

Diversity Statement

Issues of diversity are close to my heart. I was raised by multiracial parents in a very multicultural environment in the Philippines. I could trace my family history to intermarriages of my Spanish, Chinese, and Filipino forefathers. Growing up, I made friends with people from all sorts of religious background and ethnicities. The Philippines is highly diverse in culture, religion, and other aspects, resulting from hundreds of years of occupation of Spaniards, Americans, and Japanese, among others. Through my life experiences, I recognize the challenges associated with having a highly diverse population facing high levels of inequality. But at the same time, I realized that diversity enriches one's culture and experience overall. I'm a firm believer that the benefits of diversity outweigh possible challenges associated with it.

One of the benefits of living in a highly diverse environment is the ease to which languages can be learned. Growing up, I had to learn three languages at the same time – English, Filipino, and another local dialect. My Spanish influence also helped me learn Spanish and Italian quite easily in college. In addition, I aced my Japanese courses while working on my Economics degree. Thus, when I came to the United States for graduate school, I didn't have to make significant adjustments, if at all. My unique exposure allows me to relate to the culture, food, and language of Latinos and Asians at the same time, while my highly-Westernized way of life in the Philippines helped me get accustomed to the American way of life here quite easily.

UIC has one of the most diverse student populations in the US. I take seriously the challenge to teach in a very diverse environment. I am very lucky that my experiences made me aware and sensitive to issues my students could be facing – issues which are related to race, gender, or even disability status. In my courses, I try to promote a very collegial environment. I ask them to do group projects to encourage interaction among students of different ethnicities and backgrounds. I also find a way to know the gender identification of some students if I feel it would be an issue to them. I ensure that students who have any form of disability are properly accorded consideration in my teaching methods and exams. It is probably a bit minor, but I try my best to pronounce everyone's names correctly. Being familiar with several languages, getting my students' names right has been less of a challenge.

My background and my love for travelling help me provide a more international and multicultural perspective to my teaching strategy. For instance, I am able to cite how tastes and preferences vary widely – from Asia to Europe to Latin America to the US. I take advantage of my previous role as an economist in the Philippine Central Bank to discuss the variation in monetary policy frameworks being practiced by central banks all over the world. Overall, I am able to introduce my students to economic and political issues that the rest of the world is facing, but they might not have heard of. By exposing my students to a wide array of perspectives and issues, I let my students appreciate the importance of understanding other people who may not have the same background as them.