

Diversity Statement

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We live in an interdependent global society where each person has his or her own unique thoughts, ideas, experiences, and skills. Educators can have a pivotal role in exposing students to ideas and experiences that they may not have previously encountered.

So what is diversity? Diversity can be thought of in terms of race, nationality, and ethnicity, but let us not stop there. To be truly inclusive, we need to expand our vision. The world has rich physical, intellectual, sexual, experiential, economic, and spiritual variety, which together weave the threads that make up the tapestry of humankind.

I was extremely fortunate to have grown up in a welcoming home. My parents were not big travelers, but they brought the world to our dinner table. As a young child, I broke bread with people from all over the globe. I learned to appreciate wonderful customs and differences while at the same time recognizing the commonalities that bind all people together. I can't think of a more wonderful gift that a parent or a teacher could give to a young person.

I believe it is extremely important that individuals are exposed to ideas, people, and, if possible, experiences/environments that are very different from their normal lives. This hit home for me when I volunteered to be a videographer for a "Children as Peacemakers" video. This production was designed to help children solve differences in a non-violent fashion. The project was shot in Chicago at a school in the Robert Taylor housing projects in the middle of "Gangster Disciple" gang territory. I met some wonderful people who were living in a very dangerous situation, which was completely foreign to my life experiences. It truly expanded my worldview.

Working with physically and mentally challenged folks has also been inspirational. I have been involved in the video production of the Badger Camp telethon for physically and mentally challenged folks of all ages as well as directing local MDA telethons. In addition, I have spent much time working with students with learning disabilities and have been an advocate for students with physical disabilities. The University of Wisconsin-Platteville presented me with an award for this work.

Advising the Students for Peace and Justice group, which is dedicated to exploring the root causes of injustice and providing a safe environment for discussion, has been a gratifying and enlightening experience. We have held numerous forums and have brought in speakers and supported various student groups, such as the Alliance (GLBTQ), Black Student Union, International Students, and the Hmong Club.

Along with other faculty, I traveled to Germany, Sweden, and the Netherlands to develop university relationships for student and faculty exchanges and greater international understanding. While we were overseas we visited a variety of media outlets (newspapers, radio, TV, advertising agencies, multimedia producers), gaining insight we passed to our students. I encourage students to travel abroad and attend on-campus international events & speakers. I have worked with international students in and out of the classroom. For example, one semester I set up an independent study for a German graduate student to assist me in the teaching of my “Media and Culture” class. This scenario provided for a wider perspective and a wonderfully different class dynamic.

Throughout my teaching career I have attended various diversity related events and workshops. I have completed the UW-Platteville’s “Safe Zone” training, which is designed to inform the campus community about diversity and respect, especially toward gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and questioning individuals. My office has been deemed a “Safe Zone.”

I am proud to say that I encourage female students to pursue their dreams in areas that have been traditionally male oriented. Because women feel comfortable in my classes, they have the confidence to take on the responsibility of becoming my laboratory assistants. After graduation, they have the self-assurance to thrive beyond the classroom.

In conclusion, I am committed to diversity in all its forms and aspects. In our pursuit of educating the whole student, we have a responsibility to provide an environment in which the learner can be exposed to a variety of new and different ideas, people, and dialogs, all with the goal of expanding human growth and understanding.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David J. Meinhardt". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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