

Tislam Swift

Diversity Statement

10/7/19

Diversity Statement

As a Queer, African-American, low-income, first-generation college graduate, I am passionate about diversity, inclusion and equity. Throughout my academic journey, these factors played major roles in my experience as a student and would then highly influence my experience as an educator. Growing up, I attended elementary and middle schools that consisted of mostly African-American and Latino students and educators. It was not until I reached High School that I would experience a much more diverse student body with students who had come from an array of unique experiences that would determine how they performed both academically and socially.

While a student at Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School, one of New York City's premier schools for performing arts, I quickly recognized many of my classmates were well advanced and equipped to be successful because of their abilities to feel included in class discussions due to cultural relatability. In my Freshman English class, the teacher would often encourage us to write reflection papers and use references that often discussed family life and other personal things. I will never forget being asked to write a paper about my family but being ashamed that my peers would not understand or relate to my experience of having an incarcerated parent. I also feared that these same peers would judge me because I was the only Black Student in the class. From that experience, I knew I would later change environments and experiences for students like myself.

As a Faculty member in Higher Education, I believe it is my job to assure each student has an equitable experience. As educators, we have to be willing to not focus on equality, but equity instead. For example, it is unrealistic to expect students to perform at the same level if

they have not had access to resources prior to studying with me. I intend on getting to know each student and understanding them and their identities. How they identify will shape our teacher and student relationship. Additionally, I think it is important to be aware of resources outside of my own studios and classrooms that will help to ensure a diverse, equitable and inclusive experience. For example, as a student at Indiana University, I worked as a Graduate assistant at the Neal-Marshall Black Culture Center and would visit the other four culture centers on campus. Offices like this provided support for students like myself outside of the classroom when I needed to see someone who looked like me or talk to someone who experienced something similar while on campus.

While Colleges and Universities were originally created to educate one demographic of people, I believe it our job as educators to help change that narrative. The American Education has evolved and we must do our best to assure that all students are supported and can matriculate efficiently. It is my job as an educator do this with diversity, equity and inclusion at the forefront of my priorities. I look forward to having the opportunity to do so at your institution.