

Claire E. Dunn
Diversity Statement

As a scholar and a teacher, I view the inclusion of diverse opinions and voices as essential to providing a full understanding of essential social science questions.

As a researcher, I study how political processes can either exclude or include certain groups in society. For example, in my dissertation, I examine the conditions under which governments are more responsive to the poor. While research suggests democratic politics often exclude poor citizens, my research finds there are ways in which poor citizens can make their voices heard and prevent the government from acting only in the interest of the wealthy few. Likewise, in another project, I analyze how the design of social policies can either encourage or discourage beneficiary engagement in democratic politics. Specifically, I find that conditional cash transfer programs increase political participation among beneficiaries as they become incorporated into the welfare state from which they were previously excluded.

In addition to studying ways in which politics can either exclude or include different voices, I also aim to include the perspectives different groups in my work. My dissertation focuses on the case of Brazil. Realizing that I am an American writing about Brazil, I have been sure to speak with Brazilian scholars and incorporate work by Brazilian researchers into my dissertation. Relatedly, my research is informed by listening to the experiences of those I study, particularly a large but often excluded group of lower and working class citizens. Incorporating such perspectives into my academic work not only provides for a broader understanding of key issues, but is also important for creating a more inclusive political science.

Diversity is likewise a key feature of my teaching. I create an environment in which students are encouraged to share their diverse opinions on issues. At the start of each semester I lay out ground rules for discussion, the most essential of which is to be respectful in interactions with classmates, particularly when we discuss controversial topics. While I encourage students to engage in constructive debate, I work hard to ensure such debates do not become disrespectful and systematically shut out certain voices.

I have had the opportunity to teach students from a wide variety of backgrounds at UNC. I have had numerous non-traditional students, first generation students, and international students as well as students from underrepresented groups including racial, ethnic, religious and gender and/or sexuality minorities. As a teacher, I make a strong effort to make myself accessible to all of my students and to provide additional support for those who may face extra challenges in finding success in college courses. I have also pursued additional trainings to serve as a better resource for my students including Mental Health First Aide and Safe Zone Ally Training.

In addition to encouraging diverse opinions in class discussions, I try to include work by a diverse group of authors in my assigned readings. As a student, I began to realize that the vast majority of reading I was assigned was written by men. As a teacher, I have made an effort to include more work written by women in my syllabi. Likewise, as a teacher of comparative politics, I have worked to include more work by scholars from different regions of the world.