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Diversity Statement

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Embracing diversity as a requisite to living a happy, ethical, and successful life was nurtured by my family history, where poverty, immigration, and victimization were overcome with partnership, determination, and a commitment to inclusivity. My patrilineal grandparents were Holocaust survivors, and my father was born in a displaced-persons camp. On my mother's side, my grandparents escaped Poland before World War II and raised my mother while heavily involved in Washington D.C.'s civil rights movement. In this vein, stories of suffering were punctuated with victories. Here are just two examples; my father played music to pay his way through college. He was our family's first college graduate and the only Caucasian musician in the band. My grandfather owned a haberdashery in a then "Black" neighborhood. As covered by the Washington Post¹, his store was well loved in the community and the only "White-owned" store not burned in the riots of 1968. Thus, my sense of diversity is not simply informed by the legacy of being part of a marginalized community but also by the freedom and beauty that diversity brings.

While I am standing on the shoulders of these "diversity" giants, I have made my own strides to cultivate this ethos. In college, I founded a non-profit organization designed to increase access to educational opportunities for low-income marginalized groups. Following in my father's footsteps, I spent time as a musician and had a similar cultural experience. Professionally, as an economist, I have worked in two extremely diverse environments. I spent 4 years in a minority-owned econometric consulting group, Summit Consulting, which boasts minority participation well above industry standards. (During my time there, 55% of the workplace were women and 43% were members of minority groups.) At Summit, I chaired their Philanthropy Program which was designed to engage Summit's employees with communities traditionally unrepresented in statistical fields. I organized reading groups in one of Washington D.C.'s poorest elementary schools, mentorship programs, tax volunteers, and data events. Second, I currently work at the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA), where I have taken diversity training to understand bias, and I am an active member on the "change committee", where one responsibility is to make the BEA more inclusive.

With regards to diversity in an academic environment, George Mason University (GMU) has one of the most diverse student populations in the United States. As a graduate lecturer, while pursuing my PhD, I have had the opportunity to interact with students from a multitude of religious, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds as well as members of the LGBTQ community. Economics intersects with issues of diversity, and I offer my students the opportunity to share their experiences. In my Principles of Microeconomics course for example, we cover topics like the opportunity costs of racism, the incentives to be inclusive, the economic experiences of immigrants, the history of women in the field, economic mobility, empowering low-income groups, and the effect that empowerment has on demand.

There are several approaches that I use in the classroom to foster discussion, particularly among those students with different backgrounds and perspectives. I start by making myself vulnerable and sharing my family's background and my personal experience on a topic. Second, I set ground rules about respecting differing points of view. Then, I create time to talk about topics and support student contributions. The goal of these discussions is to create an environment where people from all backgrounds feel comfortable sharing their opinions in the context of critical thinking and learning the material. In one instance, after teaching about the impact that voluntary exchange has on overall wealth, I opened up the floor to talk about experiences where exchange and wealth were limited. One student described his parents' move to the U.S. for economic opportunity, which was followed by another student's description of the lack of opportunity due to racism.

I am also committed to diversity in my research. For example, my research draws on insights from a variety of intellectual disciplines, including history and political science. While I believe that economics offers insights on many important questions, I embrace the contributions of other social sciences and humanities – both in terms of the analytical frameworks these disciplines use as well as the research methodologies they employ. Currently, I am working on a paper that reconciles a gap between an economic data driven model and the qualitative research documented by historians.

Diversity and inclusion are important in my life, my teaching, and my research. All three have taught me the value of different perspectives. Ultimately, I believe that a multi-perspective approach to each discipline is an essential part of growth. Accordingly, my teaching and research style reflect my commitment to an interdisciplinary and pluralistic approach to learning.

¹ https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/pink-polyester-zoot-suits-disappear-from-gentrifyingdc/2012/09/16/560cd5ae-fdb5-11e1-b153-218509a954e1_story.html

