

Diversity Statement

Irene Morse¹

As a queer, female political scientist from a low-income background, I strive to contribute my unique perspective to the academy, while also preserving spaces for other historically disadvantaged groups to impact and transform the post-secondary educational landscape. I consistently reflect on my positionality as a researcher and instructor, especially with regard to national origin and race. I strive to support marginalized perspectives and encourage systemic change to make higher education more accessible and equitable.

I identify as a queer political scientist both with regard to my gender expression and my sexuality. Because I am readable as queer, I have often faced microaggressions, discrimination, and sometimes outright hostility from those who oppose or do not understand the LGBTQ+ community. Through such experiences, I have learned that feelings of safety and belonging are crucial for success in any environment, including in the academy. I therefore prioritize these values in my classroom spaces and pay close attention to which students are succeeding and which are struggling. For the students who struggle, I offer consistent and reliable support in completing assignments, participating in the classroom, connecting with professors, and navigating their undergraduate program. I regularly reflect on my positionality as an instructor and attend workshops that prioritize DEIA in pedagogy. I am proud to set an example to my students of a visibly queer instructor who has achieved excellence throughout my educational trajectory and ultimately been fortunate to pursue a PhD. Due to my visibility in this regard, students frequently approach me with concerns about their education that extend beyond our particular course, and I frequently update my knowledge on resources for students facing mental health struggles, homelessness, sexual assault, and other common issues.

Additionally, I am a female political scientist. Though women in the academy are disadvantaged in many ways, we also have created a network of support and solidarity that helps us navigate a male-dominated and male-founded field. I embrace a strengths-based understanding of women's position in the academy and strive to uplift and promote fellow female political scientists' research and pedagogical agendas. This is especially important for women who practice quantitative methods and/or identify as methodologists within the field of political science, as we tend to be particularly marginalized in these spaces. Additionally, I recognize that my female academics are more likely to have additional household, relational, and emotional burdens than their male counterparts. I therefore embrace accessibility in course design and in research workflows, adopting and promoting systems that allow work to be completed asynchronously and working to communicate directly and clearly with project team members.

Finally, I believe that my low-income background uniquely positions me to assist and relate to students. Growing up, my father went through long periods of unemployment or underemployment and was always the sole family provider due to the fact that my mother has some chronic illnesses. I was fortunate to receive a variety of scholarships, including Pell Grants, to pay for my undergraduate education. This history has instilled in me a strong drive to seek out

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and apply for fellowships, grants, and other sources of funding in order to achieve my professional goals. I have also learned excellent budgeting and project management skills and don't take any source of funding for granted, no matter how small. In my interactions with students and colleagues, I do not judge others based on their background, manner of dress or speaking, and I strive to engage professionally and compassionately with everyone I interact with. Finally, coming from a low-income background has given me a strong drive for success and a willingness to tolerate temporary delays or deprivations in order to achieve greater accomplishments in the future. This trait is invaluable in academia, as research projects often face unanticipated challenges that require patience and mental flexibility to overcome.

Overall, I believe that my voice and presence can contribute significantly to the diversity of the academy and can help to transform the post-secondary landscape into a more equitable place. However, I must acknowledge that part of embracing and promoting my own diverse identities involves understanding the areas where I can perpetuate harm against marginalized groups if I do not engage in consistent reflection, transformation, and advocacy. As a white individual of US origin, I have become increasingly aware of racial dynamics in the academy that benefit me and disadvantage non-white and non-American students and researchers. By participating in DEIA education and advocacy initiatives as I am able, I have worked to become a more culturally sensitive, anti-racist instructor and researcher. This includes implementing teaching practices that help to hold me accountable to my students and paying extra attention to research ethics when working with non-American research subjects. In all my work, I strive to practice anti-racism, undermine neo-colonialism, and foster equity, inclusion, and partnership.