

Statement of Contributions to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility

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When one considers the ubiquity of music to the human experience—a commonality that transcends many of the boundaries that can sometimes be used divide us—the potential music has to bring people together can be easily inferred. Music educators have an obligation to champion this characteristic and to ensure fair and equitable access to music instruction for all students. Further, inclusivity and equity should be implicit in how music educators conceptualize ensemble music making and music classroom teaching.

In my 24 years as a music educator, I have made my classroom a place where students can be themselves and where they are never ostracized, ridiculed, or made to feel of lesser value than anyone else. My ensembles are collaborative environments where my students and I are equal creative partners and where we work together toward mutually agreed-upon objectives that are both worthwhile and meaningful. My teaching practices help students develop a sense of autonomy, personal competence, and relatedness to others in the ensemble. Additionally, I work consistently to provide and promote musical opportunities outside the classroom. I feel diverse musical experiences—such as those I have provided to students over the years—are vital to the development of a broader world view and a deeper, more nuanced concept of what it means to be a musician.

I am in my sixth year on faculty at a regional university located in one of the poorest congressional districts in the United States (KY District 5). Access to music education is a significant issue in the region due to the prevalence of school districts where students receive little or no compulsory elementary music instruction or are taught music by teachers with certifications/specialties outside of music. In middle and high schools where instrumental and vocal music instruction is offered, programs tend to be significantly underfunded and underdeveloped. In my time at MSU, I have consistently demonstrated a commitment to outreach and service in this region.

Despite the COVID pandemic at times hindering access, I have been a guest clinician during nearly 40 school visits while in my current position. Additionally, I have hosted multiple educational events on my campus and served as guest conductor for several regional honor band events. These activities provide musical enrichment to hundreds of regional high school and middle school musicians annually. Further, I facilitate opportunities for my students to perform service and outreach to local and regional school music programs. The outcome is invaluable musical opportunities for secondary school students in our area and vital experiences in schools for our music education students.

My work in schools as a guest clinician is a critical component of my recruitment strategy. I actively seek opportunities to visit and work with an array of middle and high school band programs representing diverse situations, resources, and demographic makeup. As a result, students in my ensembles represent a cross

section of our region. My students come from urban and rural areas, affluent and impoverished regions of our state, and from developing band programs and programs that are accomplished on the national level. While challenging, at times, in the context of teaching to diverse musical backgrounds and experiences, having so many different perspectives in the same ensemble is enriching for all members.

In my work with preservice music teachers, I train students in inclusive, anti-discriminatory teaching methods and approaches that ensure their future classrooms have a climate and culture where all students feel welcomed, valued, and able to succeed. For example, I teach extensive accommodation and modification strategies for instructing students with special needs. I encourage an ability-focused mindset, so that my students concentrate on possibilities rather than on obstacles. Additionally, I teach my students processes and procedures for operating a band program that ensure fairness and equity with regard to all available opportunities (e.g., audition procedures for chair placement and solo opportunities, student leadership selection, handling band fees for underprivileged band students).

With regard to directing large music ensembles, I consider many factors when selecting literature (e.g., ensemble capabilities, student preferences, variety of final program, length of works, purpose of performance, theme, availability of soloists, artistry inherent to the composition, student exposure to core wind band repertoire, etc.). Additionally, I feel that it is important that pieces by composers from historically marginalized or underrepresented minorities are routinely programmed. A review of works I have programmed in my current position will illustrate my commitment to doing so (see CV). Students in my ensembles benefit from my extensive study of each piece we program, and they learn the story behind the music and composers we perform. Highlighting diversity is just one facet of the comprehensive information shared with students during our concert preparation.

As a host of multiple large, annual music events, I am extremely conscious about who I select to serve as my guest clinicians/conductors. I facilitate a range of high-quality professional guests to work with my own students or with those high school and middle school students participating in events that I coordinate. It is equally important to ensure students have the opportunity to experience learning from musical leaders who represent diversity (of thought, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, etc.). Such experiences are vital to combating implicit bias and serve to enrich the academic environment. As a member of the music faculty at the University of Mississippi, I will continue the practices I have described and eagerly engage in new and existing departmental diversity, equity, inclusivity, and accessibility initiatives.