

Statement on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

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Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) is a complex system of states of being, viewpoints, and actions with multiple nontrivial intersections of factors such as personal identity, social identity, and privilege or lack thereof. It can include civil rights and human rights, can pertain to gender, skin color, religious background, sexuality, able-bodied status, and much more. The depth and breadth of DEI can seem daunting and the timescales for progress glacial. But for me DEI work has three primary motivators: (i) personal, (ii) moral, and (iii) practical.

All of us are touched by DEI on a personal level, though for many it does not rise to a conscious awareness. For me, I am keenly aware of how the lack of DEI can affect some of my best friends, a godson, nephews, and nieces who are black, brown, Latinx, or of mixed heritage. Each time I hear about a black male being wrongly killed at a traffic stop, I seize up, thinking about a nephew whose dark skin has gotten him pulled over wrongly before. Even closer to me are my late mother, sisters, wife, and daughters, who regularly navigate gender inequities. I first became aware of issues faced by women when I was a young boy. My mother told me about her experiences in the 1950's as a divorced woman who was denied loans because she didn't have a man to co-sign for her; who was denied jobs because there would surely be male applicants who would need the income to support their families (ironic, given that she had a young daughter and no assistance from her former husband). I saw the limited opportunities for education and employment available to my older sisters, though it didn't register to me until much later when I was experiencing successes with my own educational pursuits. When I started my study of physics as an undergraduate, I happened to enroll in one of the few public physics programs in the U.S. that was near parity in gender of faculty and students. I knew that physics had historically been male dominated, like so many fields, but I was blissfully unaware that this was a continuing condition of the discipline. It became painfully clear when I started graduate school in a cohort of 45 students, only 2 of whom were women. These are real, personal issues for me, which drives me to act.

To borrow from and update an influential statement in human history: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all *humans* are created equal." It's a simple moral ideal that speaks to human potential and is reflected in most of the dominant religious and secular philosophies around the world. While the ideal is simple, the implementation is nearly always flawed, which is why we have a moral imperative to continuously reflect on DEI and take steps to do better. As academics, we are engaged in searches for truth. We subject empirical data and axioms to logical scrutiny to understand how the world around us works, how we interact with that world, and how we interact with one another. We make our findings open for critique by peers and together build robust results that move us forward in our search. Indiscriminately discarding inconvenient data or wholesale exclusion of the opinions of groups of peers would be in direct conflict with our search for truth. Bias and wholesale exclusion of groups of peers – including racism and sexism among others – is antithetical to our sense of truth, as academics and humans, and limits our ability to find or create justice in the world.

Knowing that our work benefits from broad participation, and that our work benefits communities who in turn feed more broad participation in our scholarship, it is a practical matter for us to work for diversity and inclusion. Populism often makes the dangerous argument that “our group goes up when their group goes down.” But we recognize this as short-sighted and not sustainable in the long term. Equity produces a more stable society focused on shared good. So even if I were not personally or morally compelled to invest in DEI work, I would see it as a practical benefit.

I have been active in DEI work. I introduced the Society for Women In Physics & Astronomy (SWIPA) in the Department of Physics & Astronomy in 2008 and served as an acting faculty mentor. I was a member of White Allies for Racial Justice at UofL and the College of Arts & Sciences Diversity Council. I was the co-director of the Mu2e Office for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion. This just names a few of the ways in which I have taken action.

I acknowledge that, as a white male, I come from a position of privilege. I can’t change that, but I can reflect on how it has affected my perceptions. Most of all, I can use it to help effect change. I am not perfect and will fall short at times, but I am driven personally, morally, and practically to pursue DEI, and I commit to the work ahead.