

Amy Eremionkhale

Diversity Statement

Growing up in Nigeria, I was exposed to the great divide between the extremely wealthy and the extremely poor. I got to witness the growth and decline of the middle class in the economy, and the impact it had on the lives of the family, friends, and people around me. This early exposure was juxtaposed with the influence of my parents on my early life development. When I was about 7 years old, I could not skip rope and I wanted to get on the team at school. I did not look the part for the team, I was plus sizes, too tall, and my family was not well-off. Unfortunately, the girls who looked the part mocked me for trying to achieve this goal, they derided me saying I would not make the team. That day after school my parents took some of the money they had been saving, bought me a jump rope, and stayed with me to work on mastering the basics. It was a long day for everyone involved. The next day, I called all the girls who had mocked me and showed them that I could jump rope. They were all surprised. I made the team, went on to do very well, and have never stopped playing sports since. This experience framed the way I approach activities in either a position of leadership or membership. I made a conscious decision to never treat another person the way I was treated by those girls, and instead to be for people who my parents were for me that day. Just because someone does not look like the part does not mean they cannot exceed at the part.

As an instructor in a classroom, it is my responsibility to ensure that no student feels that the material I present to them is beyond their reach. I make this assertion clear at the beginning of the course by asking them to practice with me, the pronunciation of my last name. I continue to do this in the first two classes, and while I do, I tell them that if they can learn to pronounce and spell my last name by following my example in class, then they can learn the course material by doing the same thing. Doing this I found relaxes the students and makes both me and the material appear more accessible, which encourages active participation throughout the course. It also highlights some of the things that make me different and shows that I am willing to build a bridge that connects everyone regardless of their background.

I have had the opportunity to contribute to the success of students who have experienced hurdles in their educational career because of what they looked like on the outside. At Lehigh University, I served as a faculty advisor in a peer mentoring program geared towards students of color named E.L.I.T.E, which is short for Empowering Leaders to Initiate and Target Excellence. In this capacity, I was able to give my mentees support with their course/major choices, help with the material in their courses, information on how to get the necessary books from the library at little to no cost, if necessary. Best of all, I have been able to be for my mentees, what my parents were for me at the age of 7. The emotional victory that comes with someone actively believing in your abilities even before they are fully realized and giving you the necessary tools along the way is something I hope to continue to provide my students as I progress in my career.