

STATEMENT ON DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

Simon Hoellerbauer

Our discipline needs to and can do more to address issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion within political science and academia more broadly. We can make academia a more welcoming environment for everyone, but it will require introspection and effort. The job market itself provides a glimpse into the problem. It is not controversial to say that for most young scholars being on the job market is an unpleasant experience. I recall attending a recent department event aimed at preparing graduate students for the job market where senior faculty, junior faculty, and new graduates all espoused a “grin-and-bear-it” mentality with regards both to the difficulties those of us seeking jobs face and to the inherent miserableness of the pre-tenure job experience. There seemed to be little desire to change fundamental dynamics of the job market and how political science departments operate, although given that UNC-Chapel Hill is a well-known R1 institution, it could spearhead such changes. Yet, these difficulties are magnified for BIPOC, LGBTIQ+ individuals, other minorities, and people from other marginalized backgrounds, if they are even able to fight their way through to the job market stage. For examples, these scholars may not feel comfortable taking jobs in certain locations in the US or the rest of the world. The vaunted “work/life balance” is also not as easy for them to attain given the extra demands often placed on them and the obstacles they regularly face. We have to recognize that there are inequities within political science that prevent so many students and scholars from finding their place in the discipline. This begins even before the undergraduate level and extends all the way to post-graduate careers. Challenges at all points of the academic pipeline make it more difficult for students from marginalized backgrounds to achieve their potentials, be it in academia or any other sector that awaits them after graduating.

An important first step to help students overcome the obstacles put in their way is to make sure that all students feel included. I recognize the privilege afforded to me by my gender expression and my white skin, but as an immigrant to and permanent resident in the United States who came over at a relatively young age, I know how feeling like an outsider can impact one’s education experience. To avoid making students feel isolated and othered, I aim to create an atmosphere of inclusion in the classroom. This starts with devising class policies, choosing readings and class content, and crafting assignments.

When I teach, I make it clear to my students that I will be flexible, and that I will work to accommodate everyone’s needs. I emphasize my flexibility in the syllabus – silent flexibility is only useful for those accustomed to asking for it, which many people from marginalized backgrounds are not. In my Introduction to Comparative Politics class, I use a diverse array of case studies to illustrate theories of political development, including Armenia, Malawi, and Taiwan. I also spend a class discussing the political and economic legacies of colonialism, asking students to reflect on how lasting the effects of colonialism have been on the political developments of colonized countries and peoples. A core part of the class involves discussing definitions of democracy, during which I ask students to very seriously consider questions of equity as well as equality. During this unit, I assign an activity that asks students to examine whether we can consider the United States of America a democracy or whether it falls short. When I teach Data in Politics I: An Introduction, I spend a considerable amount of time in class discussing how our own biases can affect our results and analyses. I make

clear that flawed statistical analyses have been used to oppress many people and strive to teach students to recognize such statistical fraud. A direct and crucial benefit of a diverse syllabus is that it also exposes students from more typical backgrounds to more viewpoints – teaching others how to respect and appreciate diversity is a goal that goes hand in hand with helping make sure students from diverse backgrounds feel represented in the classroom.

Another core part of making academia more diverse is thinking about how we mentor students and how we can help connect students from different backgrounds with the resources available to them. During my time as an instructor of record, I have had the privilege of mentoring several students from diverse backgrounds. I helped an international student from Honduras develop a research proposal and connected them with a professor at UNC to continue their research. I also had the pleasure of helping another student, a refugee from China, develop the skills they will need to achieve their goals of being a refugee officer. I enjoy meeting with my students outside of class, to help them take steps toward their own future. Creating spaces for underrepresented students to thrive is a critical part of building a stronger future for the field of political science. As we build this into our pedagogical approaches, we create room for a better future on a national and global scale.

We do not only interact with our students; during the course of our work we inevitably interact with fellow faculty members, janitorial staff, other co-workers, graduate students, administrative assistants, and survey enumerators, among the many others who make our jobs possible. It is just as important to keep others' identities in mind in the professional setting and to acknowledge the power imbalances inherent in academia. We must recognize that while we may be knowledgeable in our fields, we do not know everything, and that the diverse perspectives of our co-workers can improve our work. When helping to organize the rollout of a large survey for a USAID project in Malawi in 2018, prioritizing the input from the Malawian survey field leaders improved the process considerably.

While teaching, doing research, interacting with others, and living my life, I always try to keep two things in mind. First, I am not at the center of the efforts I make to diversify and make more inclusive the educational experience and working environment of others. We cannot expect marginalized students and peers to educate us at their own expense. Educating myself, changing my policies, and caring for others are my responsibility, for the benefit of everyone. Therefore, I strive to adjust my efforts to meet the needs of those around me. I recognize that this is an ongoing process, and I seek out opportunities to learn more. In 2019, I completed the UNC LGBT Center Safe Zone training in order to become a better ally and advocate, and I continue to look to the literature on how to best serve underrepresented and marginalized students. Second, there are many identity markers that are not obvious or visible. I aim to be inclusive and celebrate the true diversity of the human experience, regardless of who is around me. We can never truly know what people are going through, and we owe all people respect regardless of what they choose to reveal about their identities.

Diversity does not stop in the ivory tower. The substantive strand of my research investigates how donor dynamics in development affect civil society in developing countries, engaging with the literature that takes a critical look at development efforts made by the West. I find that people are more likely to engage with organizations that match them demographically and geographically. However, many development-focused civil society organizations funded by Western governments are forced to adjust to donor pressures in ways that make them less likely to match the populations they hope to engage. I hope to use

my work to help identify pathways toward removing intercountry power imbalances and to empower local populations in more effective ways. Civil society organizations can hold governments accountable and facilitate collective action, but only if organizations can actually connect to people.

Yet, while acknowledging the importance of diversity — and how diverse backgrounds affect experiences within all levels of academia — is key, we must also recognize that this does not go far enough. Fostering inclusive environments in the classroom, in research, and in the broader university environment is crucial, but we have to recognize that more fundamental changes are also necessary. I believe that it is incumbent upon the scholars and teachers of my generation to continue to change how political science and broader academia operate, in particular when it comes to diversity. Individual solutions should be part of our efforts, but we need structural responses to structural problems. Although structural changes are also needed before graduate school even begins, the American Political Science Association can help improve the experience of graduate students. For example, APSA can develop a best practices protocol for advisors that incorporates topics such as mental health and diversity, and then offer certificates for advisors that agree to abide by them. This would offer an accountability mechanism and could even be incorporated into a centralized grievance mechanism. To return to the job market experience I mentioned at the beginning of this statement, there are several changes that APSA could spearhead that would improve the experience for everyone. Similar to a certification for advisors, APSA could push for standardizing the job market process, offering a certification for universities and departments that agree to abide by best standards. Currently, the dizzying array of application types and requested materials increases the workloads of already overloaded scholars on the job market. The best practices can include allowing for as much flexibility as possible in the interview process and paying for travel and visiting expenses up front instead of through reimbursements. APSA can also facilitate virtual APSA annual meeting interviews for scholars who cannot afford to come to the annual meeting. At the end, what is most important is that those of us who are more privileged listen to the marginalized *and* then do the work so that the burden of change does not fall on them.

The murder of George Floyd, the political reaction to it, the 2020 election, and violence against Asian Americans during the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrate how far society still has to go before genuine equity is reached. During my time at UNC-Chapel Hill, the university has had to reckon with its own failings, first with regards to Silent Sam, then with regards to allegations of racism within the Political Science Department itself, and then Nikole Hannah-Jones rejecting UNC's offer of tenure, among many things. In the summer of 2020, I joined with other graduate students to form the Removing Inequities in Political Science (RIPS) Working Group at UNC, an evolution of the Anti-Racist Working Group that organized in support of removing Silent Sam in 2018. Our goal is to identify and work to dismantle obstacles that have kept marginalized communities out of political science. Although the inherently unbalanced power dynamic between graduate students and faculty has made our work difficult, we successfully pushed to make comprehensive exam evaluation fairer and more uniform across the subfields and to make degree progression more uniform and less dependent on informal, subfield-specific norms. As I move on to being a junior faculty member, I will continue to devote myself to making the field of political science more accepting and ensuring that marginalized people are not squeezed out of the discipline.