

JOEL FREDERICK KIRK – DIVERSITY AND INCLUSIVITY STATEMENT

Being raised as a white, upper middle-class male in rural Northern England, issues of diversity, equity, inclusivity, and belonging were not often discussed in the insular communities of my upbringing. It was only upon entering the more cosmopolitan world of university lifestyle in my late teens that questions of DEIB first entered my ideology as a very naïve student in the early stages of career development. The generous, patient time of my more experienced friends and mentors helped me to slowly move past my ideological shortcomings. Such influential figures also helped me to come to terms with my sexuality as a gay man and the childhood trauma of growing up with a severe speech impediment for the first 14 years of my life; much of which had been long suppressed in my desperation to fit in with the conservative norms of my sheltered early years.

By the end of my undergraduate degree, I was an active member of my university's LGBTQIA+ society alongside volunteering as an academic advisor for international students. Musically, I voluntarily tutored for community ensembles catering to children in deprived areas. After starting my PhD in Buffalo, I was selected for the highly competitive Social Impact Fellowship. Through this program, I spent two months volunteering for a non-profit organization specializing in providing ice skating opportunities for the disabled alongside undertaking intensive courses on social innovation and minority welfare. I have continued to volunteer for this non-profit for the remainder of my time in Buffalo, also volunteering as the Music Graduate Student Association treasurer for the past two years. This role has involved the organization of social events, visiting guest speakers, and a research symposium with a commitment to diversity and inclusivity at the heart of the organizational process.

As for my research, I have presented papers on issues of race and sexuality in music at national and international conferences, and published peer-reviewed papers. My work has been

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performed globally by ensembles and festivals that hand-pick composers with voices firmly rooted in inclusive messages, and I have written music for amateur and community ensembles alongside virtuoso and professional groups. As a performer on the trumpet, I have forged strong links with local community ensembles in Buffalo through sustained voluntary membership. I endeavor to maintain DEIB as a key aspect of my artistic mission via continued engagement with community groups and the honing of a varied compositional toolbox which allows me to write in more accessible musical languages when required.

To me, anti-racism can be defined as an acute awareness of my ‘protective pillows’ of automatic privilege and over-advantage within American society as a white male. Such terms often stimulate responses of aggression within primarily white workplaces due to the ‘we already had a class on this’ ideologies that arise from ‘tick-box’ bureaucratic business structures. Robin DiAngelo refers to this as ‘white fragility,’ citing it as the leading cause of continued systemic racism in American workplaces in the 21st Century. I am aware that my identity as a white male mitigates my identification as a gay man in American culture, so I am cautious not to frame the marginalization of non-white communities through those of my sexuality.

When teaching subject matters involving minority groups, I am always mindful that I am leading discussion from an inherently privileged, disconnected perspective. Therefore, I ensure that my pedagogy is as informed as possible through use of current literature and examples, and I am open to students and peers critiquing my discourse for improvement. As DEIB is a subject area with a great deal of new research being published every year, I am committed to ensuring that my approach to pedagogy continually evolves with the forefront of significant developments in the field.