

## **Wes Grooms, Ph.D.**

### Diversity Statement and Experiences

I inhabit a privileged social position as a cisgender white male. Yet, as a member of the LGBTQA+ community, I also know some of the challenges that can result from having to endure the disregard meted out to ‘others’ in our society. I am thoroughly committed to the challenging work of recognizing and undoing the harms of our inequitable social structures and conditions.

I have taught courses with highly diverse enrollments comprised of multiple non-majority demographic categories; the ratio of minority students in these courses has been as high as 48%. As a direct result of these experiences, I put to use contemporary diversity pedagogy research, which has informed my decision to begin courses by introducing myself as a cisgender gay male, indicating my preferred pronouns, and encouraging students to follow suit as they are comfortable. These actions are based on diversity pedagogy scholars’ reports of successful, albeit difficult, experiences utilizing them in their own classrooms to combat the culturally hegemonic gender binary and to move their classrooms beyond being ‘safe’ (but quietly intolerant) spaces to being spaces of brave discourse and learning. I also regularly work to diversify the scholars on my syllabi; one way I accomplish this is by seeking out and utilizing resources specifically designed to achieve this goal that have been developed by diverse scholars in my fields of work.

I have also participated in multiple instructor workshops on diversity and equity. These have influenced the design of my courses and the operation of my classrooms. For example, where appropriate, I start courses with exercises such as a ‘reverse foot race,’ whose ‘finish’ presents a physical representation of the vastly different places from whence people ‘start’ life and the impact this unequal start has on lived experiences and life outcomes; these exercises are especially impactful on diverse student bodies.

I am currently completing my invited tenure on the American Planning Association’s (APA) inaugural Social Equity Task Force. The task force was charged with producing resources and strategies for improving social equity through planning practice. Our final report will be incorporated as actionable items into the APA’s 2019 Strategic Plan. One recommendation in our report calls for collaborations between the APA, the Planning Accreditation Board (PAB), and the American Institute of Certified Planners to modify curricular and practice obligations in ways designed to achieve this goal.

These principles are also central to my research. My co-authored paper entitled “Public Administrator Practice as Recognition: A Philosophical Case for Public Sector Cultural Competence” promotes understanding about how we come to value our own culture, expect equal social treatment, and develop self-esteem for our individual and group-based attributes. It also explains that these processes constitute human needs and, as such, cultural competence is argued to be a necessary component of public sector practice. Another example is found in my co-authored paper entitled “Toward a Political Urban Planning: Learning from Advocacy Planning and Growth Machine to ‘Plannitize’ Urban Politics,” which proffers a theory-based foundation stone supporting planning’s normative goals of increased inclusion of diverse voices in planning processes and more equitable planning outcomes by arguing that societal equality can be enhanced by more vigorously recruiting minority community members into planning education programs and practice to better match the full participation in urban governance enjoyed by members of the hegemonic growth coalition.

In sum, I work diligently to check my privilege, and to conduct my research and teaching in ways that improves excluded peoples’ access to, and experiences of, higher education.