

Commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion

While 2020 saw an awakening towards dismantling systemic racism and fighting for social justice, it also reignited academia's role in upholding these issues. The number of individuals entering the academic workforce keeps increasing; yet, the representation of several ethnic and racial groups has not changed in the last 10 years and remains well below US demographics¹. Diversity is crucial to innovation and excellence: studies have indeed consistently showed that learning outcomes, such as critical thinking², integrative complexity³, intellectual engagement⁴, or creativity⁵, are enhanced by racial diversity and multicultural experiences. Therefore, commitment to DEI should be universal.

As a researcher, mentor, teacher, colleague, and a woman in STEM, I strive to make academia an inclusive environment in which every identity can thrive and belong. I am eager to pursue and implement these values from the classroom to the lab, at every level of the academic path, and in the community.

The lab and the classroom are key environments of the academic workplace where DEI efforts are crucial. Over the course of my PhD and postdoc, most of the students I have mentored were women and from groups that have been minoritized in science. Mentees helped with different aspects of ongoing research projects and at different levels of independence. Several of them have now gone on to successfully pursue PhDs and postdoctoral work. Through various teaching experiences, I have shared my enthusiasm for science with students from diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds, and in two different countries. My approach in both teaching and mentoring adopts a student-centered stance, supporting each student's unique set of strengths. To ensure that the lab and classroom remain safe and inclusive spaces for all, I will detail this commitment both in the syllabus of the courses I teach, and in a lab handbook, which I will revise yearly based on students' and lab members' feedback.

In parallel, I have advocated for DEI through serving on the board of the Caltech Postdoc Association for four years. In 2019, I analyzed and disseminated the results of a campus-wide postdoc survey, which highlighted a clear gender disparity in postdocs' ability to plan for a family. Specifically, while 30% of Caltech postdocs are women, only 15% of postdocs with children are women. This worrying finding has helped advocate for more affordable childcare. I am also committed to outreach as a tool to make science accessible to diverse audiences; and I have participated in several science communication events aimed at the general public and K-12 students. In the future, I will continue these engagements by (1) serving on committees (admission, search, DEI, advocacy group) to promote the role of diversity in academic excellence and remove systemic barriers that can prevent student retention or success; and (2) mentoring and sponsoring students from underserved communities or underfunded schools, to help create opportunities that will ultimately facilitate access to STEM in higher education.

Finally, my commitment to DEI would not be possible without personal growth and self-learning. As an ally I am aware that terms and norms are constantly changing, therefore, I aspire to keep educating myself. I have participated in multiple workshops, townhalls, book clubs and other events to this purpose. These have shaped my perspective, helped me build a deeper understanding of the systemic issues, and develop strategies to become an effective ally. I plan to continue this self-learning throughout my career.

I am dedicated to fostering a diverse, equitable, and inclusive environment. It is my core belief that each individual belongs, and I aspire to actively contribute to making that belief a reality. I am eager to get involved in various DEI initiatives at UMD, such as attending the Anti Racism Teach-in Series and serving on the Department of Psychology Diversity and Inclusion Committee, to continue striving for a more inclusive and representative next generation of scientists.

¹ Survey of Earned Doctorates, report available at <https://nces.gov/pubs/nsf21308/>

² Nelson Laird (2005) *Research in Higher Education*, 46 (4)

³ Antonio et al (2004) *Psychological Science*, 15 (8)

⁴ Gurin et al (2004) *Defending diversity: Affirmative action at the University of Michigan*

⁵ Leung et al (2008) *American Psychologist*, 63 (3)