# DIVERSITY STATEMENT

NOAH SPEETER

The world of math academia is still largely dominated by white, straight, cisgender men. Unfortunately, many in academia either don't see this as a problem or fail to acknowledge the very real systematic oppressions that women, people of color, and LGBTQ people face in our field. We will not see equitable representation of these groups until these systematic oppressions are dismantled. I think it is important to recognize that systematic oppression is complicated and multifaceted. Combating inequities requires conscious efforts at both a small-scale interpersonal level, and more broadly within the community. This includes us having the uncomfortable conversation about how academia's racist and sexist history directly lead to our current state of being.

My experiences as a person of color in a racist society has given me an important perspective in these issues, but ultimately my role is that of an ally because the majority of these inequities have not personally obstructed my professional development. I believe the greatest impact I can make as a mathematician, is to help make math more accessible to those we have traditionally kept out of the field. Currently my impact is greatest through my interpersonal work as an instructor and research mentor, but I view the actions I take to influence my department more broadly as being just as important. My department has in fact taken note of the work I do inside and outside of the classroom. In the Spring of 2022 I received the University of Kentucky Math department Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Award.

During the Summer of 2022, I organized ran the Discrete Algebra Research Team (DART). I started DART with the intention of helping young mathematicians from underrepresented groups get much needed research experience and guidance. I saw a need for this because most of my queer and BIPOC friends in math academia have always needed to make their own opportunities for themselves. In contrast, my straight white friends usually had more access to mentors and thus more access to career development opportunities. While I didn't exclusively recruit mathematicians from underrepresented groups, I did reach out to a research collaborator who would be able to provide me with a diverse group of capable candidates. What resulted was a research group which was 40% women, 40% trans/non binary, and 40% people of color. I plan to make DART an annual summer research group so that I can continue to serve as a mentor to young mathematicians from underrepresented groups.

When I start a semester, I ask my students to fill out a short questionnaire. Within the survey I make sure to ask the two following questions: "What pronouns would you like me to use when I refer to you?" and, "Is there a name you would prefer to go by (nickname or otherwise) that is different from the name which appears on canvas?" Although the majority of my students will identify with the name that appears for them on canvas, these questions do two things for me and my students. First of all, it tells all of my LGBTQ+ students that I am a safe person to be out to. Second, it helps to prevent cases where I unknowingly make trans and nonbinary students feel discomfort by using their deadname. This is also why I phrase the second question in a way that does not imply that the name which appears on school records is *their* name. Transgender people spend years trying to get official records to reflect their gender identity and name—college students are no exceptions to this.

Since its implementation, I have had multiple students use the survey to come out to me as trans. In the spring 2021 semester, a student gave me his name and pronouns which were not yet reflected on any school records. During a one-on-one meeting I showed him how he could change his name on Zoom whenever he felt comfortable doing so. Other grad students and faculty have since joined me by implementing similar questionnaires in their classes. This is one of the direct ways that I feel I have left the University of Kentucky math department a bit more queer-friendly than when I started

grad school there.

Being a brown man in America has given me plenty of experiences with prejudice. I grew up in Minnetonka Minnesota, a wealthy suburb to Minneapolis. Like many of my peers I was privileged to receive a car when I got my license at sixteen. Unlike my peers, I was pulled over by the police shortly after. I was obeying all of the traffic laws, however the officer claimed he could not see my dark grey seat-belt over my bright yellow shirt. It was a rather lazy excuse to cover for a rather obvious reason for the stop: my foreign sedan fit in nicely in this neighborhood, my skin color did not. This was my first of many experiences with racial profiling. Some of them are more obvious, like the time I was harassed by the police while vacationing in Florida because I "fit the description" of a petty beach thief. But most of the time its more subtle, such as extra attention from the cashier in a rural gas station. These experiences shape who I am as an educator and as an academic because I know that they are not unique. Every single one of my students and colleagues with black and brown skin have stories like these, and the stories they have are often worse.

Although I am a person of color, I am still a lighter-skinned, straight, cisgender man and have thus benefited from many systematic privileges afforded to these groups. My legitimacy as a mathematician is not questioned in the same way that it is for female mathematicians or black mathematicians. I cannot, and should not speak for these groups, as their voices are often drowned out by those of us who consider ourselves allies. Instead, I believe greatly in the importance of listening, and then demonstrating through our actions, not just words, that we understand.

I work hard to build a trusting environment in my classroom based on these principles. This goes beyond asking my students for their pronouns or making sure I know how to pronounce the names of my students who come from different cultures. I take care to show each of my students that they are valued in my classroom, and that their perspective, pertaining to math or otherwise, is valid. This sounds simple in concept, but it requires continuous conscious effort. I monitor who I call on for questions and who I socialize with before or after class. In doing so I continue to ensure that all of my students receive positive attention from me. If underrepresented students do not feel welcome in a math class, they will look elsewhere for a place that they do.

Outside of the classroom I am a member of the University of Kentucky Working Group on Ethics, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice in the Mathematical Sciences (EEIJMS). As a member of EEIJMS, I attend biweekly meetings where we discuss readings pertaining to addressing racism, sexism and queerphobia in math academia and education. During meetings, everyone is expected to contribute to discussions so that we can learn from each other. This work group has helped me better navigate complicated topics such as white allyship verses white saviorism and advocating for my underrepresented students without otherizing them.

I see the work I do as a teacher/mentor, and the work I do in EEIJMS as complimentary. The experiences I have connecting with students of color or LGBTQ students informs me how to better contribute in spaces like EEIJMS. Likewise, the other members of EEIJMS have helped me become a far better teacher to my underrepresented students. I believe work groups like this have the potential to make real change in math departments, but only when they are taken seriously. It is very easy to say racism and sexism are bad. It's harder to confront the fact that the system, which you are a part of, has failed the very students you claim to be an ally to. It's even harder still to then do something about it. I think many of us in math academia have good intentions, but if we are not willing to take meaningful actions, the faces of mathematicians across the country will continue to look largely the same as they did forty years ago.