

Diversity Statement | Tatiana Londoño

As a bilingual first-generation Latina immigrant, I am acutely aware of societal inequities and their reflections in academia. While Latinos make up almost twenty percent of the U.S. population, they only compose four percent of the professoriate. Among this percentage, fewer identify as female and immigrant. Accordingly, I fully embrace my identities in my research, teaching, and service; doing so is essential for promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). At the same time, diversity is not monolithic. Universities are diverse in identities and experiences and, as a researcher, educator, and colleague, I realize that cultural humility and empathy are essential to maintaining DEI. In my research, teaching, and practice, I center the voices and lived experiences of excluded identities and perspectives. Importantly, I advocate for social justice and challenge oppressive systems to create spaces of community for those who traditionally lack them.

I grew up in a low-income Latinx household with immigrant parents who lacked college degrees and English fluency. Yet, my parents persevered; my father worked multiple jobs while my mother, who had a physical disability, took care of me. They taught me the value of resilience, survival, and community. Yet, they could not always protect me. Growing up, I regularly confronted and normalized experiences of xenophobia, sexism, and classism. It was only in college – at a predominantly white, affluent institution – that I learned what to formally call these experiences and their impact. Yet, just because we were taught what to call our day-to-day lives, does not mean we were supported – more than one professor told me I was not “cut out” for graduate school. I later learned it was not intelligence or determination that I lacked; rather, I lacked the privileges and support afforded to many of my peers. Now that I’m in a position to support students, I intentionally offer guidance that is tailored to student needs and connects their strengths to their goals.

Seeing these struggles and challenges among my students, I strive to support, empower, and advocate. First, I approach my content with cultural humility. I am not an expert in the experiences of all groups of people; therefore, I include scholarly contributions, creative material (e.g., documentaries, memoirs), and guest lectures from professionals and community leaders from underrepresented groups across the world. For example, in my Human Behavior and the Social Environment class, I show a documentary on China’s Mosuo matriarchy, which teaches students about non-Western family structures. This has previously prompted discussions about how Western influences (e.g., tourism) can initially seem beneficial to other countries but can erode traditional social structures (e.g., the abandonment of matrilineal families). Students walk away with a critical eye to social injustices around the world that can sometimes be obscured by economic development. Second, understanding that my privileges shape how I teach, I have students lead certain class discussions so that they can share their lived experiences with oppression and privilege, facilitating mutual learning, connection, and respect. For example, using a “diversity profile” exercise, students take stock of the multicultural diversity in their lives, and in the discussion, students learn about the assumptions they make about one another, how these assumptions are based on social constructions, and how diversity is more than just what meets the eye. Stepping back as an educator shows respect for students’ intrinsic knowledge and acknowledges different identities in the classroom and diversity in learning processes. Third, in pursuit of a positive, equitable classroom, my students and I develop “community agreements” to reflect on what we need to create such an environment and how to prevent or respond to potential harm. Finally, we often fail to expose minoritized students to campus resources that could be useful to them. To address this gap, I invite staff to talk about specific culturally responsive resources that might not have been otherwise advertised. I do the same with future career opportunities, inviting alumni that students can relate to – both in terms of identity and their work.

I strive to create equitable spaces on campus by mentoring and advocating for students from diverse and underrepresented backgrounds. For example, I mentor first-generation graduate students. I meet biweekly with students to provide a safe space, to debrief about their week, and to brainstorm strategies to overcome unique challenges and achieve their goals. One-on-one work with students is not enough to create institutional change in equity and inclusion. Thus, I am part of the doctoral committee with faculty administrators advocating for a more inclusive curriculum and effective retention of doctoral students from underrepresented backgrounds.

I also aim to create culturally responsive resources for students. At UT Austin, I am part of a multidisciplinary collective striving for the creation of a center for immigrant students. In my role, I conduct research and write proposals highlighting immigrant students' unique challenges and experiences, justifying the need for a center that offers tailored services. In order to promote equity and inclusion outside of the university setting, I focus on creating relationships with the general community that are mutually beneficial and are not extractive. I also promote social justice in the general community by being an ally and volunteering with local immigrant legal services to support individuals in immigration detention.

As a social work scholar, I am responsible for promoting an inclusive and just society. Thus, I aim to share my research with those working with Latinx immigrant communities and eventually create relevant interventions for these communities. This is a population that is increasingly diverse, socially and economically disenfranchised, and at risk for health and mental health issues. My research centers these inequities and disparities. More importantly, however, supporting diversity in research means centering the voices and highlighting the strengths of immigrants and the communities around them. Accordingly, I use qualitative interviewing methods that let participants guide their storytelling and the aspects they want to focus on. These techniques give space for the complexity of their experiences, including how immigrants survive and thrive despite their oppressive environments. I also use inclusive community-based participatory methods in the way I plan, recruit, and collect data. For example, most of my research questions emerge from informal conversations I have with immigrant community members about their experiences and needs. During each stage of the research process, I plan with and ask for feedback from social service agencies, scholars from other disciplines, and community leaders that are already trusted by, embedded within, and, at times, part of immigrant communities. I am also cautious about the conclusions I draw from the research and dialogue with the community to debrief these conclusions. I also make sure these relationships are mutually beneficial. I offer any services I can provide, such as training, community education, or volunteering for local efforts. Lastly, with the research group at the Center on Immigration and Child Welfare, I collaborate with scholars across the country on research, policy briefs, and the incorporation of research into trainings and community interventions. Our most recent brief summarized current gaps and needed improvements to post-release services for unaccompanied immigrant children. Currently, I am leading the design and implementation of a trauma-informed training curriculum for providers working with immigrant communities in New Mexico.

I will continue to promote equity and diversity as tenure track faculty. I want to collaborate with the university in fostering an academic environment that will minimize barriers for students and ease the process for them to accomplish their academic and professional goals. As tenure-track faculty, I will continue to highlight different backgrounds, viewpoints, and perspectives in my research, teaching, and practice and strive for a just and equitable society both within and outside the university.