

## **Diversity Statement- Charlie O'Hara - November 12, 2021**

My interest in linguistics has always been linked to my commitment towards fostering equity. During my undergraduate studies, I was considering pursuing a career in mathematics, but my main misgiving was the abstractness of the work. I could continue studying topological spaces; but the distance between my future research and the real problems I was identifying in the world was unsettling. I was beginning to understand the systemic structural biases present in our society that disadvantaged women, underrepresented minorities, disabled people, LGBTQ people, and others; while largely benefiting me as a cis white man. In linguistics, I believed it would be easier to work towards easing and potentially dismantling these biases, both through work on understudied languages and through pedagogy.

To this end, my first large project of graduate school focused on hand-digitization of a dictionary of the Klamath-Modoc language, an indigenous language of southern Oregon and northern California. My digital version of the dictionary is used by a member of the Klamath tribes who is working on revitalizing the language. Creating a small searchable organized digital database allows the analyst to perform computational tasks with the data, but it also allows the language teacher to be able to access necessary information quickly on the phone in the classroom.

I also intend to repeat these successes with other understudied languages. I saw firsthand how creating a searchable corpus of the Klamath-Modoc language allowed for me to discover subtle generalizations in the language which made a contribution to linguistic theory in general. Linguistic theory requires diverse study of languages beyond the commonly studied Western European languages. I intend to foster this focus on understudied languages to future students, by pursuing funding for undergraduate assistants to help digitize other languages. This experience can both enhance the scope of our linguistic theories, while offering students a deep insight towards data they could work on in the future.

Fostering inclusivity in the classroom and my research is also important to me. Computational and mathematical research is often intimidating for people without a strong background in mathematics and computation. Unfortunately, societal bias leads to underrepresented groups being less likely to have confidence in their math abilities. Therefore, it is crucial for the goals of equity to try to teach and present such material in a way that demystifies the high-level mathematics involved, and hopefully to use linguistics as a way to teach computational concepts. At the University of Southern California, I created and led a small reading group of graduate students studying formal language theory. One goal of this reading group was to use my mathematical background to help foster understanding of the formal mathematical field for my colleagues who had less experience and confidence in computational linguistics. This experience has helped me better understand how to help foster graduate students' comfort in discussing and working on intimidating computational topics. In the future, I plan to use the lessons learned here and from educational research to enhance my teaching and presentation of my own work.

In my time at the University of Michigan, teaching during COVID, I have worked hard to be empathetic, accessible, and flexible with undergraduates from a variety of backgrounds. Students differ widely in their access to reliable internet, quiet distraction-free places to attend class, and computing equipment. I have offered alternatives to live class presentations, allowing students to fully participate in class without being limited by their living situation. I make sure to check in regularly with all of my students, but particularly those that are struggling in the course. Due to my use of flexible assessment strategies, such as skills-based grading, I have been able to reach out to those students falling behind with empathy and strategies to help them succeed in the course, rather than punitive threats of lower grades. These interventions have helped several students in my courses move from falling behind to near the top of the course, and several students struggling with mental health and medical crises have reached out to me to thank me for being understanding and flexible.