



Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Statement

Sky Kunkel

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) are vital in academia because they promote intellectual and cultural enrichment, advance social justice, and prepare students to be active and influential members of a complex and interconnected world. By fostering an environment that is welcoming and supportive of diverse perspectives and identities, academic institutions can create an inclusive, equitable, and enriching community for everyone. Given the history of systematic exclusion of marginalized communities, academics must make intentional efforts to rectify these wrongdoings. I contribute to and improve DEI through my research agenda, my teaching and mentoring, and through my formal and informal service to my department, university, and political science as a discipline.

My experiences as a transgender, queer, first-generation college student who grew up in poverty drive my commitment to DEI. These experiences inspire me to uplift underrepresented voices through co-authorship and mentoring, and to create safe, inclusive spaces in academia. For example, at Purdue University's LGBTQ Center, I volunteered as a tutor, offering academic support and mentorship to LGBTQ+ undergraduates. This work reinforced my belief in the importance of community and the need for accessible resources for marginalized students.

My commitment and advocacy for DEI extend to the creation and management of systems designed to institutionalize support to marginalized and underrepresented communities. I am the co-founder and inaugural president of the first university-wide organization for queer graduate students in Indiana, the Purdue Queer Graduate Student Association (QGSA). In creating this organization, we organized access to funds that could improve the lives of LGBTQ+ graduate students at Purdue University and have worked to create a more inclusive environment for all. In my time as the president of QGSA, my co-founder and I focused on raising funds from external donors interested in promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion. With that money and institutional support, we began setting up systems for graduate student grants for travel and research. Through this experience, I learned the importance of institutional support and the need for sustainable funding models in creating lasting change for underrepresented communities.

I also bring my lived experiences into my research agenda and use that agenda to bring issues to the forefront of political science. In my research with a graduate student, we problematize the common and uncritical use of the phrase "sub-Saharan Africa" in political science research due to the racist origins of the term. This paper is an important contribution to the field of political science and to broader efforts to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in academia. Our article sheds light on how scholars perpetuate stereotypes and misunderstandings about a complex and diverse continent by examining how top political science journals often use "sub-Saharan Africa" as a catch-all term to generalize their findings. This paper originates from my own use of the phrase in prior research; after my coauthor contextualized the arbitrary nature of the name, we began learning about its origins in European conceptions of race. My job market paper, discussed in more detail in the

research statement of this application, also explores the effect of diversity in peacekeeping missions; women peacekeepers make strong contributions to locals' trust in peacekeepers, effectively improving peacekeepers' ability to stop or reduce violence. Through my research, I encourage and foster a deeper understanding of the complexities faced by marginalized groups and promote DEI efforts in political science and beyond.

Together with a graduate student at the University of Arizona, I organized an informal reception for the 2023 Peace Science Society International conference that provided queer early-career scholars with a network and the context to learn from experienced academics. The reception for Peace Science provided numerous benefits for early-career scholars in academia who identify as LGBTQ+, as well as allies of the community. By bringing together queer scholars and others, the reception fostered a sense of belonging and connection, provide mentorship and guidance tailored to their specific needs, and raise awareness of issues and challenges facing queer scholars in academia. This can ultimately lead to a more inclusive and supportive academic environment for queer scholars. In addition, the reception helped to fill gaps in knowledge or experience unique to queer scholars and can provide opportunities to learn from experienced academics who share identities. By providing a safe and supportive space for networking and learning, the reception was key for the success of queer early-career scholars in academia, and it contributed to a more diverse and equitable academic community.

As an advocate for diversity, equity, and inclusion in academia, I recognize the importance of reaching out to underrepresented and marginalized communities, especially in the context of recruiting. For example, on a recently organized panel submission to ISA 2024, I intentionally reached out to non-male potential contributors first, leading to a panel balance of seven women and non-binary participants and five men participants. It is critical to actively seek out and engage individuals from diverse backgrounds and identities, as this increases the representation of underrepresented groups in academic spaces and fosters a more inclusive and welcoming environment for all. By intentionally recruiting from underrepresented communities, we can improve diversity in our academic departments and programs, ultimately strengthening our research and educational efforts. In my service on a faculty search committee for Purdue's Political Science Department, we worked as a committee to seek out and request applications from communities marginalized by academia in both historic and contemporary times; for example, we would seek out communities where underrepresented scholars in that subfield gathered to solicit applications. In academia, we can and need to work toward promoting equity by providing support and resources to ensure that underrepresented students, staff, and faculty have equal opportunities for success. Ultimately, my goal is to build a diverse, equitable, and inclusive academic community that fosters excellence in scholarship, teaching, and service.

As an educator, I am committed to promoting DEI in the classroom. One way to demonstrate this commitment is by taking an inclusive approach to designing and delivering course materials. For example, in my asynchronous online course, I provide my lectures in multiple formats, such as video or audio, to accommodate a range of learning styles and needs. I also use my experience as a student with a learning disability to inform my instruction.

For example, I write a script for every recorded lecture I give to assist students with hearing disabilities. By creating a classroom environment that is accessible and welcoming to all students, I strive to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to engage fully with the course material and succeed academically. My commitment to DEI in the classroom is an essential part of my teaching philosophy and I look forward to continuing to promote these values in all of my courses.