

Please answer any of the following guiding questions:

1. Which parts of your identity are most important to you in academia? Why do you find them important?

I identify as a queer woman with disabilities. I think that as much as I was trained/taught that my field (STEM) is all about the technical material and that my identities (queer, feminine, disabled) shouldn't *really* have a part in my work, it absolutely does. When I was younger, I tried to convince myself of this, but I think even at a young age I knew that my identities were influencing my presence in academia.

There aren't many like me in my field; at least, if there are, I don't see many of them in my classroom, at conferences, or at the office. I feel like when I find others like me, we tend to stick together and support each other, but we are a small fraction of the room.

I think that there are struggles that queer people, women, and disabled people go through on a daily basis, and sometimes there isn't even enough room to deal with them in academia. For any of these identities, the struggle can be loneliness and feeling disconnected from the broader community. We heard some examples in week 2 on this topic, actually. Other times, those struggles are maybe more obvious, like when I have to work from home some days because I need to rotate my heating pad and ice pack.

I think the culture in academia (at least in my field) feels like it carries its own energy/wave, and to be successful, you just have to keep up as best as you can. That "wave" seems to be a standard set by decades of common practice. I think there are more conversations happening around accommodations and giving room for new ways to conduct our work, but finding people who advocate for that is like finding unicorns. I feel lucky that I work with people who are very understanding and supportive of me (as a person, not just as a student or researcher), but I know that's an exception, not the standard in my field.

This is all to say that my identities are important in academia because *I go through the world differently and do my research differently than others do* (because of my identities). Trying to conform to the aforementioned "wave" causes me to burn out and spiral, so I try to exist in academia as *me*. Any other way is unsustainable for me. But, that doesn't mean that I am necessarily comfortable doing so.

2. Which parts of your identity are challenged within academia? What have they taught you about navigating academia?

A while ago, I used to tutor for an engineering tutoring center. We had in-person and tele-calls, so we took questions from both queues on shift. Our mic didn't work very well for the online tutoring, so sometimes you had to reconnect it and it took a while. One time, a student came on, "sir I have a question, sir I need help now, sir!" and I typed in the chat explaining that I would be ready shortly, but I needed to fix the mic. Once I got it working, and the student heard my feminine voice asking how I could help them, they said, "oh, never mind," and logged off. So, I can only assume that the student didn't want help from me because I sounded like (and am) a woman.

At first, I'd have to tell myself to "be a b****," when in reality I was just being mildly assertive. But I think I had to put myself in the mindset of "be mean back" to get just a little strength to stand my ground (not even really push back). Now, I think I can handle confrontation a lot better. I wouldn't go so far as to say that I am comfortable with it, but I am lot quicker to just cut things off if I need to be protective.

I talked to another faculty who identifies as an introvert and she said, "...so I'm fully in favor of

introverts [showing up] and insisting on doing it in a way that maximizes their ability for creative thought and supports them to get the most out of it that they can. I'm similarly irreverent in my work-life now—if I can't show up as myself, what's the point of showing up?" That made me feel a lot better about attending it in a way that I am comfortable.

These experiences taught me to be protective of my identity and how I exist in academia. I admire people who have “quiet strength,” and seem unbothered when they are challenged. I also admire people who are more brash and will be more vocal in protecting their identity. I think at different times in my life (and in academia), I've rotated being more quiet and more vocal. For me now, I feel better having the confrontation than if I didn't (which later leads to me thinking about “what if?”), or at minimum, challenging the situation back with my needs. *Why should my identity be challenged within academia, why can't I challenge academia back?*

3. Which parts of your identity inform your approach to teaching? How can you draw strength from these identities?

As mentioned earlier, I know how lonely my field can be for people like me. I come from a very proud family, so I didn't really seek formal support until five years ago, honestly. So, I know how hard it can be to not only be lonely, but also to struggle in silence. I know that my experiences aren't unique, though, and that are plenty of other students/people going through similar struggles. I want to help these students, especially because I think my experiences have positioned me to be able to do so.

Broadly, I find strength in being myself. I can't work for very long pretending to be someone I am not. So, *I draw strength from my identities by making a safe and comfortable space for me to exist in.* I take breaks to be alone. I connect with other queer folk and women.

4. What are some personal experiences that have impacted your teaching?

One of my professors at undergrad had very lively office hours. We would go to ask questions about the homework, but it would often turn into us working with each other and he'd jump in every so often. A lot of the times, we'd run over time because we were so busy chatting (about the class and life in general, like gardening and hiking). So, this helped to instill the *importance of teaching the student, not the content.*

Those same office hours were really about getting to the meat of the problem at hand. The professor didn't care too much if we were “clean” in our answers, but he did care that we could be convinced of our results/proof/solutions. He said that pretty writing can come with time, but he cared that we really understood what we were doing. As an analogy: $3^2 = 9$ is true, but do you really understand that $3 \cdot 3 = 9$, or that $3 \cdot 3$ is really $3 + 3 + 3$? I think this gets to the core of what it means to be a good scientist/engineer/mathematician: really love and appreciate the content, debate about it, be curious about alternative explanations. As a teacher, *I'd love to instill a similar sense of curiosity for the “meat” of what we do rather than doing problem sets quickly and cleanly.*

5. What are some personal experiences that have taught you a lesson(s) about teaching?

I was very fortunate to have some really supportive and kind people in my life who helped to kick-start a sense of belonging and confidence. One of my professors at undergrad was so, so, so cool and caring, and he did a lot of work to boost me (and other students). I emailed him at the end of the semester and told him that he really changed my life/career and gave me a new hope that I could really go to grad school if I wanted (“I am good enough for that?!”). He was the first professor I had who seemed to really care about his students, and that was just so cool for me (he'd

also bring greens from his garden and check how our life was doing in general during office hours).

He later told me that he was practicing a new technique he learned from attending the Women in Math club called micro-assertions (yes, the old German man cared so much about all of his students that he was going out of his way to the Women in Math club). He said he didn't really get it at first because they're little boosts, so who actually cares to hear them ("if you got that part right, you know you did, so how does it help for me to comment on that?"), but that he'd try it anyway because who knows who needs it? Me! I needed it! So did everyone else who heard those little boosts! Those little comments chipped away at my "imposter syndrome" throughout the semester and opened me to the possibility that I could go for my dreams if I wanted to (Ph D).

It's amazing reflecting on that, having been both a student and instructor in different capacities. *I will never forget how important it was for me to hear his micro-assertions.* I plan to use that in my own teaching, too. It's important to be visually supportive of your students, especially in frequent little ways.

Further, *I am inspired by the fact that my old German professor was still learning how to be a better instructor,* and went out of his way to do so. I hope to never stop learning how to support my students (hence, this workshop series!) and learning from my students.

6. What elements of dialogues do you hope to engage with through teaching?

I want to emphasize mindful, deep listening and understanding; ask questions to understand more. These are important for scientists!

7. In what ways do certain parts of your identity inform your approach to implementing dialogue (or parts of dialogue you hope to engage with) through teaching?

I think I can tend to be quiet as an introvert, so I would like to make sure that the space is comfortable for people to share their thoughts. I think it's important to emphasize being aware of how much we are all sharing so that no one accidentally takes up someone else's space.