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### **Statement of Commitment to Diversity and Social Justice**

Early in my professional career, I had a moment of self-awareness brought on by a reading assigned to all staff members in university housing one summer at the University of South Carolina. This chapter caused me to reconsider my awareness, knowledge, and skills as it related to “diversity” and was a critical step down my path to considering higher education’s role in creating a socially just world, broadly, and my role in supporting student success for members of traditionally underrepresented population groups, specifically. More than that, it opened me up to greater amounts of humility through engagement in introspection and new perspectives.

This experience led me to seek out opportunities to serve on the diversity committees at the University of South Carolina in university housing and at Dixie State College. It has come up in other opportunities I have had, working on a self-study team with the disability services office at Georgia Gwinnett College and international work in South Africa. These experiences have become foundational as I develop and refine my research agenda and teaching. As I consider implications of my research and practice around programs that support student success, the question keeps coming up “who does this work for?” and “who has access?” While my research is not about underrepresented student groups on the surface, it is fundamental to my character as a scholar and a practitioner and I am committed to continuing to improve my awareness, knowledge, and skill in this area.

### **Ways in Which My Scholarship Seeks to Promote Diversity and Social Justice**

I have recently been giving thought to how, as a scholar, I might use my scholarship to promote diversity and social justice. I have come up with four actionable ways in which I can leverage my privilege embedded in my social and professional identities and subject positions. First, and most obvious, is that, as I mentioned in the opening paragraph, I must continue to question fundamental assumptions of access and equity in higher education. Because of my awareness of the issues of imbalance in the distribution of opportunity and power in higher education, I no longer have the luxury of not bringing up these issues in my research, scholarship, and writing. As a result, a staple in the introduction and discussion sections of my work has become to ask questions such as: Who has access to this? Who is systematically excluded? Who does this work for? How does this perpetuate systems of power? This is played out practically in my data analysis by disaggregating by key individual or institutional groups and in my research design by ensuring that data collection techniques are representing individuals and institutions in accurate and meaningful ways that will facilitate such a disaggregation.

The second is based on the recognition that if we can understand how and why educationally purposeful activities and interventions work we will have better answers to help higher education be successful for all kinds of students. It is important to recognize that this approach must be couched in the previous one. One example of an area where this is playing out in current conversations in higher education is in the research on the equity effects of high-impact education; students from underrepresented groups have outsized gains when they

participate in these activities. Moreover, starting to tease apart how educational systems work for one group sheds light on ways it might not work for others. This is important is because once we start unpacking why and how things work for students in higher education, it gives us language and lenses to start understanding how we can make it work for all groups of students, not just those who enjoy the choice architecture of the privileged.

Third - and this is where it gets a bit meta, but is not trivial - is the question of “Whose work am I citing?” I was made aware of the “Cite a Sista” campaign, started by PhD students at UGA. That bit of activism opened my eyes and I have been trying to be more thoughtful about whose work I cite. I am confronted with questions now such as, “Am I citing the same-old same-old sources?” and “Who are the scholars I keep going back to and how does that continue to perpetuate structures of class and power in our field?”. Recently, in writing the contextual statement for the new Cross-functional Framework on The First-Year Experience for CAS, I went back and intentionally looked through each section to make sure I was including multiple perspectives including scholars of color in the US, studies based on students of color or minority-serving institutions, and international perspectives.

The fourth is an emerging avenue for me - I am still working on being better at this one - and that is considering who I am partnering and collaborating with. Again, I face questions like, “Am I using my position to distribute opportunity in equitable ways?” We are all more likely to collaborate with people who think, act, and have similar worldviews to ours. People who have similar identities to ours are more likely to ask the same kinds of questions of the world that we are. However, if this goes unchecked, it has the same consequences as I mentioned before: maintenance of the status quo. If we, as a field, want to be better, to truly improve, we must be more thoughtful about with whom we continue to partner and who we systematically exclude. I am committed to becoming better at this by being more thoughtful and intentional about my collaborations and collegial relationships. I have made some strides, but recognize this will take active, on-going, and consistent effort to improve.