

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, many of my fellow students struggled with it for a while. As we submitted the test, the instructor graded them and gave us feedback immediately. I remember he took each one of us who finished the test earlier outside of the classroom and told us the same words: "You finishing the test this fast did not amuse me; I expected it. I apologize for not moving forward with the topics as it should be. If I do that, 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 struggling with such math topics and frustration since I wanted to learn more content and prepare myself well for the upcoming university courses.

It has been around seventeen years since then, and those words have become more relevant to me as I have been an instructor. I have seen the students that learn the topics faster than others and excel during the evaluations. Also, 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 value the knowledge they acquired instead of remorse for any unnecessary suffering.

To achieve such goals, I put effort into knowing about the background of my students. It helps me a lot when they interact with questions or comments during the lectures. As expected, some students may be reserved, shy, or apathetic to participate during lessons. So, I encourage everyone to attend my office hours or join me in casual hallway conversations if I am available. When that happens, I ask about their performance and current thoughts about the course so far. I noticed that many students are less intimidated and open with their comments in less crowded scenarios. They also welcome an instructor who listens to them and considers their feedback. Their comments help me elaborate on the lecture content, redesign the example exercises, and refocus the evaluation material.

My experiences as a Teaching Assistant and Visiting Assistant Professor have been more significant to me due to the diversity in the American classroom. During office hours, the conversations with students allowed me to learn more about their challenges based on their socio-cultural and ethnic backgrounds. My strategy is to pay attention to their words and mannerisms as I address their questions. When the situation is appropriate, I politely ask about the culture and academic experiences

from their region of origin. To my surprise, students welcome my interest and gladly answer the questions. Many students continue the discussion by asking about my cultural background too, and I comply. What started with a simple question out of curiosity became insightful conversations about culture, customs, and academic differences across countries. From such discussions, I learned about being a student in different cultural contexts, which helped me know my students better and provide them adequate assistance.

As I know my students and their performance during the course, I can decide 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. I am always glad to see some students go beyond expectations. Finally, for specific courses where I am in charge, I let students formulate their final projects, which helps me check their proficiency in the topics and ambitions. While reviewing their proposals, I adjust their scope and goals as I see fit. Overall, I noticed the complexity of the proposed projects tends to align with the students' proficiency.

Thinking again about that circumference test from seventeen 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 seek further assistance or be challenged with advanced content appropriately. My goal is to engage students with their learning process according to their proficiency and make it a positive, memorable experience.