How to Write a Diversity Statement

"Professional Development Corner" article by Ahmad A. Alharthi, University of Washington

Separate from the teaching and research statements, the diversity statement is a document explaining the extent to which one is able to contribute to a culture of equity and inclusion. It functions as one piece of evidence for one's effort to address diversity issues regarding teaching, research, and service. To help you get started with your statement, I will explain below the possible sections of a diversity statement and what each section might entail. When writing this statement, considerations typically revolve around certain keywords, including the words making up the title of this issue —"race," "equality," "justice," and "allyship"—along with others that I will also mention below.

Before we go into each section, two important points need to be sorted out. First, you may want to spend some time thinking whether you would like your statement to be **past-oriented or future-oriented** (or some combination of both). In other words, are you going to highlight your commitment and contribution from past experiences, or are you going to discuss your growth and awareness about diversity, thus primarily explaining your future plans? The guidelines for writing a diversity statement published by the University of California at San Diego allow both options, as applicable to the respective candidate, but state that "a demonstrated record of past effort is given greater weight than articulating awareness of barriers or stating future plans" (University of California, San Diego, n.d.). No matter which option you choose, the key is authenticity. So, in your discussion, make sure that you talk about real involvement (from the past) and/or realistic projects (for the future).

Second, make a decision as to whether you would like to mainly discuss **your personal identity or your engagement with disenfranchised groups** (or some combination of both) . If you decide to talk about your personal identity, you can do so in terms of either acknowledging your own privileges (Golash-Boza, 2016) or, as applicable, by discussing your own disadvantages. On the other hand, if you decide to talk about your relation to historically underrepresented groups, you can focus, as appropriate, on racial/ethnic minorities, immigrant/first-generation students, women in higher education, or multilingual/international students. With that said, Beck (2018) points out that not disclosing one's personal identity might be preferred by some universities. For example, at the University of California at San Diego, attention is given to specific efforts related to diversity on the part of the applicant "regardless of personal demographic characteristics" (Contributions, n.d., as cited in Beck, 2018).

Now, for the actual statement, you may begin by explaining your understanding of the notion of "diversity" before you discuss your commitment to diversity in relation to the three major goals of higher education: teaching and pedagogy; research and scholarship; and service and leadership. When asked her opinion about the diversity statement, Tabbye Chavous, director of the National Center for Institutional Diversity at the University of Michigan, explains that while there is no one-size-fits-all approach to writing a diversity statement, "every faculty member's work connects to at least one of these goals" (Smith, 2019). So, the decision is yours as to which of the three goals to highlight most. Your decision can be based on your past record and on what the institution applied to values the most among these three goals. Note that you will likely be asked to provide a separate document for your teaching philosophy and another one for your research. Therefore, your discussion of teaching and research in the diversity statement will not only be less detailed, but also be exclusively concerned with how diversity features in those two areas.

In the case of **teaching**, this is where you should discuss how you are able to create an accessible learning space for your students. Give examples of and provide a rationale for decolonizing your teaching practices and diversifying your curriculum, where a variety of voices and a range of perspectives are represented in your course content. Notions relevant to this section might also include "access," "inclusive teaching," and "anti-racist pedagogy." Indeed, even the notion of "active learning" can be linked to diversity in that it promotes various teaching methods which can serve different learning styles and help students with diverse educational backgrounds. If not already, familiarize yourself with some of those terms and see what each one entails. You would be surprised with how you might be already implementing some of those ideas without even realizing.

As for your **research** section, discuss to what extent your research addresses social justice issues. For example, does it engage with civil rights and/or human rights issues? Reflect on how your research is focused on one or more of the "big eight" social identifiers: age, ability, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, class, and religion. If you have a dissertation chapter that addresses any of those issues, this section would be the place to summarize your chapter.

Finally, with regard to **service**, this can include anything that is neither teaching nor research, from programmatic work and administrative experience to leadership opportunities and service on relevant committees and task forces. Have you participated in tutoring or mentoring programs targeted towards underserved groups? Did you take part in designing curricula or compiling resources with diverse writers (e.g., international students) in mind?

Willis (2017) talks about probing yourself as a strategy, where you would examine who you are, where you stand, what you did, and what you really believe in with regard to diversity issues. Just as importantly, remember to ask for feedback on your statement from colleagues, your advisor and, if applicable, the career center at your institution. As language professionals, we are already in the midst of efforts to promote issues related to diversity, including, among others, respecting students' home languages, ensuring fair assessment practices, and reducing stereotype threats. To me, that is a huge component of what we do in applied linguistics and language studies in general. So, it is crucial to reflect on your past and try to translate that mindset into words.

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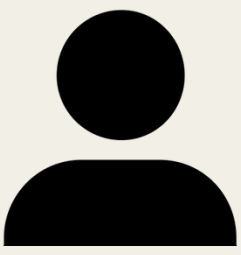

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