

DIVERSITY STATEMENT

I believe we have a moral obligation to think deeply about the ways in which scientific research, education, and the academy have and continue to perpetuate harm against marginalised groups; as a member of several marginalised groups, I know these harms first hand. And I believe—as bell hooks teaches us—that liberation resides in education. I believe this lesson extends into academic research, since it is a form of learning about the world. As such, I am committed to creating and promoting spaces that cultivate true learning and that challenge us beyond our previously held ideas: in classrooms, while being mentored, when conducting research. I want each person's voice to be and feel valued.

A key to achieving this goal is my belief that learning is not hierarchical: I can learn from others just as they can learn from me. Non-hierarchical learning is an essential component to creating equitable spaces and to developing fruitful mentorships that go beyond that of student – advisor. I have worked with undergraduate students as a teaching assistant, as well as one-on-one in the lab where they helped with my research or carried out their own projects. Using a “teach to learn” approach—an approach that teaches students to be learners rather than teaching them the answer—and seeing how much it empowers students has shaped the view of my role as an instructor. I then reinforce these lessons by actively and frequently highlighting to my students the things I am learning from them.

While at Duke, I founded and for four years chaired the Biology Department Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Anti-Racism (IDEA) Graduate Committee. We spent a lot of time understanding the experiences of students and the community more broadly. We thought carefully about the expressions that bias—racism, classism, ableism, sexism, to name a few—takes: who is getting funding? whose work is being promoted? whose opinion is valued? who is being believed? We used what we learned to create educational materials, organise workshops and symposia, and push leadership to implement institutional changes. Our work can be found [here](#).

In my role as chair, I not only worked with individuals but with the group as a whole and as a collective. I facilitated conversations to navigate conflict, in addition to helping them attain their visions for work they wanted to see. I have found that having us engage in questioning allows us not only to gain greater understanding but also to arrive at a clearer consensus. Because I did not dictate the direction of the committee, all participants felt they had contributed and had a stake in our work. I have aimed also to never shut down an idea, but instead workshop it—even in times when it seems like the original idea is impossible. By taking it seriously and discussing it, we can get at its root driver and carry out the vision even when logistical hurdles don't allow for the original conception. While these discussions are not always directly related to science or research, these skills carry over to engaging with and leading scientific teams, collaborations, and classrooms.

These conversations have led me to extensive independent study of structural discrimination. This work has shaped the way I engage in teaching, mentorship, research, and outreach. The impact of these changes is hard to measure, but may be reflected in the Biology Teaching Assistant Award and the Duke Graduate School Dean's Award for Excellence in Mentoring.

Further, I have begun establishing a rapport with a few Traditional Owners in Australia where my study species occur. I believe it is essential that we move forward with research that is respectful of the wishes of Indigenous and local communities, even if the process may be slow. To move closer towards goals of equity and justice by taking concrete action is not only a moral obligation, but will directly result in drastic improvements for the lives of countless individuals.

My commitment to education and liberation is deeply rooted in my experience as a disabled, immigrant woman of colour. I have seen and experienced the ways in which traditional education and academia fail marginalised students. And I have felt the deep understanding, the being at home of truly equitable spaces. And so: my life's work—be it teaching or research or mentoring—is to uplift every person (for ultimately we are all in this work together), to help them access the resources they need, to make sure their voices are honoured.