

Diversity Statement

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“It is time for parents to teach young people early on that in diversity there is beauty and there is strength.”

Maya Angelou

I am an Indian woman, and have experienced many factors that commonly arise in underrepresented groups. Issues of diversity and inequality are deeply important to me both personally and professionally. Addressing the underrepresentation of groups such as women and minorities in academia is one of the most challenging and critical problems facing us as a field. Increasing diversity not only makes for a more socially inclusive environment, but also broadens the collective insight of academia field as a whole.

MY BACKGROUND

I was born in a large and implausibly diverse country - India. India is particularly known for linguistic (179 languages) and religious diversity. Being born a girl to a conservative patriarchal Indian family in the 80's, I faced gender discrimination within and outside of family, from my childhood days. However, my father provided me the guidance, protected my interests, encouraged decision making and supported my education. Perhaps, he realized that in the long run, only education and awareness can give me the power to battle gender discrimination and achieve equality for myself and others.

Because my father was deputed to Nigeria from Ministry of Steel, Government of India, I spent four years of my early childhood life in Africa. I have fond memories of nursery school in Nigeria and close association with several African teachers and friends. I returned to India later and continued early schooling in the national capital, Delhi, which is home to a host of different cultures, ethnic groups, religions, castes, and languages. Being of Hindu origin myself, I have studied in Christian missionary school and catholic convent college in Delhi. After finishing high school and college education in India, I went to England in 2009 to pursue Masters in Economics at University of Manchester, and finally moved to United States in 2012 to pursue Ph.D. in Economics at University of Georgia.

Over the past 30 years, I have benefited culturally, socially and intellectually from the extremely diverse community of the four different countries, where I have lived - Nigeria, India, England and America. At different points in my career, I have lived with or had close association with a host of people from different backgrounds, races, nationalities, gender, religious origins, ethnicity, and physical ability. My exposure to a diverse community since childhood has taught me to respect, adapt, appreciate and learn from each other's differences. For example, even though my native

language is Bengali, I have learnt to speak three regional languages of India, other than the official language English, and an international language French, without any formal training. My experiences have framed my intellectual outlook, cognitive style, and personality that makes me well placed for a diverse environment. Through these experiences, I understand some of the challenges and benefits of diversity and have come to appreciate how privileged I am.

SUPPORTING DIVERSE BACKGROUNDS

This commitment to diversity has also shaped my research and teaching at University of Georgia. I take pride in the diversity of my dissertation committee which includes professors from America, Uruguay, Russia and India. Because I deeply care about issues such as poverty and inequality, my dissertation is devoted to studying monetary policy and poverty in developing countries. Specifically, I study how monetary policy affects the welfare of poor households in developing countries with a particular focus on subsistence food consumption and inequality, as well as the channels through which monetary policy can affect poverty and inequality.

In my teaching, I take seriously the challenge of teaching to a diverse audience. As I explain in my teaching statement, I recognize that as a teacher I have the responsibility to constantly find ways to improve the class, so I have actively sought feedback from diverse students on the same. I have found that my students have an enormous ability to teach me, and I strive to adapt both the style and content of my teaching material to reflect the diversity of my students. This has included important steps like learning to lecture more effectively to a class of native and non-native English speakers as well as to create content and syllabus that are more diverse in the material. In organizing classes, seminars, and lectures, I have found that a more diverse program is able to attract, and communicate more effectively to, broad audiences. By bringing in a wide variety of perspectives, a more diverse program can also support broader, more widely applicable, and more effective learning.

In my class, I have had the opportunity to teach and directly reach out to a wide range of students from underrepresented backgrounds - female students, students with disabilities, African-American, Asian and Hispanic students, which has helped me recognize the issues within these communities. I would often spend time knowing more about their academic interests and career choices and analyzing how my class can help them achieve their goals. I understand that it is important as a teacher to encourage students at an early stage, before, as evidence shows, the balance of people from different backgrounds decline.

I strongly believe that the diversity of a university's faculty, staff, and students influences its strength, productivity, and intellectual personality. Diversity of gender, ethnicity, race, religion, physical ability, age, experience, and many other attributes contribute to the richness of the environment for teaching and research by fostering creativity and innovation. I look forward to being able to contribute to the university's diversity goals through my experiences, research and teachings.