

## Carlie Antes: Statement on Diversity, Inclusion, Equity & Belonging

As an educator, artist, mother, and first-generation scholar from rural Nebraska, I believe that fostering a diverse student body and atmosphere is perhaps the single most important contribution a University can make to their students' education. In being a first-generation scholar from a town of 400, I approached college with little exposure to the vast ways of thinking and existing that differed from my own. And while my experience is not true for all students of rural environments, it does serve as a lens through which I now view the value of diversity within the college experience. It is at the college level where all students—regardless of background or demographic—should be ensured opportunities to engage with, learn from, and celebrate the individual differences and varied experiences that shape a person's world view.

As an educator in the arts, I believe that art should maintain an entry point for critical thinking and discourse. I work to make certain that all studio/classroom encounters promote a culture of respect and dignity and that these spaces maintain a sense of security where students can create freely and engage in artistic forms of self-expression.

In facilitating a sense of belonging, I encourage students to look beyond their own interests and find significance and meaning in the shared existence and experiences that occur throughout a specific space and time. My teaching approach encourages dialogue that questions pre-conceived biases and notions of *value* through the lens of art. I ask students to consider value as being fluid and subjective rather than fixed, and encourage them to seek value in the limitless possibilities of what they do not yet know. Similarly, I ask students to identify the binaries and value systems that exist within various fields of artistic study. Together, we deconstruct these ideas by looking at a diverse range of contemporary artists whose work touches on overlapping ideas or methods of artistic practice—thus, extracting them from any preconceived binary. In completing this exercise, students become able to recognize the *similarities* within perceived differences, and observe the overlap in tools, knowledge and resources that seemingly disparate artists and practices impart to one another. These conversations prepare students to follow the same line of thinking into other facets of life—considering lived experiences that differ from their own—and leads them to a better understanding of how diverse perspectives serve to enrich not only the communal studio/classroom environment, but every avenue of human existence.

In addition to nurturing a culture of belonging, I actively promote diversity by ensuring all lectures include contemporary artists from a variety of backgrounds. I want each student to be able to identify one or more artist/characteristic throughout a given lecture with which they can connect. This means that I am continually reassessing the art historical canon, and introducing artists who identify as women, mothers, persons of color, LGBTQ+, and neurodivergent—as each have been historically under-represented within the arts.

I take pride in cultivating a space of inclusion and emotional safety for a diverse group of undergraduates; I work to grow and maintain student trust in all that I do, striving to meet each individual's needs with consideration, empathy, and encouragement. However, even with diligent effort, I acknowledge that I may not have the independent resources to support the personal and unique challenges some students may face. It has been important to me, during my time at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, to maintain a list of campus resources for students who may need additional assistance—including Services for Students with Disabilities, Title IX resources, and mental health resources available through the Office of Academic Success.

As a graduate student at UNL, I have been fortunate to serve as Co-Chair for the Graduate Student Assembly's Academic Affairs Committee. This experience has provided me valued insight to many of the specific challenges that face international students across campus. For this reason, my work on the Academic Affairs Committee has been focused on improving working conditions for graduate students—with special consideration to the unique needs of international students. Together, our committee is working to develop and propose policy changes that concern faculty/graduate relationships and abuse of power disputes.

As best practices and resources for promoting equity, inclusion, diversity and belonging may mature over time, I look forward to continuing my own journey, keeping an open mind, as I strive to continually adapt my practices and routines for new students, emerging issues, and the evolving ideals of our shared society.