**Commitment to Diversity Statement**

Exploring nature, studying our evolutionary history, and seeking to learn about ourselves and the world around us, is a right that should be accessible, safe, and relevant to everyone. This requires taking a closer look at our own institutions, from what we teach to how we teach it. I approach DEI initiatives in three ways. First, as a teacher, I aim to create an environment that is open to and celebrates learners of all backgrounds and experiences, providing multiple ways for students to engage with material and feel comfortable communicating their ideas. Second, I endeavor to make science accessiblebeyond the classroom by creating true reciprocal relationships between researchers, students, and the community. As a white woman in STEM, I am actively working to better understand, navigate, and use my privilege to break down the very real barriers to entry in this field for underrepresented minorities. Third, to achieve these goals, I practice personalized mentorship, critical to nurturing a community of support that makes diversity, equity and inclusion a day-to-day reality in science.

My active teaching techniques break down the idea of the educator as the expert and learners as novices, giving students agency to be active creators of their own knowledge. An inclusive classroom to me means an environment that supports and fosters students as full individuals. Central to this is creating a course that all students can relate to and engage with. For this reason, in my seminar Introduction to Behavioral Endocrinology, I incorporated readings from a diversity of black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) scientists. The lack of racial or gender diversity in the core texts and scientists we learn about in our field is what led me and a group of peers to start a graduate student working group on “Rethinking the Fundamentals”. We worked with the E3B department’s newly formed Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee to revise the fundamental curriculum in order to reflect and incorporate contributions of BIPOC scholars and scientists, provide historical context for the tools we use today, and build a more ethical scientific practice. I worked directly with faculty teaching Fundamentals of Ecology and Fundamentals of Evolution to make curriculum changes and measure and evaluate student experiences with these changes; following our recommendation, the Fundamentals of Evolution incorporated a new discussion on the problematic history of the field, reviewing how evolutionary theory has been misused to promote eugenics and other racist ideologies. Similarly, Fundamentals of Ecology added new readings from indigenous scientists to expand upon the notion of how we study ecology. My assessment showed that students responded positively to all these initial changes, providing a foundation for further much-needed development.

Throughout my career, I have worked to remove the barriers that exist for marginalized peoples to access, engage in, and continually be supported by the scientific field, and ecology, evolution, and environmental biology in particular. Currently, I lead an inclusivity in STEM discussion group with fellow Frontiers of Science instructors. We engage in bi-weekly workshops with undergraduate students to discuss personal and systemic experiences in equity and diversity in the sciences, and educational spaces more generally. These open forums provide an opportunity for instructors and students to learn from each other and work together to increase accessibility to the sciences, with the goal of identifying actionable steps for integrating anti-racist and inclusive pedagogical practices into the science classroom. These initiatives have long been a part of my work. As an outreach coordinator at the Mpala Research Center in Kenya, I organized talks between researchers and the community to facilitate information sharing, and organized and implemented the “Mpala Girls Empowerment Project”, including lecture series, shadowing opportunities and graduate internships to provide mentorship and conservation education for young Kenyan women. It is very important to me to ensure that there is an equitable exchange of understanding and opportunity between scientists and their community. At Columbia University, I have also participated in other outreach events such as Girls’ Science Day and Earth Day at the Hudson Highlands Nature Museum, where I was able to share my curiosity and love for science with children from all backgrounds. Connecting with the community makes science a more equitable space.

In addition to creating more outreach opportunities, effective mentorship is crucial to making science more inclusive. Successful mentors build a sense of community and belonging, where mentees feel valued and accepted as individuals. In the lab section I ran for Environmental Biology II, one of my students asked to get more involved in our lab. Over the course of 2 years, I had the pleasure of acting as her mentor. In addition to teaching her skills in the lab, I helped her navigate choosing a major that best fit her passions, learning to work with difficult professors in the field, and juggling the many aspects of undergraduate academic life. Watching her grow as a scientist, researcher, and academic, culminating in her presentation at the Science Research Fellow summer symposium, was a highlight of my graduate career. I have personally benefited from having female mentors in the sciences as well. My Women in Natural Sciences (WINs) mentoring circle was a huge source of support as I struggled through the difficult period of thesis proposal defense and qualifying exams; and my personal mentors have been vital in shaping my identity as a scientist and teacher, pushing me to fight against the barriers facing women in our field. Based on my experiences and training, I developed the resource, *Mentoring in the Sciences: Tips, Tools, and Techniques for Being an Effective Mentor* in order to help build this community of effective mentors in the sciences. I look forward to “paying it forward” and serving as a mentor for not just self-identifying women but for all students with a curious mind for the sciences.

Whether as a teacher, researcher, or mentor, I am committed to making the field of ecology and evolutionary biology an inclusive and diverse community that welcomes all voices. Inspired by my own projects and the work of my colleagues, I think there is great opportunity to conduct biological research that centers on justice issues and empowers and benefits both students and the community. I look forward to working with the department to increase awareness of these issues, and develop outreach initiatives in the community.