

Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity Statement for Hayden C. Dawes

Social Work has a complicated history of both dismantling oppression and being complicit in it. However, I became a social work practitioner and researcher because of the profession's important role in uprooting oppressive systems at the individual, familial, group, societal, and global levels. Throughout my career, I have committed myself to dismantling oppression by centering diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) throughout all my efforts, including in my practice, teaching, leadership, service, and research.

Drawing a Larger Circle: Positionality and My Commitment

As a Black Queer man raised in cultural contexts of Europe (e.g., Italy, the Netherlands) and the American South, I am aware of how my identities—through both privilege and marginalization—shape how I view and navigate the world. Furthermore, I understand how these processes are also fixed and context-specific. My experiences have allowed me to be especially aware of how people are alienated by dominant forces and made to be *othered*. To use the words of Pauli Murray, “*I intend to destroy segregation by positive and embracing methods. When my brothers try to draw a circle to exclude me, I shall draw a larger circle to include them.*” Therefore, I remain committed to drawing even larger circles around me—to fully embrace more of the alienated parts of self and that of others—through my actions in practice, teaching, leadership, service, and research.

Drawing Better Circles in Practice and Teaching

My commitment to DEI precedes and goes beyond my academic ventures. Before enrolling in the Ph.D. program, I was the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBTQ+) Veteran Care coordinator for the Durham Veterans Affairs Hospital, where I coordinated care, supported, and advocated alongside LGBTQ+ Veterans. Furthermore, my private practice focuses on addressing LGBTQ+ people of color's mental health concerns.

Through the value of humility and the practice of decentering my own experiences, I have learned how to be more inclusive and responsive to others through relationships and community building. For instance, in working alongside and teaching people who are neurodivergent, I have become more aware of how important it is to create a neurodivergent-affirming learning environment by providing accommodations that allow neurodivergent people to participate fully. As a recent example, when I moderated a panel and facilitated programming with question-and-answer components, I ensured there were note cards so that people could write their questions and provide them to the presenters and myself. People generally overly stimulated by auditory engagement voiced feeling more comfortable engaging in this format.

Due to the marginalization that I've experienced, I remain dedicated to listening and learning from others' experiences. Going beyond knowledge acquisition, I aim to do my best to draw better—more inclusive—circles by actively creating spaces that invite people to show their whole selves. I am very interested in joining an academic environment where I can further this effort. I could support students in developing their projects and reflections from an anti-oppressive lens amid field placements that may not be considering these matters. Such an occasion would provide an opportunity to *draw better and broader circles*. Overall, I aim to stay open and actively engaged in bringing about collaborative change while supporting students on and off campus and assisting an academic community in upholding anti-racist principles.

My pedagogical work is informed by bell hooks' ideas and others engaged in critical inclusive pedagogy. For example, in my teaching, I often meet with all students before the first-class period to understand who they are as people first, even before as students. Also, I meet with students to learn about their unique needs and life situations. All the while doing what I can for them to be more fully included in the classroom by making appropriate accommodations in my teaching. As an example, I have encouraged students who are parents to attend hybrid synchronous classes at home online if that makes learning more accessible for their family constellation and their overall needs.

Drawing More Complete Circles with Leadership and Service

I am often the only Black queer person at the tables in academia and other organizations. Therefore, I endeavor to draw a *more complete circles* by centering my perspective and the perspectives of Black people and other oppressed peoples in all contexts. My service as a student representative on the Doctoral Program Committee and Diversity Committees at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill has afforded me the opportunity to conduct this work in an academic setting. During my time on the Doctoral Program Committee, I supported the committee in evaluating and reimagining grading practices that disproportionately and negatively impacted students of color. Furthermore, seeing that the norms of academic writing tended to privilege white students more than their fellow doctoral students of color, I asked faculty members to consider what writing support students, particularly doctoral students of color, needed to succeed in the program and academia. As a member of the Diversity Committee, which oversees all the diversity initiatives of the School of Social Work, I was part of discussions about disability justice programming and curriculum changes. Additionally, as a Ph.D. candidate and adjunct faculty member, I frequently mentor and support students with shared identities.

Drawing Stronger Circles Using Research and Beyond

My research centers on the well-being and mental health of LGBTQ+ people of color, a group that has largely been neglected in the social science literature. Therefore, I focus on *drawing stronger circles* with research to fill this gap to improve social work services, especially mental health treatment for this population. As an example, I recently led a team of eight researchers to publish a systematic review on LGBTQ+ people of color's mental health and substance abuse treatment experiences. From the findings, we highlighted the need for additional efforts to advance services to meet this population's desires and needs. My research projects that do not prioritize this population remain focused on other socially vulnerable groups. For instance, an ongoing research project highlights the voices and experiences of first-generation Ph.D. students of color. The aim is to use the findings to influence social work doctoral education in how we can better construct academic environments that offer more ease and dignity along with the rigor for first-generation Ph.D. students of color.

Conclusion

I am eager to build upon my previous and current work advancing DEI as a new faculty member. My ultimate aim is to demonstrate courage in shaping the discipline of Social Work through teaching and mentoring students and in influencing social systems through my practice, research, and leadership.