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Minority & Friends Network  
Oshkosh Placement Exchange  
Travel Grant Essay

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**Philosophy on Inclusivity and Application to Higher Education Experience**

I am truly passionate about creating and promoting an inclusive community. I have many truths I hold about how best to create and maintain an inclusive environment where everyone feels welcomed and included, and I hope you find meaning in reading them.

**Humanity First**

I believe in treating everyone first and foremost as a human being who matters and has worth. Humanity must be at the forefront of every interaction. Dehumanization is one of the worst forms of cruelty and marginalizes the core of someone's being. A guest speaker came in to one of my undergraduate classes and told us the world would be a much happier, healthier place if everyone treated everyone else as if they wore a shirt that read "I matter." That message has stayed with me at the forefront of all my interactions with people. I believe each person has a purpose and has something to teach me and give to the world. It is my job to discover that potential in others and value them for what they contribute to the world.

**Respect Everyone**

I believe individuals and their unique cultures must be respected. Judgment of an individual and his/her choices should be removed to make space for understanding. Each person makes his or her own choices based on motivating factors that can never be known about a person. Judgment stifles dialogue. In my experience I try to say, "Tell me more about..." rather than "Why would you...?" I believe taking out the "why" encourages others to be completely candid and feel comfortable telling me more about themselves and their experiences.

**Educate Yourself & Others**

I believe I must continue to educate myself and strive to educate others about various cultures and lifestyles. This includes all forms of diversity, which are too numerous to list.

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Through this continual education I learn more about myself as well as individuals and populations of people who have had different experiences than me. As a graduate student and Residence Hall Director, I make it a priority to become educated about issues related to diversity. I engage in conversations with my residents and staff members about their families and cultures. I had the opportunity to serve on the Diversity Action Committee through the Upper Midwest Region Association of College and University Housing Officers (UMR-ACUHO), which allowed me to learn from others in the field. I also completed a course on International Education during my graduate work, which was immensely helpful in understanding international students' experiences. I will continue to educate myself as I leave graduate school because I am so committed to furthering my own education and passing on what I have learned to others.

**Use Language Wisely**

I believe it is imperative to pay attention to language. Language reflects thought. If we can modify our language to be inclusive, we can transform our minds, behaviors, actions, and attitudes. One of the very first things I discuss with a new group I am working with is appropriate language. I make it very clear that dehumanizing language will not be tolerated because language is a key factor in creating a community where everyone feels valued. I also teach them about using person first language, where the person is given priority over anything else. For example, saying a person with a disability rather than calling him or her a disabled person. I also educate them about using the term "accessible" rather than "handicapped" and explain why the difference in words is so important.

**Listen To Stories**

I believe everyone has stories to tell about their life that reveal their values and experiences. In order to understand someone more fully, I must pay attention to these stories. In

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my experience, I like to ask people to tell me more about themselves, their lives, and their hopes for the future. I believe I learn more about someone by asking an open-ended statement than I ever could with using narrow questioning. Stories are another way that help me understand others.

**Obey the Platinum Rule**

I believe others should be treated as *they* wish to be treated. Treating others as you wish to be treated only further divides us and leads to verbal and nonverbal miscommunication. Treating everyone exactly the same or as you would wish discounts their individual experiences. People must be treated as they wish to be treated to feel valued. I try to educate others on why the Platinum Rule is better than the Golden Rule, and I base my interactions with others off of what I know of them and what they have told me they want.

**Serve as an Advocate**

I believe I must serve as an advocate and ally for underrepresented populations. Too many people are silenced, and I must use my privilege to speak for those whose voices have been taken away. In order to do so, I must understand the social system that has created disparities and acknowledge the privileges that exist. I have always served as a change agent, and if there is something that needs to be modified to create a better environment for our students I will lead the movement to accomplish it. I enjoy getting others to join in a cause and seeing the difference it makes in others' lives.

I believe I have been a role model for serving as an inclusivity advocate, and I have been guided in my endeavors by these personal philosophies. There is still so much I would like to know and further educate others on, and I hope to find an institution that will allow me to continue to pursue this passion as a professional. Thank you very much for your consideration.