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Statement on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

As a human rights and international relations scholar, educator and administrator, the principles of diversity, equity and inclusion are central to my research, teaching and leadership initiatives. I put these principles into action by working to make a university education possible for a wide range of students; developing programming and mentorship opportunities for junior faculty and graduate students; and pursuing research that connects human rights principles with practical outcomes.

Making a University Education Possible. One of my primary objectives with respect to working in and with a diverse, equitable and inclusive community is to make a university education possible for a wide range of students. In May 2018, I became the Faculty Coordinator for the William H. Thompson Scholars (WHT) Learning Program. This program, generously funded by the Susan Buffett Foundation, provides full scholarships for lower-income Nebraskan students to attend the University of Nebraska. Our students are a diverse group. Nearly 60 percent of our scholars are first generation students. They have a wide variety of racial, ethnic, religious and ideological backgrounds and come from both urban and rural parts of the state. This community of scholars, which is 1000 students strong on the UNL campus alone, represents the future of the state and the future of higher education.

My work with this community, as well as my role on the Associate Senior Vice Chancellor's Student Success Team, has illustrated very clearly that supporting a diverse student body extends well beyond admissions. The WHT program, in addition to covering the costs of tuition, provides wrap-around support, including peer mentorship, one-on-one staff advising, professional development, community living and much more. As Faculty Coordinator, I work with academic units around campus to offer WHT-specific sections of general education classes. Instead of taking Introduction to Chemistry with 500 students, for example, our WHT students will enroll in a section capped at 25. These smaller classes, combined with excellent and dedicated instructional staff, especially-allocated enhancement resources and the socio-emotional support the students receive, set our scholars off on the right path. The program has functionally closed the so-called achievement gap, and we are looking at ways to scale the findings of our work to the broader university community.

In the pursuit of lowering barriers to academic success, I also have been part of a pilot project on the UNL campus to move to all open electronic resources. I recently received a grant to shift my introductory international relations class to all open-access materials. The initial results have been very positive. Not only does this remove the barrier of expensive textbooks, but it also has provided an opportunity to make the course material more accessible for all our students. By offering a diverse set of readings, videos and multi-media experiences, the course content is more engaging, making the course as a whole more inclusive.

As the Director of the Forsythe Family Program on Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs at UNL, I have championed making study abroad and research opportunities affordable for all of our students. I actively work with donors to fund these initiatives and work to support students financially and logistically as they pursue their study abroad and research goals. The compounding and transformational effects study abroad and engagement with research have on our students helps to build stronger, more diverse and more inclusive communities.

Mentorship and Programming that Evens the Playing Field. In addition to working to make higher education more diverse, equitable and inclusive, I also use my role as a campus and disciplinary leader to provide mentorship and programming that can help even the playing field for faculty and graduate students.

Within the Department of Political Science at UNL, I helped to create a new mentorship program for junior faculty. The goal of this program is to make mentorship networks transparent and equitable. I also have served as a mentor at the International Studies Association Annual Meetings and at the Visions in World Politics Workshop, a program based out of the University of Iowa that is designed to mentor young female scholars on both their research and professional development. In my capacity as Chair of the Human Rights Section of the International Studies Association, I have spearheaded a new travel grant that will be reserved especially for scholars from the Global South and help them to overcome the financial and logistical barriers to participating in our annual conventions, which are critical for the establishment of professional networks and the dissemination of research.

Promoting Diversity through Research on Human Rights. Human rights research inherently deals with the tension between universal human rights principles and discriminatory and inequitable state and social practices. My research on international human rights adjudication considers how international justice and global governance mechanisms can provide recourse to victims of discrimination. This work also considers how international institutions can change domestic laws, practices and norms to be more equitable and inclusive. My National Science Foundation-funded research on women's rights protections in Europe specifically examines the ways in which domestic actors can mobilize around international human rights recommendations and rulings to stop gender-based violence and to create a more diverse and equitable labor market.

In addition to the subject of my research, I have worked hard to build a diverse professional network. This network crosses disciplinary borders and includes historians, lawyers, psychologists and even computer scientists. Moreover, I have fostered networks that span multiple continents, languages and backgrounds. These diverse communities of scholars, such as the Inter-American Human Rights Network, for which I was a co-founder, have provided some of the most enriching and inspiring experiences in my career.

As the Director of the Forsythe Family Program on Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs, I am able to influence the direction of the human rights-related research happening on the UNL campus to address issues of inequity and discrimination. For example, our program is spearheading an initiative on human trafficking that focuses on the particularly high rates of trafficking of indigenous women. This initiative, which will operate under the title #MMIW (Missing, Murdered and Indigenous Women) will bring together innovative human rights research and pressing policy concerns with the goal of using research to help create a more just, inclusive and equitable world.

Summary. In my role as a teacher, researcher and administrator, I have taken concrete steps to making our scholarly and professional communities more diverse, equitable and inclusive. I look forward to continuing my work to make higher education accessible, to level the playing field for faculty and graduate students, and to promote diversity, equity and inclusion through human rights research.