographers called the Food Justice Scholar-Activists and Activist-Scholars (FJSAAS), which focuses on breaking down elitist assumptions about knowledge creation in food systems work.

In sum, I create a vibrant and supportive environment for the diverse group of people I reach through teaching, research, and service. I do this through learning about issues in equity and inclusion, service to diversity, and inclusive practices in my teaching and research.