

Diversity Statement by Abdelkader Berrahmoun

My background as a working-class immigrant and non-native English speaker has strongly impacted my commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion. As an Algerian graduate student in France long ago, I experienced discrimination against Arabs, Muslims and Africans. I witnessed segregation, lack of equal employment opportunity and overt racism in many forms. Later, upon coming to the United States, I struggled to learn and communicate in English, to comprehend unfamiliar cultural norms, and to secure a living wage. These and other foundational experiences fostered my empathy for others who undergo challenges based on their divergence from mainstream society.

During my twenty-year career as a language educator, I have worked diligently to address issues of diversity and inclusion in the classroom. My students represent a spectrum of 'differences': multi-national, multi-racial, multi-lingual and multicultural populations with distinctive traditions, cultural perspectives and communication styles. Among others, I have taught first-generation college students, LGBTQ-identified students, military personnel and students representing varied socio-economic levels and political views. My students enter the classroom with unique histories, gender identities, learning styles, medical conditions, disabilities and other personal factors that may significantly affect their academic experience.

Against the backdrop of this diversity, I have established protocols based on respect, tolerance and communication. I am welcoming and friendly to all students, and I aim to create a safe, accepting, relaxed learning environment. I'm committed to students' success; therefore, I may differentiate instruction, offer extra help or provide other accommodations to ensure inclusion and equal access.

Many of my class activities involve collaboration, discussion and peer sharing. Among my multi-national and American students, I help facilitate conversations about history and cultural perspectives, so that we can more fully understand our differences and commonalities. When conflicting opinions arise about sensitive topics such as race, religion, the *hijab* or ISIS, I challenge my students to become better-informed and to respectfully work through the issues.

At the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey (MIIS), I develop unique content-based courses on challenging themes such as immigration, religious and ethnic groups in the Arab World, foreign policy, terrorism and Arab women's activism and leadership. These and other courses bring issues of diversity, justice and equal rights into sharp focus. I want my students to push beyond stereotypes and mass media interpretations of current events; to unpack the complex histories and cultural factors underlying compelling issues in the Arab World and diaspora.

I foster respect and inclusivity through various collaborative teaching strategies. In my content-based courses, I have regularly organized forums, roundtable discussions, role plays, collaborative digital portfolios and other methods that link diverse students in shared learning tasks. At Smith College, my students collaboratively produced an Arabic radio show; they also organized Smith's first Arabic Cultural Festival - exposing them to diversity within the Arab world. These kinds of collaborative approaches have prompted my students to interact outside of their comfort zone and familiar social/academic circles.

While I feel that many of these efforts have successfully promoted tolerance, cooperation and respect for diversity, the classroom (and the campus, by extension) is still a microcosm of the larger society. There is always further to go in terms of advancing peace. I believe that higher education must address the various phobias, social inequalities, institutional racism and other challenges that have perpetuated disenfranchisement and marginalization of sectors of students.

In the future, I hope to serve on committees that address inclusivity and diversity on campus and in the surrounding community. Such initiatives can promote dialogue and enlist students in community service. I am also interested in organizing student groups around interfaith dialogue as well as issues of religious and political tolerance.