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## **DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSIVITY STATEMENT**

**HEADLINE: "WE ARE BETTER WHEN WE WORK TOGETHER"**

**SUB-HEADLINE: "FOR DEI TO WORK, EVERY VOICE MUST BE HEARD, AND EVERYONE MUST CONTRIBUTE"**

Diversity initiatives and passion for diversity, equity, and inclusivity are at my core, and my commitment to these values is unwavering. Diversity, equity, and inclusivity have helped me become a better professor and scholar throughout my career and personal life. Listening to and hearing from individuals with varied lived experiences and perspectives allows a generation of better ideas, appreciation, and understanding of individuals from various backgrounds and groups. I firmly believe the emphasis on diversity, equity, and inclusivity builds a community that heals and deals with complex problems related to polarization and division in a complex society—a society such as ours that is increasingly diverse.

For the academic 2021-2022 year, my approach to diversity, equity, and inclusivity in the classroom and during my time at Gaylord has been fearless. Through co-organizing Black History events with the National Association of Black Journalist student groups in Spring 2022, I have enjoyed celebrating small wins at every turn. For example, along with the NABJ student officers, we organized a movie night in which faculty, students, and staff were invited to watch "American Skin." When an officer is cleared of wrongdoing and announced there would not be a trial, violence erupts in the city. The father of the murdered pre-teen African American boy demands a fair trial that was not granted previously. The lack of a fair trial causes the father to take the police captain and the police department hostage to hold a mock test.

Everyone within Gaylord College was invited and welcome, and the discussion after the movie was phenomenal. Participants were comfortable bringing their authentic voices and selves to the discussion. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusivity are more than just words to me; these words mean that hard-and-fast principles should guide how I teach and treat students, colleagues (faculty and staff), friends, and family. DEI means that I am responsible for building an environment where I can cultivate and inspire future strategic communicators to be leaders. Once they graduate, I hope they feel empowered to use their knowledge of cross-cultural issues and cultural competency to create public relations messages celebrating multiple viewpoints.

We "Grow through what we go through" means I will continue to practice what I preach and look inward to build an inclusive culture that encourages, supports, and celebrates diverse voices. I will continue to learn how to create a learning environment that encourages and challenges students to

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face their own implicit biases for them to grow and understand how to appreciate, not tolerate, individuals whose lived experiences differ from ours. An example is the "white potato activity" I used in my class this semester. I brought in a bag of white potatoes. I picked my potato, created a story about the potato, introduced the potato by name, and told the potato's story to the class. Next, the students came to the table to select "their special potato." They were given a few minutes to look at and get to know their potato carefully. After that, students worked in teams and introduced their potato to another student in the class, and they were to share their potato's story. After that, each student introduced their potato to the entire class and was instructed to place it back on the table with the other potatoes. After a few minutes, students were told to return to the table and find their "special friend/potato." Surprisingly, each student could find their special potato and learn the lesson's objective. While all things (people) MAY look alike, when you take time to get to know a person (potato) personally, you learn that effort to get to know individuals from that group of human beings with unique personalities, characteristics, and attributes. This activity taught students that to grow, we must first learn to understand how we interpret people and events. They also know that way to grow as a UNITED community is first to look inward, and when we do, we can become better when we work on DEI together!

In the Spring 2022 semester, I was thrilled to devote a weekly day and time for one-on-one sessions titled "Let's Talk About It." These sessions allowed students to visit the Affinity Lounge and discuss issues they would feel uncomfortable discussing in public forums. Like in my course, Cross-cultural matters, the few students stopping by to talk were ecstatic to have a "safe place" to speak about personal cultural conflicts and issues. The feedback we received showed that, as a College, we must continue to emphasize our passion for every student, staff member, and faculty member who deserves a safe space to ask questions and feel validated. In an email from one of my students enrolled in my Fall 2022 Cross-Cultural Issues in Media and Society, a student wanted to let me know that she is "grateful to be in [my] class, and I thoroughly enjoy the way you teach. You make every feel at ease and comfortable, and included. I love the topics that challenge us to think inwardly and not outwardly." This email made my day.

After teaching cross-cultural issues for over 15 years, I find teaching and allowing open, honest. Authentic discussions about topics like "the N-Word," "Immigration and media portrayals of Hispanic cultures," "Concerns with Native American portrayals and Mascots," and "Cancel Culture; What it is and why we cancel" allow students to consider marginalized groups in an empathetic way. I find that finding ways to talk about issues such as these in and out of the classroom reduces hateful, narrow-minded viewpoints about groups. Thus, candid discussions and opportunities that encourage people to take the perspective of or empathize with marginalized groups involving complex, emotional hot topics and the media's role in aiding in certain conflicts will and can reduce people's prejudice and serve as a means aimed at closing the gap and mending the polarization that plagues our culture today.