Statement of Diversity

During my senior year in high school, I got a math test that I will hardly forget. Not because of how hard it was but the comments the teacher gave me after I finished it. The test was about the general equation of the circumference. Some of us finished the test reasonably fast. However, my other fellow students struggled with it for a while. We submitted the test to the teacher once we finished it, he checked our answers immediately. He took each one of us individually outside of the classroom and shared the same words: "You completing the test faster was not amusing to me; I expected it. I apologize for not moving forward with the topics as it should be. If I try, those who are still struggling with this test will fail even worse." Such words made me feel two different emotions at once: empathy for my fellow students and friends who were struggling with the topics, and frustration since I wanted to learn more content and prepare myself well for the upcoming university courses.

It has been more than fifteen years since then, and those words have become more relevant as I have had instructor roles. I have seen the students that learn the topics faster than others and excel during the evaluations. And I have seen the students who struggle with the content but try harder to obtain decent grades. As an instructor, I want all my students to engage and succeed in the course. Furthermore, I intend to make each course a memorable experience where students do not feel there was unnecessary suffering or a waste of time.

To achieve such a goal, I put effort into knowing about the background of my students. It helps a lot when students interact with questions or comments during the lectures. However, some students may be reserved or shy to participate in such type of public interaction. So, I encourage everyone to attend my office hours or join me in casual hallway conversations if I am available. In both situations, I start by asking their names and their current thoughts about the course so far. Many students are open and frank with their comments in such less crowded scenarios. Their feedback helps me to redesign the approach to the content, the example exercises, and the evaluation material.

My experiences as a Teaching Assistant were more significant due to the population diversity in the American classroom. The initial conversations with students during office hours allowed me to learn more about the challenges based on their socio-cultural and ethnic backgrounds. I did not want to be invasive. Instead, I paid attention to their mannerisms as I addressed the questions. When the situation seemed appropriate, I politely asked about them. To my surprise, they welcomed my interest and gladly answered the questions. Many students asked back about my cultural background, and I complied. What started as a simple question became insightful conversations about culture and customs. From such discussions, I learned about being a student in different cultural contexts, which helped me to know the students better and provide adequate assistance.

As I know my students and their performance during the course, I can start making decisions on strategies to help those in need and provide challenging content for those
excelling. Simple methodologies such as having evaluation material with optional questions (which vary in difficulty) worked fine. Also, I encourage students to explore advanced topics related to the course. I offer additional office hours on-demand to discuss such content, so the usual office hours are for discussing the regular material. It is always glad to see some students go beyond expectations. Finally, for certain courses where I am in charge, I let students formulate their final projects. While reviewing their proposals, I adjust the scope and goals as I see fit. Overall, I noticed the complexity of the projects tends to align with the proficiency of the students.

Thinking back about that circumference test from fifteen years ago, I could picture myself in the same situation as both student and instructor. Such a situation motivates me to offer an inclusive environment where my students could either seek further assistance or being challenged with advanced content appropriately. My goal is to engage students with their learning process accordingly to their proficiency and make the course a positive, memorable experience.