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## How to write an effective diversity statement (essay)

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Faculty job postings are increasingly asking for diversity statements, in addition to research and teaching statements. According to the University of California at San Diego [website](#) [1], “the purpose of the statement is to identify candidates who have professional skills, experience and/or willingness to engage in activities that would enhance campus *diversity and equity efforts*” (emphasis added). In general, these statements are an opportunity for applicants to explain to a search committee the distinct experiences and commitment they bring to the table.

So, how do you write an effective diversity statement? If you are a job candidate who actually cares about diversity and equity, how do you convey that commitment to a search committee? (Note that if you do not care about diversity and equity and do not want to be in a department that does, don’t waste your time crafting a strong diversity statement -- and you need not read any farther in this essay.)

My first piece of advice is: do not write a throwaway diversity statement. Some job applicants think that writing a diversity statement that shows they actually care about diversity and equity may be too political. Thus, they write a blasé statement about, for example, how they encourage students to come to class in pajamas if they feel comfortable. That is not an effective strategy, because it does not show a genuine commitment to diversity and equity.

Of course, it is true that many faculty members overtly reject campus efforts to enhance diversity and equity. However, it is also true that search committee members who do not care about diversity do not read diversity statements. Just like search committee members who do not care about teaching gloss over teaching statements, those who do not care about diversity gloss over diversity statements. So, don’t bother writing a statement directed at faculty members who do not care about diversity. Write one for those faculty members who will take the time to read your statement carefully.

I can assure you that many faculty members truly care about diversity and equity and will read your statement closely. I have

been in the room when the diversity statement of every single finalist for a job search was scrutinized. The candidates who submitted strong statements wrote about their experiences teaching first-generation college students, their involvement with LGBTQ student groups, their experiences teaching in inner-city high schools and their awareness of how systemic inequalities affect students' ability to excel. Applicants mentioned their teaching and activism and highlighted their commitment to diversity and equity in higher education.

Here are seven additional suggestions to consider as you write your diversity statement.

- **Tell *your* story.** If you have overcome obstacles to get to where you are, point those out. If, in contrast, you are privileged, acknowledge that. If you grew up walking uphill to school carrying two 20-pound sacks of rice on your back, by all means, tell that story. If you were raised with a silver spoon in your mouth, acknowledge your privilege. Either way, use your story to explain how you can empathize with students who confront challenges on their way to achieving their educational goals.
- **Focus on commonly accepted understandings of diversity and equity.** Concentrate on issues such as race, gender, social class and sexual orientation. Don't try to tone down your statement by writing about how it is hard to be a Kansan in Missouri, for example. Instead, write about racial oppression, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism or some other commonly recognized form of oppression.
- **Avoid false parallels.** By that I mean do not equate the exclusion you faced due to being a Kansan in Missouri with the exclusion an African-American faces at a primarily white institution. You do not have to be an African-American to have insight into the challenges they face, but if you do not have experiential knowledge of racism, then do not claim it. Instead, focus on writing about what you do know. If you feel comfortable getting personal, you can write about your own experiences of privilege or oppression. But you don't have to get personal; you can cite statistics or studies to make your points.
- **Write about specific things you have done to help students from underrepresented backgrounds succeed.** If you have never done anything to help anyone, then go out and do something. Sign up to be a tutor at an underperforming school, build a house with Habitat for Humanity or incorporate antiracist pedagogy <sup>[2]</sup> into your teaching. In addition to having a rewarding experience, you can write about it in your diversity statement.
- **Highlight any programs for underrepresented students you've participated in.** If you have had any involvement with such programs (e.g., McNair Scholars Program), describe that involvement in your statement. This involvement can either be as a former participant or as a mentor or adviser to someone who has participated. These kinds of specific examples show that you understand what effective programs look like and how they work.
- **Write about your commitment to working toward achieving equity and enhancing diversity.** Describe specific ways you are willing to contribute. You can mention your willingness to contribute to pre-existing programs on the campus or you can express interest in creating new programs based on models at other campuses.
- **Modify your statement based on where you are sending it.** Your statement for a land-grant institution in the rural South should not be the exact same one you send to an elite institution in urban California. Look up the demographics of the institution to which you are applying and mention those demographics in your statement. For example, if the university you are applying to is a Hispanic-serving institution, you should be aware of that. Or if it has a well-known

scholarship program for underrepresented minorities, you should mention that program.

Diversity statements are a relatively new addition to the job application packet. Thus, search committees are still developing assessment tools for such statements, and many campuses lack clear guidelines. Nevertheless, you can use this novelty to your advantage by writing a stellar statement that emphasizes your record of contributions to diversity and equity as well as your commitment to future efforts

### Section:

Faculty <sup>[3]</sup>

### Author Bio:

*Tanya Golash-Boza is an associate professor of sociology at the University of California at Merced. Her most recent book is Deported: Immigrant Policing, Disposable Labor and Global Capitalism (NYU Press, 2015). She runs the blog Get a Life, PhD <sup>[4]</sup> and tweets as @tanyaboza <sup>[5]</sup>.*



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### Links:

[1] <http://facultyexcellence.ucsd.edu/c2d/>

[2] <http://www.stcloudstate.edu/arpac/workshops/default.aspx>

[3] <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/news-sections/faculty>

[4] <http://getalifeph.d.blogspot.com/>

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