

Naoko Skala
Statement of Diversity

As an educator who is from outside of the United States, my experience in higher education helped me to build a strong understanding of inclusion and diversity.

When I was an international student at Emporia State University (ESU), Kansas, I had faced some challenges because of the language, the culture and many things that were different from my own country. I was lucky to meet people who helped and accepted me, especially in the theatre department. The faculty and students were always supportive. They also encouraged my academic interest for theatre. Without that experience at ESU, I would never have pursued my career as a theatre educator and practitioner.

When I mentor or teach students, I always remember that experience at ESU. On the first day of my 100 level theatre class every semester, I can see the nervousness on some students' faces. Most of the students have never taken my classes or any theatre classes because they are the freshman or transfer students. Some are first-generation college students.

I believe one of the best ways to engage students is to communicate clearly with them. Many students are nervous because they do not have enough information or sometimes they do not know how to ask questions of the instructor. Some students are afraid of speaking in class. I always check the class schedule in the syllabus with the students at the beginning of every class session. It helps them to understand the outline of the class on that day and what we are going to do in the future. Students can practice reading the syllabus appropriately and they can prepare for future classes. If any special preparation is required for the 100 level classes, I usually send a reminder email to them one day before that class.

All students have some degree of adjustment when they first come to college. However, first-generation students often face greater challenges. One of my students was missing classes because of illness. She came to me and told me she could not go to the doctor because she had no health insurance. I was able to research the university's insurance plan and luckily it was affordable enough for her to enroll. I always try to be approachable and knowledgeable about university resources.

As an educator, I want to keep supporting students academic success and accept them for who they are in the same way that teachers I had in the past accepted and encouraged me.