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Statement of Diversity

My commitment to diversity and inclusion, teaching philosophy, research interests, and personal life are rooted in the same core values. The intersection of these aspects has made me aware of the fluidity of gender, religious, and ethnic identities, and the role I play in forming sensitive citizens who can understand and respect ways of life that are different from their own.

As a language instructor, I am aware that teaching a language introduces students to new cultures, countries, and mentalities that enhance and, in some cases, threaten the perceptions they have of themselves. In my classes, I welcome different perspectives and backgrounds in the activities I design, particularly dialogues, role-plays, press conferences, and debates. Besides teaching and reviewing grammar, I encourage students to see culture as a broader, more nuanced concept than food, music and sports. In literature courses, I show how literature spreads positive and negative views of different ethnicities. At the same time, I focus on how literary critique opens a space of negotiation in producing meaning and can even empower those readers who are not represented in the texts if the concept of “lack” serves as a point of departure to critical discussions. During my fourteen years as an instructor, I have taught a variety of courses, and I have been committed to addressing these issues inside and outside of the classroom. I designed my first graduate seminar around theatrical representations of Muslims, Jews, Amerindians, Turks, and Blacks in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spain. The course encouraged students to conceptualize diversity through the lens of postcolonial theory. Influenced by my own scholarship, I fomented the critical analysis of theatrical texts by asking students to situate the plays in the historical period, to understand the ideological conditions in which the playwrights wrote, and to identify the biases represented in the texts. While students reflected on “sameness” and “difference” during the early modern period, they realized the relevance the texts had to contemporary society. Through their analyses, they made broader insights into issues of tolerance and intolerance that people from different identities face.

As a researcher, I have dedicated years to studying the aftermath of the Spanish Reconquista, an eight-century-long fight waged by Christians to regain control of the Iberian peninsula, which led to harsh policies towards Muslims in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In particular, I have looked at how the anxieties and fears provoked by that

presence were represented in theater. In analyzing plays about Moriscos, descendants of Muslims forced to convert to Christianity at the end of the fifteenth century, I have focused on their expulsion from Spain (1609). Examining plays, novels, and historical accounts has taught me that this period has more similarities with than differences from our own society. For instance, my most recent research essay deals with the notion of “passing” —i.e. pretending to belong to another race, gender, or religion— in Antonio Mira de Amescua’s play *El mártir de Madrid* (1610). The notion of “passing” in the play reverberates with contemporary instances of people who try to change an aspect of their identity, such as their gender or ethnicity. In effect, I have seen that early modern Spanish literature can teach us a great deal about diversity and inclusion. The examination of these texts has illuminated the ways we deal with exclusion, displacement, and belonging today. My publications are anchored in the understanding of others, the tensions produced by these encounters, and points of convergence that promote acceptance.

As a first-generation Puerto Rican woman in academia, I come from a background that is diverse, rich, and mixed. Growing up in the countryside and finishing a degree at a public university located in an urban setting allowed me to understand the needs of learners who do not fit the racial, social, and financial profile of the traditional student. I understand when people have difficulty placing me and I also understand the political situation of my country. In turn, I am conscious that others have experiences that I will not be able to immediately relate to. I have come to understand diversity and inclusion as acts of humbleness, openness, and communication.

I have received training on these issues to better conceptualize my personal experiences and assist others with similar situations. I participated as a student in the Summer Institute for Diversity Education (SIDE), a program that trains faculty and staff on diversity. One exercise I designed for a course titled *Medieval and Golden Age Spanish Literature*, “Four Corners,” was based on that experience. An ice-breaker, “Four Corners” was designed to motivate participants to reflect on their own experiences, perceptions, and opinions regarding gender, race, sexual orientation, and disability. As a facilitator, I asked several questions and provided four options as possible answers to each in different corners of the classroom. By facilitating the discussion of difficult topics, the exercise prepared students to later engage with these topics in analyzing literary texts.

At my current institution, some of my service duties are tied to units and initiatives that promote diversity and inclusion. I am a faculty affiliate of the Latin American Studies program

and have collaborated closely with the director to promote events related to Latin America. I also brought a theater company from Mexico, EFE Tres Teatro, to the stage for students and the general public. The company staged some of Miguel de Cervantes' interludes that deal with diversity and religion, such as the Retablo de las maravillas (The Stage of Wonders). I organized a luncheon between members of the theater company and students enrolled in Latin American Studies. In addition, I am a faculty affiliate of the African Studies program and participated in social events with faculty and students from different African countries. As part of my affiliation, I presented my research at the African Talk Series. I talked about how theater reminiscences helped Moriscos to strengthen their sense of community in North Africa after their expulsion from Spain (1609-1614). Moriscos in exile remembered early modern Spanish theater as a means to deal with the difficult circumstances of losing their land but also to highlight their sense of identity as distinct from that of Muslims outside of the Iberian Peninsula, who did not have a strong theater tradition. The talk addressed issues of belonging, nationality, and exile. In addition, I collaborate every year with the Fulbright office at my institution, helping applicants to rethink how to be better cultural ambassadors abroad, and I was part of Ohio First Scholars, a program created to mentor first-generation students.

In sum, diversity and inclusion are integral to my academic and personal life. I strive to support any initiative that creates opportunities to understand others and build a strong community.