

## Diversity Statement Cameron Ruether, Ph.D.

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My approach to the ongoing work of supporting diversity in the university environment itself, as well as diverse students themselves, is to practice policies of open flexibility and generous availability. These are phrases which also appear in my teaching statement, where I elaborate that I deeply believe that anyone is capable of succeeding in mathematics if given sufficient time and resources, and so my policy of generous availability provides additional instruction time to those who desire it. However, I feel my policy of open flexibility is most relevant to considering the needs of under represented and marginalized students in particular. Additionally, I also believe in constant allyship and actively supporting marginalized communities outside of the university environment.

### **Open Flexibility.**

I am only an expert in mathematics, but each of my students is an expert in their lived experiences, and so I choose to learn from them how I can improve their experience inside the classroom. To practice open flexibility, I encourage my students to inform me when they feel there are changes I can implement which would help them succeed in their studies or deal with hardships they may be facing.

I am also cognizant of the fact that, even when invited to speak, minorities in STEM often have their experiences disregarded. In [6], Dr. Ayush Gupta explains how non-marginalized members of the STEM community can be led astray by a fixation on remaining data driven, logical, and objective when dealing with issues of systemic injustice. Since any conclusion deemed sufficiently supported by data will be necessarily be supported by data collected from a currently unequal system, “this obsession with statistical reproducible knowledge as knowledge (and insisting on the objectivity of that) serves to maintain our classrooms and our pedagogies as White, cis, hetero, patriarchal” [6]. Dr. Chanda Prescod-Weinstein also discusses this phenomenon, in particular focusing on how it impacts Black women. Prescod-Weinstein defines the term “white empiricism - where speculative white, male testimony is more highly valued than reality-based testimony from Black women” [7]. Quoting Jarita Holbrook, Prescod-Weinstein also writes, “Black students have their capacity for objectivity questioned simply because their standpoint on racism is different from that of white students and scientists who don’t have to experience its consequences” [7]. This unfortunate pattern which arises from STEM’s belief that it operates objectively on all matters is something that I actively work to avoid. I am always careful to accurately listen to the needs of every individual student in “ $N = 1$  case studies,” to borrow a term from Gupta [6].

Simultaneously, I acknowledge that some students may not have a desire to discuss barriers they are facing. In [1], while discussing research on microaggressions, Dr. Fatima Abdurrahman recalls a talk by Dr. Stephanie Masta and paraphrases her as saying “some of these researchers perpetuate a certain kind of harm by asking these students, who are already marginalized, to repeatedly recount for strangers these sometimes deeply traumatic stories about how they’ve been excluded.” Therefore, my practice of open flexibility is also one of availability. I inform students that I am available if they wish to discuss something non-mathematical, and I trust them to decide if and when they would like to use that offer.

### **Constant Allyship.**

The video essay *How NOT to be an Ally (BMB #14)* [4] by YouTuber F.D Signifier examines three archetypes of ally which are commonly portrayed in North American media. The second type, which

he dubs “The Partner,” he characterizes by explaining that “Partners usually come together with the marginalized group ... with a common goal, and thus, for the most part, on even ground” [4]. I feel this is an accurate description of the situation that I and my students experience in the classroom. Together, we work on the common goal of teaching/learning the course material, and do so on even ground. However, F.D Signifier goes on to criticize The Partner archetype. He explains that a common faltering of The Partner is the tendency to abandon the marginalized group, either once the task is complete, or when The Partner uses their privilege to avoid an issue which is unavoidable for their marginalized companions. I believe that in the context of a professor-student relationship, it is easy to falter in this way if one only worries about diversity on campus. Marginalized students’ experiences facing discrimination off campus undoubtedly affect their academic performance, and therefore I believe it is necessary to practice allyship off campus as well. I work to practice this whenever possible, and in particular I did so when a hateful occupation occurred near my university.

In January 2022, a protest against vaccine mandates calling itself the *Freedom Convoy* established a blockade of parked semi-trucks in front of the Canadian Parliament in Ottawa, Ontario [8]. The protest quickly transitioned to an occupation when the participants remained for multiple weeks, disrupting the downtown core and harassing residents with noise [5]. While claiming to only be a protest against vaccine mandates, in reality the Convoy supported conspiracy theories and harboured extreme and hateful views [2]. Due to the harassment of visible minorities by members of the Convoy, many marginalized students at the University of Ottawa felt unsafe travelling to campus if their commute passed too close to the Convoy. At the time, I was living in Ottawa and working as a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Ottawa. Since I was privileged to not feel physically threatened by the Convoy, I participated in the counter-protest which occurred against the Convoy on February 5 [3]. This type of social action, against injustices which affect students on and off campus, is what I mean by constant allyship. I will continue practising constant allyship, as I believe that it is critically important to combating the underlying systemic issues which cause a policy of open flexibility to be required in a classroom.

#### REFERENCES

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