

# MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

## Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Statement

Dr. Amanda Lanier – Spring 2024

As I write this statement, we are a few days into the month of Ramadan. I use “we” deliberately, even though I am not Muslim, because the practice of fasting during daylight hours and breaking that fast with friends and family each evening belongs to MSU’s extremely large and varied population along with many other examples of cultural and personal diversity. Even for faculty like me who teach cultural identity and intercultural competence as content in our courses, though we may use different conceptual terms, it is easier to embrace what is familiar than to address differences that may complicate our pedagogical choices and our interaction with students and colleagues.

Because I work in applied linguistics and world language education, my students embody diversity in terms of their international origins, their cultural identities, their ethnicities, and other aspects of their demographics. They identify as female, male, and non-binary; they are parents, grandparents, and childless; they represent a wide range of ages and socioeconomic backgrounds; they are neurodivergent and neurotypical; and they vary in physical ability, though I have not yet faced the challenge of teaching deaf or visually-impaired students in online graduate courses. Our program is designed to offer access to education for many participants who would otherwise find it impossible to advance their education, in that it is relatively affordable and flexible enough for working adults.

DEI begins with *perception* and *perspectives*. Awareness of that diversity and openness to it does not, however, mean that I am able to address equity and inclusion to the full extent that might be valuable for my students, my colleagues, and other members of our educational community. True commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) involves meaningful and concrete steps, ideally informed by members of the groups that will be most affected by those steps and grounded in humility about the shortcomings of those efforts.

To identify those steps, we can aim to address a few more “p” words as guides: *policies*, *pedagogy*, *power*, and *person*. *Policies* should be straightforward, wise, and clearly stated in our syllabi and other documents but also flexible enough for varying needs, including religious observance, physical and mental accommodation, and responses to crises and disagreements. Perhaps their only lack of flexibility should be a refusal to tolerate discrimination toward other students. *Pedagogy* that is inclusive also involves communicating predictable demands as well as providing individual choice and, where possible, alternate modes of completing requirements. *Power* addresses the variations in personal agency that members of diverse groups may feel, which leads to unacknowledged privilege and also a failure to advocate for members of less powerful groups; policies are useless if students will not take advantage of them because of inherent power dynamics. *Person* reminds us to focus on the individuality of each member of our community, with their own unique confluence of identities and challenges, and to address their needs as they arise rather than expecting a label to encompass them or asking them to represent an identity that they may not interpret in the same way that we do. While we cannot allow for every variation of diversity and every challenge that it will bring in our policies, personal respect will help us to perceive the injustice and discord that may arise and address them with compassion.

The list I propose here is only one of many frameworks for addressing diversity, equity, and inclusion in education. My own diverse students have suffered from discrimination in other contexts and shared those challenges with me and stepped up to increase equity and inclusion in their work and reminded me to do so in mine. Succeeding in that regard will be a matter of continuing to listen and adjust throughout my career.

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