Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Statement
William O'Brochta

"I didn't think I could just call the mayor." Inequity and exclusion are built into the university experience. Instructors are responsible for not only providing an inclusive classroom climate, but for leading efforts toward equity and inclusion. This nursing student in my *National Government in the U.S.* course could (and did) tell me all about identifying viruses in petri dishes, but she did not feel that it was appropriate for her to contact a local elected official to voice her concern about a problem in her neighborhood. More than just knowledge is required. I promote equity and inclusion in three stages: tailoring support to individual students, building a collective engaged citizen identity, and expanding students' perspectives through community engaged partnerships and projects.

Students enter my classroom with a wide range of backgrounds and experiences. My introductory courses are filled with future nurses earning Associate's Degrees, education majors, engineering majors, and more. In upper-level courses, I teach many transfer students and students planning to graduate early. Most of my students are the first in their family to attend college and work at least part-time. My first step is to assess students' backgrounds and to ask them directly how I can best support them. I do this by assigning pre-course surveys and then using individual and small group activities to get to know students throughout the term. I call this "running around" because that's what it looks like, but it gives me an opportunity to greet and check in with students in even the largest introductory courses. In doing so, I set a tone — also outlined in the classroom community contract that students write on the first day of class — that encourages students to build and maintain connections with me. Students may need additional support structures that can help address inequalities and better integrate them into the course and to college in general. These structures should be collaborative and personal. When I mentor students, we make a plan and implement it together. For example, a student struggling with being concise in his writing worked out a plan to focus on rewriting one paragraph of his work each week and then coming by my student office hours to discuss it. This discussion soon led to learning more about the student and assisting him with job applications for which clear and concise writing was a requirement. My initial accessibility and openness toward getting to know students translates into an improved ability to support student learning throughout their college career.

When students are equitably supported, the classroom is more conducive to learning. Adding in inclusive teaching strategies and representing diverse scholarly voices also helps. Yet, I think about equity and inclusion in the classroom as promoting a deeper, mutual understanding between students that transcends a single course. One of my course goals is to encourage students to develop a collective identity as an engaged citizen. We know from research — including my own — that establishing a common identity among a diverse set of individuals promotes diverse friendships and increased tolerance. Therefore, I structure my courses to facilitate collective identity formation in a way that incorporates diverse perspectives. Students are challenged through social annotation, reflective blogging, and research activities to investigate topics in political science that they are deeply and personally invested in — these topics often revolve around life experiences, including experiences with diversity and inclusion. After working individually, I ask students to develop and apply each others' ideas collaboratively. For example, students in my *Comparative Foreign Governments*

course must take their individual research interests and integrate them as members of UN country delegations. Integrating both individual and collaborative work in a supportive environment creates common bonds among students and helps to build collective identity.

My recent leadership toward equity and inclusion has involved local community activities and projects. Community engagement both asks students to work alongside people with diverse backgrounds and life experiences and challenges them to better understand their own values, beliefs, and priorities. However, community engaged projects can perpetuate inequality if students gain knowledge from community partners without contributing meaningfully to improve their community. I tackle this potential power imbalance head on. I take care in my large *National Government in the U.S.* classes to help students understand how they can contribute to addressing community problems through their group community engaged project without overwhelming the resources of the relatively small number of community organizations in our area. My community partnership in *Representation, Identity, and Dissent* was built from several years of experience volunteering with a local youth jobs program, working with staff to identify ways in which my class could contribute to their program and setting up activities that promoted mutual exchange and benefit. Including the community in my courses also pushes students to become more involved in the community and introduces them to a number of relevant local community organizations.

I cultivate diversity, equity, and inclusion using evidence-based practices. First, I have several years of experience mentoring students from different backgrounds within academia and more than a decade of experience mentoring youth in community organizations. I have been selected to lead mentoring efforts for both undergraduate and graduate students at the department and university level. Second, my research investigates how diversity impacts perceptions of, attitudes about, and collaboration with others. Using interviews, surveys, and experiments, I show that relationships are important for determining tolerance. This is good news: it means that interventions that encourage students to collaborate with one another are likely to succeed in promoting a collective identity. Additionally, pre- and post-test surveys implemented in my *Introduction to Comparative Politics* course show that students' identification as social scientists increased, a result consistent with establishing an identity as an engaged citizen. Third, my community engaged activities and projects significantly increase student understanding of different perspectives and their ability to work with people from different backgrounds. Qualitative reflections and pre- and post-test surveys in my *Representation, Identity, and Community* course demonstrate that students' attitudes toward inclusion and diversity-related issues meaningfully increased.

My work supporting students, building collective identity, and establishing community engaged partnerships is ongoing as a process of constant evolution and improvement. Beyond opportunities for students to get involved with my own research on identity-based representational inequality, I plan to continue and to strengthen my collaborations with students by creating a mentoring group where students can explore representation and identity-based inequality. I envision that students will be involved in various ways, from conducting independent and collaborative research to exploring connections to ongoing public policy issues. I also want to continue to strengthen my work on community engaged pedagogy as a way to increase equity and inclusion. That nursing student who felt that her voice did not matter, ended the term interviewing a campus Dean about policy transparency. Her voice was heard, and I work to cultivate that voice in my classroom, on campus, and in the local community.