

## **Ana María Ospina Pedraza || Inclusion and Service**

During my undergraduate years at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Bogotá, I became accustomed to student mobilization and massive public demonstrations. Protests over budgetary cuts received ample support among undergraduates, who often went on strike blocking campus activities for months at a time. Upon coming to the University of Massachusetts, Amherst for my doctoral degree, I experienced the vast difference in campus political culture between public universities north and south and was surprised at the apparent apathy of my undergraduate students. The political dimensions of my cultural shock sparked my curiosity and have motivated my research on social movements ever since. Furthermore, that shock reinforced my belief in the power of a pedagogy of inclusion. I believe that my experience and skills can nurture an environment of inclusion at Furman University.

The position I inhabit today as an international scholar, product of public higher education, has provided unique insights into the challenges faced by students from underrepresented backgrounds, north and south. It also affords strategic knowledge of the experience of students navigating the immigration system. This privileged position and knowledge guide my pedagogical interventions and how I mobilize resources at my disposal to undo institutional barriers for students historically excluded from educational opportunities. Through teaching and mentorship, service, and organizing, I accomplish my primary purpose of securing inclusion and helping students attain their professional goals.

As a teaching assistant and instructor of record in Political Science and Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies, I have learned that securing the inclusion of all student voices and perspectives in class demands attention to power relations in everyday life. Grading participation and engagement based only on in-class verbal communication favors those who walk into the classroom embodying the privilege to have a public voice. To develop a fair evaluative scheme, I use tools that help me assess student engagement with lecture, but not only through public speech performances. For instance, I use online blogs to evaluate students' critical assessment of class material in a less intimidating format. Nonetheless, as the classroom is a space where students develop professional skills like public speaking, small-group discussions with real-time class reports encourage them to participate by breaking down the audience they speak to.

My service to the university has been in the promotion of institutional support for the inclusion of diverse voices. While at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, I was the student representative to the Graduate Studies Committee in Political Science, where I experienced firsthand the importance of including underrepresented voices in strategic spaces of decision-making. Additionally, my work at the Center for Latin American, Caribbean and Latino Studies, CLACLS, helped me offer institutional support to the work of emerging minority scholars while maintaining the connection between academia and activism alive. In the spring of 2018, we organized the conference "Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria: Unnatural Disaster and Transnational Community Responses," which gathered scholars and activist from the island to reflect on the still devastating impact that political neglect has had on the Puerto Rican population. During the 2018-2019 academic year, I was a committee member in the search for a professor of African American Studies and/or African Diaspora at the Department of Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies. This experience brought me closer to the dynamic and forward-looking scholarship conducted by black feminist scholars, and I look forward to continuing my intellectual engagement with their fascinating work through my own research projects.

Finally, as a student, I organized the Association of Latin American, Caribbean Students and Friends, an engaged graduate student organization dedicated to the support of Latin American and Latino students, and the advancement of knowledge on the critical relationship among the Americas

and the United States. With student conferences and film screenings, we reached a community willing to learn about issues affecting Latino/a communities in the States. Through this experience, it became clear that for students from underrepresented backgrounds it is crucial to have spaces of informal association where they can develop a sense of belonging in campus life. I can offer my experience organizing on campus as a mentor to undergraduate organizations, to help them develop informal or institutional spaces that support their educational and professional goals.

I look forward to bringing the skills I have acquitted in pedagogy, service and organizing in support of an inclusive community at your institution.