



University of Pittsburgh

School of Arts and Sciences
Department of Economics

MARTA BOCZOŃ

Diversity Statement

No culture can live if it attempts to be exclusive. — Mahatma Gandhi

I was raised in Legnica, Poland, earned my undergraduate degree in Warsaw, Poland, participated in the Erasmus exchange program in Münster, Germany, completed my master's studies in Berlin, Germany, and since 2015, I have been living in Pittsburgh, PA, USA. In total, I have lived in or visited over thirty countries around the globe on four different continents, from Manchester, UK through Istanbul, Turkey to Tokyo, Japan. In this statement, I address an array of experiences related to diversity, equity, and inclusion that I have collected as a world traveler, undergraduate instructor, and academic researcher.

Discovering the world has always been my passion. It not only gives me the opportunity to grow, but most importantly, it teaches me respect, empathy, and kindness towards people of all colors, religions, sexes, ages, and nationalities. Specifically, exposure to diversity from an early age has helped me to understand and respect individual choices different from my own, for example with respect to education, career, or family planning, and that diversity should be valued and not discouraged. It also taught me the senselessness of biased and discriminatory actions and encouraged me to stand up against sex and race discrimination by participating in Pride Parades and supporting the #Dont-CallMeMurzyn campaign against the word "Murzyn," which is a Polish racial epithet used widely to describe and address Black people.

In the past ten years, I was met with love and tolerance at each step of my personal and professional career. In order to reciprocate the kindness that has been shown to me, I often volunteer to support those in need. For example, during my undergraduate studies in Warsaw, I volunteered to teach German to seniors and retirees at the University of Third Age and was a chief coordinator of *Discover Europe*, the biggest pan-European photo contest for students, aimed at supporting young artists and stimulating intercultural dialogue between Polish and international students. Moreover, I participated in two long-term environmental projects at the Conservation Volunteers Australia (Darwin, Australia) and the Southwestern Research Station of the American Museum of Natural History (Portal, Arizona), where I helped local researchers to run the stations and conduct field projects. Most recently, I helped high school students in Pittsburgh with their preparations for the *Euro Challenge*— a national competition on the understanding of the economy of the European Union.

At the University of Pittsburgh, I continuously interact with my fellow classmates and the faculty from all around the world. Over the years, these frequent interactions—inside and outside the classroom, e.g., during Department's Happy Hours— have helped me to further recognize, appreciate, and embrace various aspects of diversity in my professional and personal life. For example, two of my closest friends in the department and I come from different countries (Bangladesh, China, and Poland), family backgrounds, cultures, and religions. However, instead of drawing us apart, these differences have brought us together. In our first year, we formed a study group that helped us successfully pass our preliminary exams, and now we are jointly preparing to enter this year's job market. By combining one another's knowledge, experiences, and viewpoints, we have become the best versions of ourselves and have achieved what at first seemed unattainable (collaborations with the faculty, external funding opportunities, and peer-reviewed publications in academic journals).

As an instructor at the University of Pittsburgh, my priorities are to be equally considerate of my students, as I am of my co-workers, and to treat them with respect regardless of sex, race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, or appearance. In order to preclude any of the students from feeling neglected or discriminated against, I continuously encourage each and every one of them to engage in all class activities. I also observe their social dynamics with each other before, during, and after the class in order to make sure that nobody is treated unfairly or bullied by their peers. Moreover, I signal to my students that I value all of their experiences. In order to do so, I provide them with examples and exercises centered around topics that they may find relevant but otherwise difficult to talk about. For example, I discuss with them statistics on skin, hair, and eye color of newborn babies in the United States (when explaining the concept of statistical probability), and describe pros and cons of the Elisa HIV testing procedure (when discussing the concepts of independence and conditional probabilities).

During my most recent teaching experience at the University of Pittsburgh, I had the opportunity to work with a disabled student. Since her disability did not manifest in any easily recognizable symptoms, my priority, as a teacher, was helping her succeed in the class while not taking control of her choice to disclose her disability to other students. Also, I was evaluating her performance according to the class syllabus, but in order to help her meet the class requirements, I worked with her individually during regular and extra office hours. Each week, I met with her multiple times to answer her questions and help to solve class assignments. In addition, I provided her with much needed moral support by strongly discouraging her from dropping out of the class and emphasizing on the progress she was making. At the end of the semester, she received a B plus in my course—a grade she earned with her hard work and dedication. However, she was not the only one who learned something that summer. I myself learned an invaluable lesson that made me realize how much it means for those who are disabled or disadvantaged to have someone believe in them and help them realize that they are capable and worthy of success.

In addition to my personal experiences, I research diversity in the context of economic inequality in the USA. The reason for focusing on this topic is that income and wealth inequality in the USA surpasses that of almost any other developed country in the world. Even before the outbreak of the ongoing pandemic caused by a novel coronavirus disease, the gap between rich and poor Americans was already at a five-decade high. Although this is expected to worsen as the pandemic continues, possible countermeasures against the rising inequality and ways to measure it are still subject of discussion. This, however, is of great importance, since errors in the existing estimates of wealth and income inequality could lead to erroneous conclusions about the current state of the economy and, thereby, result in inaccurate predictions and ineffective policy recommendations. In particular, since income and wealth inequality are often subjects of political debates, it is imperative to provide the general public with an idea of how accurate these estimates are. Otherwise, the public can be easily misled by an unusually low or high value and consequently, either under- or overestimate the severity of the ongoing crisis linked to rising inequality. This, in turn, may result in voters misconstruing the effectiveness of current policies and lead them to express support for more radical proposals. As such, this and other studies on income and wealth inequality more generally are critical in fighting socio-economic disparities. They are fundamental not only in deciding on marginal tax rates for income but also in considering other forms of taxation. Consequently, in the long-run, they could help to either halt growing inequality, or eliminate barriers that hinder equal participation of the rich and the poor in the US economy.

To conclude, I am thankful for having been given a chance to study and live abroad. Over the past ten years, I have encountered people of different backgrounds and nationalities from all around the globe. These experiences not only helped me to widen my horizons but, foremost, were pivotal in making me understand the true meaning of diversity. I strongly believe that “no culture can live if it attempts to be exclusive” and that “our ability to reach unity in diversity will be the beauty and the test of our civilization” (Mahatma Gandhi).