

You have to start somewhere,
to get where you want to be!
Building Community and Supporting Diversity

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Outline

- Why have someone work on community building and diversity?
- A few lessons
- Outcomes and successes
- “So, where do I start?”

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What barriers to building community students face at your institution?

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- ④ Repeat steps 1-4.

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- Get students to help you organize these things, or give you advice about what to do!

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- Math courses, what to take when, etc.
- Writing a senior thesis, to dispel myths.
- Collected experiences of and advice from women in math at Harvard (undergrads, grads, post-docs, faculty), shared them among the group, and shared parts of these to key faculty members.
- Summer research opportunities.
- Applying to graduate school, the GRE, etc.
- How to ask for a recommendation letter.
- Still needed: careers outside of academia.

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How do students find such information at your institution?

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So students turn to their connections.

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- One or more of their parents or family members have been to college or even graduate school, or have connections for internships and summer work;
- They came well-prepared academically, from a strong high school;
- They have acquired college or grad school survival skills (from teachers, parents): collaborating on homework, going to office hours, talking to professors, applying to scholarships and internships;
- Graduate students and professors will talk to them, give them advice, encourage them forward, tell them about opportunities;
- They are surrounded by similar students and faculty, in terms of: race or ethnicity, gender identity, religion, background, socio-economic status, etc.

Leveling the playing field

We want to level the playing field for our students, so all have access as much as possible to the information and advice they need to succeed.

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“Gripe sessions” are highly recommended if you are willing to listen (and not defend yourself), if you take it seriously, and if you get back to students about it.

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From this stemmed two things:

- an ongoing collaboration with a few key students, highly motivated to have better gender diversity in the math major;
- and a discussion among 2 other faculty members and me, about what we can do to support diversity. Led me to organize a little “diversity training” at our annual calculus teacher training.

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- Meetings every week or other week, with a reading to do ahead of time. Readings might be from research literature; experiences of minorities in math or science; resources on allyship.
- Special meetings:
 - ▶ Invited 2 graduating seniors to give us their honest thoughts and feedback on the department.
 - ▶ Took an allyship training by our Office of BGLTQ student life, and a Gender 101 Training from the Women's Center.
 - ▶ Incorporated some of those ideas in a training for our course assistants.
 - ▶ (Other available trainings: bystander training from Office of Sexual Assault Prevention and Response, online course on religious literacy, negotiation/mediation/listening skills workshop...)

Results?

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- The word is getting around that we want to support our students coming through calculus (as opposed to those more advanced first-year courses) who want to become math majors.
- We have gained credibility, at least among some students, that some of us really care and are trying our best. That gives students more confidence and trust in us and the department.
- Numbers...
- The “Gender Inclusivity” student group has been highly successful — at the expense of the math association...
- Do we need to tackle campus culture next?
- Some students are still quite critical — all the better to keep us going.

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- Add a blurb to your personal homepage about how you support diversity. (See my website for example and links.)
- Get someone to do a training in your department!
- Talk to students. Seek them out. Interview graduating seniors.
- Ask students what they want or need, and ask them to help you make this happen. Seek their input and help. (“Gripe session” .)
- Attend student events, if they are ok with it. Support students in organizing what they want to organize.
- Find a way to spark discussions. You never know who your allies might turn out to be.

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Visit my website for tips and a “checklist”:
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Start with one thing, then another, then another.
See where this takes you,
and who comes along for the ride.

Who will commit to doing one thing to build community and/or support diversity during the upcoming semester?

Who will commit to creating a mechanism for rewarding those who take on this work in your department?