

DIVERSITY STATEMENT

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As a 1st-generation college graduate, I believe in education. Schooled and trained in the United States, I am a firm believer in the values in an educational system which celebrates ethnic diversity, equal opportunity policies and practices. I value and promote collegial relationships and mutual respect among students, faculty, and staff. My own diversity competency is built on a lifetime of international experiences. Presenting at multiple international conferences, I have been exposed to many aspects of diversity in opinion, ideas and the colorful individuals who represent them.

Originally from Malaysia, I grew up in a multi-cultural society which inculcated the values of mutual respect, understanding and tolerance. As such, I uphold a high level of expectation that demanded clear, succinct and comprehensible approach with people from diverse lifestyles, perspectives, and backgrounds. In order to do this successfully, I approach differences with an open mind. Because there are number of factors that affect the way we think, act, and communicate, I also pay attention to body language.

Acceptance of individual differences is essential in achieving a favorably diversified learning environment. I have assisted students with special needs such as physical disabilities when I was a doctoral student at Texas Tech University. The assignment I develop and topics discussed are from diverse viewpoints. I give appropriate feedback and how to address various social and cultural issues in the classroom through course material. I understand some students may not have experiences in dealing with multiculturalism but as an instructor, my job is not only to provide an exposure but also to encourage understanding.

In an increasingly competitive international market, higher education institutions are adopting strategies to attract talented students from overseas. As such, my courses such as Graphic Communication and Creative Visual Experience & Design have attracted students from Canada, China, Denmark, France, United States, and so forth, adding international diversity to the course. I acknowledge and seek to address the needs of underrepresented students with varying levels of academic preparation in pedagogically relevant and responsible ways and to advance the understanding of diverse perspectives. In January 2012, I taught a reflective and hands-on design course which I developed at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore. The crux of the course recognizes that there is always an experience created by a product, service, event, environment and people. In addition to the weekly worksheets that get the students to share diverse and multiple observations, stories, perspectives, and even stereotypes, they embark on a transformative experience in which they document a process which requires them to be someone they are not for 10 weeks. Nicole Yeo became Nur Cole for she had chosen to adorn the hijab and be a Muslim woman for her transformation into someone she is not to face her fears and to allow her to try something she would never have tried. She concluded that the experience was a great eye-opener. From the outset, she didn't know what to expect but it pushed her to the boundaries and she emerged as a more confident person, shredding her inhibitions.

When I was a creative director at a computer retailer in San Francisco in 1992, for the next four years, I had assumed a high level of responsibility that demanded clear, succinct and comprehensible communication with people from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds. I also paid attention to body language and sensitivity to topics that may be a taboo to my colleagues from different backgrounds. Except for the weekends and public holidays, I was trained on a daily basis as I was involved in the day-to-day supervision, facilitation and coordination of advertising and promotional projects where different languages co-exist with English in an in-house design department.

As an educator since 1997, first as a part-timer at the Academy of Art University (then college) in San Francisco to full-time employment at Southern Arkansas University, a doctoral student and teaching assistant at Texas Tech University, Savannah College of Art and Design and finally Nanyang Technological University in Singapore where I have been for the past 10 years, I have been exposed to the many different populations in different parts of the world which further sharpened my diversity skills. When prejudice, racism, discrimination and disrespecting creep into my classroom, they will be dealt with in a firm and prompt manner. Regardless of the issue, as long as I approach any diversity challenges with professionalism, courtesy, understanding and sincerity, and most importantly, an open mind, many issues can be averted or assuaged.