Commitment to Diversity and Inclusion

My efforts in fostering diversity and inclusion can be summarized based on my experience in engaging students in classrooms, my teaching and research plans related to equity and inclusivity, and my own experience and values related to diversity. I am committed to cultivate an equitable academic climate where my students feel comfortable and a sense of belongingness. I am also a first-generation minority college student, which gives me confidence and helps shape my views as an instructor.

As a part-time faculty at the Northern Kentucky University (NKU) and TA at the University of Cincinnati (UC), I instructed students with diverse identities. My students range from upper to lower class, white to non-white, international, nontraditional, gender nonconformities, trans, and students with physical and cognitive disabilities. Since the traditional passive lecturing method historically worked for only a few students, I am committed to implementing (pedagogically sound) active learning strategies that intentionally and actively foster equality and inclusiveness. For example, as a part-time faculty at NKU, I have implemented fun sketching activities during class discussions. Students are encouraged to choose a geology topic that they care about and draw a rough sketch on the board. Although all students are encouraged to participate in this activity and subsequent discussions, I would intentionally favor female, first-generation, and students with disabilities to be more forthcoming. My goal is to build confidence in them and to motivate them in the broad STEM field. I would often wear a batch in the class that says '*First-generation.'* The intent is to inspire the first-generation students to overcome their adversities and barriers.

While serving as a TA at UC, my undergraduate classroom sizes were generally large (~65–100 students). Therefore, I preferred more group activities. While doing that, I considered the diversity of the classroom. I ensured that the international students and students of color have their favored groups where they feel comfortable and less marginalized, instead of randomly assigning them to any group. I valued the intellectual diversity of my student body and actively promoted their engagement throughout the course. As a result, minority students in such a group setting performed as high as the other students. Doing this also gave voices to those who felt underrepresented and motivated students who felt validated in being part of a learning community.

Through my teaching and research, I strive to ensure that my students perform at their fullest potential and flourish in the competitive professional world, irrespective of their backgrounds and affiliations. As a Postdoc at the University of California, LA (UCLA), I mentored a female graduate and two female undergraduate students in the Luminescence geochronology lab to hone their research skills. I want to continue involving students in my future research projects to inspire more females and underrepresented STEM students. I am also committed to developing *Virtual Reality Learning Environments* (*VRLEs*) in my classrooms using basic coding/programming, 3D virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) models, and drone-based photogrammetry. These inexpensive modern technologies are highly interactive, intuitive, immersive, and inclusive and make learning more exciting and comprehensive for diverse students.

My struggle and experience as a socially and financially disadvantaged student also help me develop empathy towards students of diverse racial, gender, cultural, political, religious, and cognitive backgrounds. I belong to a minority group in India, the scheduled casts, equivalent to the lower class in the United States. I worked extremely hard to overcome this vicious cycle of socio-economic barriers (caste system). Along this journey, I was fortunate enough to have incredible teachers who helped me excel in my studies and life. Sometimes that involved free books, free tuitions, and even application fees for exams or US visas. It was their support and blessings that I excelled in my career. I want to help my students in the same way. I want to see them succeed in life irrespective of their identity, experience, and backgrounds. Therefore, I often meet my students beyond the classrooms to address their concerns, following the institutional guidelines. My students often acknowledge that I respond to their problems quickly and that I am always flexible and accommodating.

I am also a member of the International Association for Geoscience Diversity (IAGD), a non-profit organization dedicated to creating access and inclusion for persons with disabilities in the Geosciences. I plan to work with the IAGD members to restructure the geology field trips to make them more accessible to a wide range of students, including those with disabilities. With my experience, background, involvements, and aspirations, I plan to make *inclusive excellence* an essential part of my curriculum.