

## DIVERSITY STATEMENT RESOURCE GUIDE



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## **What Is a Diversity Statement and Why Is It So Important?**

*Diversity statements* have become an integral part of the materials submitted as part of an application for employment. They are just as important as the resume, cover letter and writing sample. A *diversity statement* is a personal essay that is a depiction of your past experiences and explains how these experiences have contributed to your personal and professional growth. It allows the applicant the opportunity to explain to a search committee the distinct qualities and commitment s/he can bring to the table.

Many law firms, government agencies, courts, and nonprofit organizations facilitate hiring programs based on diversity. The goal is to increase the pipeline of the types of potential hires. Because clients are demanding more diversity in the workforce, such programs have been instrumental in increasing the number of minority applicants as well as those from other under-represented populations.

## What Makes Me Diverse?

Defining “diversity” or what constitutes “being diverse” can be challenging. Many are confused because more often than not very little guidance is provided as to what the employer is seeking and what is meant by the term diversity.

Here are some diverse factors to consider:

- Race
- Ethnicity
- Gender
- Sexual orientation
- Religious affiliation
- Socio-economic status
- Education background

This is not a comprehensive list, but just a few examples how to illustrate your diversity.



## Where Do I Begin?

The first step is doing your research. You should identify the specific initiatives that appeal to you as well as conduct an in-depth review of the employer facilitating the program. You want to ensure that your interests are aligned with all that the organization has to offer. This can be practice areas, professional development opportunities, locations and ties to the local community. **Most importantly, pay close attention to the requirements and the application deadlines.**

You can find listings for these opportunities on CareerLink and in the Diversity Initiatives & Fellowship Guide.

*Before you start writing, think of the following:*

- Outline how you define diversity.
- Ask yourself, how do you embody diversity?
- Ask yourself, how has your experience with diversity (exposure to things outside of your norm) impacted your personal growth?
- Ask yourself, how has your experience with diversity (exposure to things outside of your norm) impacted your professional growth?
- How will you contribute to increasing the diversity of our profession?

Finally, make an appointment with Career Counselor and Diversity Liaison on [Careerlink](#) to receive additional guidance on drafting your diversity statement.

### ***Statement Example A. 1L Summer Associate Diversity Fellowship***

***The following example resulted in the author receiving an interview for the fellowship and an automatic call-back for the 2L summer associate position. Permission was granted prior to publication.***

*Bam!* I slammed my knuckles against the table to signal that I passed my turn. Every weekend of my childhood in Orlando, Florida, I spent my time playing Cuban double-nine dominos with my paternal grandparents. I found those weekends to be my gateway into a culture and home left behind many decades ago. I woke up at sunrise with my grandfather to make *café con leche*, I danced with my grandmother's delicate scarves to Beny Moré, and I was called *Señorita Munoz* for the first time at six-years old by the man behind the coffee window when I ordered *guarapo*, a juice extracted from sugar cane. Although my story seems exotic to many people, to me being a bilingual, Latina in Orlando, Florida, felt like the norm. My classmates abundantly filled my life with different languages, religions, and backgrounds. Within that setting, I felt that I added to the diversity of my surroundings while rarely feeling demoted by my minority status. However, I found that Miami was just one small part of the world and that in other locations cultural dynamics manifested in varying ways.

Academically, at the University of Texas in Austin, Texas, I focused on religion because of its juxtaposing effect in our society: religion provides unity, separation, war, and peace. Furthermore, religion is so personal and sensitive, yet constantly discussed in the media. My studies highlighted an issue in my family; although I studied International Affairs and Religion, with a concentration in Judaism, I had a Catholic upbringing and my maternal grandfather was a Baptist minister in Puerto Rico. My grandfather and I sang hymns in the morning when he would read the Bible, yet when I asked him to attend Christmas mass at my Catholic Church, he refused. I found myself curious about this dividing phenomenon that religion can play in our society—for example, my Peace Studies project focused on the media coverage of Arabs and Muslims and its effect on societal relations and national security. I brought this aspect to student life at my university by participating in the President's Council on Diversity and Inclusion where I advocated for an expansion of interfaith initiatives. My access to such a global

academic and social perspective made me realize that we can learn from each other and share colorful and intricate stories of our ancestral histories. I encountered, however, a drastically different situation when I moved to Dallas, Texas, after graduation, and taught Bilingual Kindergarten and First Grade with Teach for America at Paul L. Dunbar Learning Center.

For the first time in my life, I felt like a minority. In the area where I worked, the community grappled to reconcile my Latina background while noting that I came from a privileged background that did not mirror theirs. “You speak Spanish so you must be Mexican. Right?” This statement, though shocking at first, was said to me many times. People at school heard me speaking in Spanish with my students and noticed my brown complexion, so they immediately assumed that, like most of my students, I was Mexican. I corrected my colleagues and students by stating that I was Cuban, but was met with tilted heads and questions because most were not familiar with this ethnicity. My own experience in Miami and Washington urged me to bring an international perspective to the school in Dallas by initiating the Multicultural Committee, spearheading heritage month celebrations, and organizing the First Annual International Day. I developed a curriculum across the different grade levels targeting different regions of the world so students could experience crafts, books, newspaper articles, artifacts, and art from around the world.

Once I began my studies at American University Washington College of Law, I knew that it was important to extend my experiences in coordinating sensitive conversations regarding culture and inclusion into the legal field. Throughout the next few years, I hope to carry on my work with the Latino Law Students Association, and challenge the law school community to ensure that law students of all backgrounds grow and thrive in their profession. Furthermore, I hope to bring my collective experiences to Johnson & Johnson LLP, and continue Able Smith’s work in assuring that all members of the work place invest in diversity to create a collaborative work environment where people constantly challenge each other to think differently while working at the highest level.

***Statement Example B. Association of Corporate Counsels (ACC) Diversity Summer Scholars Program***

***The author of the following sample was awarded a position within the ACC Diversity Summer Scholars Program. Permission was granted prior to publication.***

For a long time, the experiences and characteristics that set me apart were the things I felt compelled to suppress. As I learned to embrace my upbringing, my sexuality, and my role as a father, I saw the value of each. Now, I appreciate the invaluable perspective on life that being a single, African, gay father, raised by a single mother, has given me.

I was born in the Philippines and immigrated to the United States when I was six years old. Because my mother did not receive higher education, I relied on the guidance of mentors to navigate academia. Experiencing the benefits of mentorship encouraged me to pay it forward. I took an active role in a nonprofit organization called Natural Productions. Here, I mentored children living in underserved communities that have experienced abuse and violence at home – as I have. I provided the children mentorship, encouragement, homework assistance, and dance instruction to help them rise above the poverty and hardship they were born into. My commitment to mentorship continues in law school. I currently serve as a resource and mentor to incoming minority students to help them succeed through the rigors of law school.

When I was nineteen I had a baby with my childhood sweetheart. Although some view having a child at that age as a barrier to success, I envisioned it as motivation. The task of caring for another person was daunting, and I was scared of making a mistake. Despite my age, I adapted and the desire to provide for my daughter motivated me to attend college, start a career in financial services, and later attend law school.

The moment I laid eyes on my daughter, I wanted her to embrace every aspect of who she would become. The best way to teach her was by example. Coming to terms with being gay was



a tumultuous and liberating experience. I encountered reactions from my family and friends that were unsupportive and agonizing. Yet, I quickly learned to develop a thick skin, compartmentalize my feelings, and focus on being a father.

I provide intellectual diversity and a commitment to community. During the 2008 financial crisis, I almost became homeless, but used my expertise to avoid foreclosure. Compelled to assist my community, I used my mortgage experience to provide guidance on the loan modification process with the hope that homeowners in default would save their homes. During my externship last summer, I learned about the significant number of minorities affected by the crisis. Consequently, I would like to help close the disproportionate wealth gap plaguing our society by spearheading the firm's efforts of collaborating with local organizations to empower minorities by providing financial literacy programs.

Diversity extends far beyond visible differences. To me, it represents a sense of belonging to a community and, with that, a fresh point of view. I will utilize my unique experiences as tools for creative problem solving with a diverse perspective that benefits both the client and your firm.