Diversity In The USA: The Palestinian Experience

Diversity is a distinguishing part of who I am. As an individual from the small and often secluded country of Palestine, I have a dual perspective having learned a great deal about diversity from being in the United States since 2013 as well as the country where I am from. My country is not as open to the world, sometimes resulting in a lack of diversity. From an educational perspective, most of the students in Palestine have the same ethnicity, language, and cultural norms. Although this contributes to students ease in their comfort zone, I recognize the benefits of diversity in the classroom.

I believe that diversity in the classroom is important for a multitude of reasons. First, it helps the students learn about other cultures and see the world from different standpoints. Second, diverse classrooms encourage problem-solving, critical thinking, and immersive creativity. Third, through understanding various cultures and social groups, students can make connections from their own lives to the lives of their peers. Teaching diversity increases cultural competence, which in turn allows students to be empathetic to the experiences of others.

My professional experience has prepared me to teach, deliver service and encompass mentorship that will result in promoting diversity, equality and inclusion. I teach at the University of Illinois at Chicago. According to U.S. News and World Report, it is one of the top ten most diverse universities in the United States. A truly global institution, more than a third of UIC students speak English as a second language. UIC's student body comprises approximately 61% undergraduate and 39% graduate and professional students. About one-third of the student population is Hispanic/Latino, about 22% are Asian, and about 8% African American. During my time as an Instructor or Teaching Assistant at the University of Illinois at Chicago, I took an active role in promoting diversity in the classroom. As a research mentor, I have always embraced and welcomed Latinos, African Americans, and other minority students into my research groups.

The following activities are examples of my experience in pursuit of a more diverse academic body. First, I encourage students to engage in peer discussion by providing them with an interesting culturally relevant discussion topic. Example topics may include why diversity matters in social media and how diversity impacts success in the workplace. I believe that a diverse and supportive environment in higher education can prepare students to become more well-rounded professionals. As an educator, I have learned that students become more tolerant as they learn to respect the difference of opinions within each other. Differing perspectives bring something unique to the table and can be a motivational tool to encourage others to think outside the box.

Another diversification activity is to utilize group activities by dividing the class into diversified groups of 4-5 students. For example, each group will contain different genders, ethnicities, and education levels because it will be created in an anonymous manner. I would provide students an opportunity to discuss and work on a culturally relevant assignment. Everyone can write two cultural celebrations that they participate in and have a round table discussion about who else may celebrate it, why it’s important and how they celebrate. This experience will allow students to better understand similarities and differences as well as may assist in understanding

stereotypes with their classmates. Classroom activities often require students to work in teams or groups. In order to successfully complete a task, it is essential to overcome differences and value the team.

As a professor, I will continue to incorporate diversity into my teaching materials and methods. It is my hope that students with diverse backgrounds will feel free to demonstrate their unique voices in class. My diverse background enables me to be culturally sensitive and enables me to understand how to relate to students with support and communication. As students contribute to discussions, self-confidence will increase. I sincerely believe I can contribute to my student's personal growth and motivate them to achieve their educational goals despite potential challenges related to gender, diversity or ethnic background.

My experience in the United States has been very beneficial in providing a comparative perspective which I truly admire and appreciate in American life. My approach to teaching students in a diverse student population has been to include materials that are ideal for teaching numerous cultures and historical backgrounds. I provide students with opportunities to introduce themselves and include their multiculturalism from the initial interaction on day one to presentations that may occur throughout the term.

I support the success of students from all racial, ethnic and gender backgrounds that are underrepresented in mathematics. One exceptional resource is The American Mathematical Society. They are committed to "promoting and facilitating equity, diversity and inclusion throughout the mathematical sciences." The AMS jointly with the MAA offers their book Living Proof: Stories of Resilience Along the Mathematical Journey as a free PDF download. It tells the stories of barriers underrepresented groups face in the mathematics pipeline and how perseverance and persistence garnered success. They hope that for the stories will inspire students to continue to persist on the road to becoming a successful mathematician. In addition, it is meant to assist teachers to relieve potential pressures on students when they experience struggle on their journey to becoming mathematicians. It is resources such as these that I will provide to my students.

Diversity can be a huge benefit to students, as it not only exposes them to new ideas and ways of thinking, it prepares them for the diverse workforce of tomorrow, in addition to inspiring creativity and innovation. I strongly believe we cannot grow if we stay the same, learn the same, and interact with the same people constantly. The only way to prosper as a society is to learn how to work well with one another regardless of gender, race, or culture.

In conclusion, I believe that I can promote diversity in the classroom and support the success of all students including those from racial, ethnic, and gender backgrounds that are underrepresented in Statistics. By incorporating my own diverse background and knowledge, unique teaching methods, and enthusiasm for professional growth, I am certain I can harness and promote diversity in all academic and professional situations. My ultimate goal is to become a professor renowned for his positive attitude, and willingness to create an informed and connected student body.