Travis Chi Wing Lau
University of Texas at Austin, Department of English

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Statement

Much of my pedagogy, research, and mentorship has been shaped by scholars and activists in the disability community, particularly those who work on the issue of access. Tanya Titchkosky frames access as an "interpretive relation between bodies," which can be impeded by or enabled by boundaries created within university spaces. Inclusion is thus the opening up of this interpretive relation to as many bodies and minds as possible in a classroom community or in a department. I prefer a focus on access over diversity because it not only recognizes the unspoken expectations of fit and ability that define every aspect of higher education but also because it is a creative project of reinventing the academy for the bodyminds that labor for it and that we serve. As Sara Ahmed has pointed out, diversity can be precisely the means by which inequality and underrepresentation in the academy can be pointed at but not actually rectified. As a contingent scholar who is multiply marginalized, I have been particularly skeptical of diversity's institutionalization without actual, substantive redress of access to enable more scholars and students to have a place at the table. To be clear, this is not to dismiss the diversity work so often disproportionately placed upon marginalized scholars; rather, I center access as a way of thinking through what we actually mean when we say we are "doing the work of diversity." If access is not a stationary point reducible to simply checked boxes or compliances but a moving target adapting to the shifting needs of a particular community, so, too, is diversity, which cannot be simply a multiplicity of bodyminds in the room but enabling these bodyminds to thrive sustainably in the spaces we share.

I owe much of my thinking about access and inclusion to my early experiences during my undergraduate career working for Covel Peer Learning Labs, which later transitioned into the Athletic Peer Learning Labs. Over three years, I worked with primarily student athletes, international students, and first-generation students—three student populations that have unique learning needs frequently left out of discussions about diversity at UCLA at the time. So many of these students expressed a deep sense of alienation in large lecture courses run by faculty who seemed little invested in their struggles and needs. As an undergraduate peer learning facilitator, I learned how to move away from top-down, lecture-based teaching that tends to frame the student as a passive consumer of knowledge toward a co-productive learning (between instructor and student, among students) that takes seriously *how*, not just *what*, students are learning. Personalized dialogues about composition and the writing process took the place of tutorials and prescriptive advice. During my training, we experimented with digital methods like collective annotation and mind maps that increased access in the classroom, as well as flipped classrooms that empowered students to take ownership of their learning. Before I had really been exposed to disability studies, I was able to have conversations with my mentors and students about accessibility and inclusion—how they both can call into question the bodies and norms privileged by the academy. In the following years during graduate school as I taught at a community college and at an Ivy League university, I would learn what vastly different academic

institutions imagined as their ideal student and the consequences for those that escaped their imagination.

My investment in how and why bodies matter is also deeply intertwined with my own lived experience as a queer, disabled person of color. Prior to 1997, I had lived abroad in many different countries in Asia for most of my childhood. Having been enmeshed in multicultural urban environments like Singapore and Hong Kong, I was ultimately unprepared for my sudden relocation to conservative, suburban Georgia. Over the course of a decade, I found myself facing acute forms of homophobia and racism before I had even developed a vocabulary for identifying and grappling with either. My classes have thus served as spaces where I and my students build that vocabulary through difficult encounters with historical forms of oppression in literature, be it nineteenth-century eugenic treatises, abolitionist poetry, or AIDS narratives. If anything, being in the academy and working with students has revealed just how ubiquitous these traumatic experiences are and how much need there is for faculty to recognize and address these realities that students bring into the classroom. Rather than liabilities to be avoided or dismissed, these experiences can powerfully animate student scholarship when instructors encourage their students to write about issues that actually matter to them. My past continues to shape how I approach teaching and mentorship as acts of empowerment, and most importantly, acts of witnessing and care at a cultural moment when marginalized students feel increasingly unsafe and unsupported.

My precarious position as a postdoctoral lecturer has prompted me to think about how I can better improve access and inclusion for graduate student workers and other contingent scholars who continue to face obstacles within our academic systems. Aside from engaging in transparent conversations about how academia works with my students and creating resources for future postdoctoral fellows in the humanities, I have devoted much of my recent writing to the issue of academic ableism and the implicit ways in which academia functions by excluding bodyminds unable to keep up with its culture of hyperproductivity. I focus specifically on neurodiversity, particularly how academic culture tends to frame cognitive difference as the "unthinkable" to catastrophic effect in terms of mental health on college campuses, as well as faculty hiring and retention. This writing, along with my poetic work, has also been my way of modeling accessible public scholarship that can take place beyond the monograph or article and engage audiences beyond the academy who deserve to be included in these conversations. Most recently, I have collaborated with my colleague, Dr. Jason S. Farr (Marquette University), to produce a guide to conference accessibility now used at annual meetings for academic organizations like the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies and the Modern Language Association. Advocacy in these spaces has helped to shift the conversation toward access in a way that does not merely tokenize disabled experience but recognize how accessibility benefits every member of our scholarly community by being accountable to every member. This radical accountability is ultimately what disabled activists Sandy Ho, Mia Mingus, and Alice Wong have advocated for in their #AccessIsLove project: *access as a collective responsibility across difference.*