

DIVERSITY STATEMENT

My own cultural competency is built upon a lifetime of multicultural experiences. Ever since I was a child, I have never lived in the same province or state for more than six years. I was born in a small city in northeast China, Liaoning Province. When I was six, my family moved to a city on the east coast of China in Hebei province. When I was 12, my family moved again to a peninsula in Shandong province, and I left my family while I was 18 to study at “Hunan University” in southeast China, 15 hours’ drive from my family home. After I graduated, I went to California in U.S. for a master’s degree program at UC Berkeley. One year later, I became an intern living in Brooklyn. As soon as the one-year internship was over, I left Brooklyn to attend a PhD program at Clemson University in South Carolina. One year and a half later, my PhD advisor moved to his new job at Cornell University and I followed him. I have been in Ithaca, NY for three years since then.

These constant relocations offered me great opportunities to make friends with people from all over the world: I shared stories with a Japanese friend when I was a child; I taught Chinese to my Korean classmate at high school; I learned how to cook pasta red sauce from my Italian neighbor; I hung out with an American veteran whose wife is from Iran; I worked as an intern for a French boss with colleagues from England; And now, I am leading an multidisciplinary research team with teammates from India, US, and China. These multicultural experiences have become an integral part of me, and I deeply rejoice this diversity in both working and living environment.

True friendships with people from different backgrounds and cultures have exposed me to different worldviews and religions. I was born in an atheist family, however, most of my uncles and aunts believe in Buddhism. While I was studying in Clemson University, people from Chinese Christian Church became my good friends and we had a lot of conversations about God, humanity, and the world. One year later, I was baptized. One important reason for my conversion is that I am truly amazed by the unconditional love from God who shows no partiality. As his disciple, I should also respect and love every human being equally regardless of their race, color, nationality, personality, religious belief, and sexual orientation. I am a pianist and a fellowship leader at church, which gives me many opportunities to interact with socially vulnerable populations and understand their needs. The more I talked and worked with people, the more I realized how much I could do for this world as a user-centered designer and researcher specialized in built environment. I decided to use my expertise to help people in need, which is why I am particularly interested in helping socially vulnerable populations such as minorities, children, patients, the disadvantaged, the elderly, the disabled, etc. by making their living and working environments more supportive, inclusive, and friendly.

My loving heart and multicultural experiences have become the foundation of my dedication to diversity, which has been well supporting my teaching philosophies and activities. I celebrate the uniqueness and appreciate the individuality of each student not only as their teacher, but as their friend as well. I want to know the challenges my students are facing in their studies and lives as I deeply care about their wellbeing. For instance, someone in my class was struggling as the only “Fine Arts” student in an interaction design class and a Korean student just arrived in U.S. I noticed him as he never spoke or smiled in class even during group discussions. As the only math student in design school and an international student in US for seven years, I know what it feels like to find oneself outside of mainstream both intellectually and culturally. I approached this student after the class, started a conversation, and helped him with his literature review assignment. We ate lunch together in the dining hall and walked together to the class. I also encouraged him to ask me questions whenever he got confused or stuck with course contents. After two weeks, I started to see him talking and smiling in class. And eventually, we become good friends.

Diversity is mutual respect and understanding, the rich soil for individual growth and flourishing, and the foundation for valuable inspirations and creativity. As my awareness and appreciation of cross-cultural understandings grow continuously, I will continue cherishing and celebrating the diversity in academic environment through my teaching and research commitments. I am confident that my multicultural experiences, religious beliefs, and uniqueness as an individual will contribute to the diversity of your community. Thank you for your time and kind consideration. Please let me know if you have any questions.