

Dr. Tim Borchers
Diversity Statement

I appreciate the opportunity to share my perspectives on diversity and how they would inform my work at CSU Pueblo as you seek to become a minority-serving institution. I have applied for positions at several institutions this year and CSU Pueblo is the first to require a diversity statement, which speaks to your commitment to this goal. I would look forward to helping you advance this work. In this statement, I'll provide the context for my understanding of diversity and provide examples of how I have provided leadership in advancing support for diversity, equity, and inclusion.

As a graduate student in Detroit, Michigan, I worked with many diverse students as a graduate teaching assistant and speech coach. I was fortunate to have classes with diverse faculty and learn about a wide range of approaches to studying human communication.

As a result, I have incorporated diverse theoretical perspectives in my work. Both of my textbooks include examples from diverse populations to ensure all students see themselves in the material being represented. My rhetorical theory book includes distinct chapters on feminist rhetoric and alternative rhetorical theories, such as Afrocentricity and Asian and Native American approaches to rhetorical theory. I have also taught classes on intercultural communication and political campaign communication, which included guiding discussions with students from diverse political opinions.

As an administrator, I have worked with a wide array of diverse populations. Our new student entering class this past fall included approximately 30% minority students and overall, 20% of our students come from diverse cultures and ethnicities. Most of our students receive Pell grants and 57% of our new students this fall were first-generation. Supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion has been an important part of my current role and I'll provide several examples of how I have done so in the paragraphs that follow.

Peru State is in southeast Nebraska where the per capita income rate is much lower than the state and national average. Supporting our students' and the community's food insecurity has been a role of the institution. In particular, I have provided leadership for a monthly food pantry that comes to campus to deliver food to the community—and our students. I also have worked closely with students for whom FAFSA issues prevent them from obtaining funds for their education. We have been creative in resolving access issues for students who can't afford textbooks or course materials.

As VPAA, I make all decisions on academic appeals, so I know the stories of the students who struggle—those dealing with family loss, mental health issues, financial hardships, or other crises. I have worked with students, their families, our Student Affairs staff, and faculty to arrive at solutions for students who need to seek mental health treatment, taking them away from classes for a period of time. In collaboration with Student Affairs staff, I have helped design our early response system to provide attention to students experiencing mental health crises. I am also serving on a System-wide task force to address mental health issues in our students.

In my role, I ensure students affected by Title IX incidents receive appropriate supportive measures. I regularly contact faculty on behalf of our Title IX office to facilitate measures such as allowing extensions on assignments, providing alternative instructional approaches, or monitoring no-contact orders between students sharing a class. I previously served as a decision-maker in Title IX cases while Dean at Minnesota State University Moorhead.

I have helped administer and analyze surveys of our students and faculty to assess campus climate, including support for LGBTQ students. I have been fortunate throughout my career to work with faculty and staff who are seen as allies for LGBTQ students and help ensure that they are successful on campus.

In the summer of 2020, we convened the President's Racial Reconciliation task force to focus intentionally on race. Our goal was to foster intentional conversations between administrators, faculty, staff, and students to better understand their experiences of being a minority student or staff member in rural Nebraska. We met weekly for nearly two years. As part of this work, we conducted wide-scale College training and I personally led faculty development sessions to motivate faculty to include more diverse content in their courses. I also led review of our general education requirements to include outcomes specifically focused on cultural literacy and competency. We developed a new academic minor in Race and Ethnic Studies that was approved by the Board. Through these conversations, I have learned much from our faculty, staff and students—and know that I still have more to learn.

We have expanded our work to focus on reducing equity gaps in student outcomes, such as retention and graduation rates. Like many institutions, we have persistent gaps in these rates between our White students and Students of Color, between Pell recipients and non-Pell recipients, and between first-generation and non-first-generation students. I led a team of faculty and staff who participated in the John Gardner Institute "Equity in Retention Academy" during the summer of 2022. Following that experience, I am now leading the campus-wide Equity in Retention Planning process that involves subcommittees working to enhance inclusive learning, foster a more inclusive campus community, and support students' sense of belonging, self-efficacy, and motivation, based on Vincent Tinto's model. Additionally, I am serving on a System-wide task force reviewing our policies and procedures to ensure they serve all students equitably. And I am part of a National Association of System Heads (NASH) Networked Improvement Community (NIC) to address issues of equity.

I believe improving equity is achieved on two levels: Systemic and interpersonal. On the systemic level, we need to reach agreement within the institution on a definition of equity and promote that definition broadly. Then, we can address inequities that are part of our policies, processes, and procedures. We need ensure our teaching practices are inclusive and that our best-intended initiatives don't have unintended consequences.

Second, developing strong interpersonal relationships can also improve equity. Faculty and staff need to know their students personally in order to provide equitable responses to help them be successful. Professional development is a key way we can equip faculty and staff with the tools they can use to build relationships with their students.

With this background, I would come to CSU Pueblo ready to learn about your students, faculty, staff, and greater community. I would work with you to carefully study the systems and policies that may cause inequitable outcomes. I would help ensure the faculty and staff have the resources to help them understand and respond to the unique needs of CSU Pueblo students, particularly those who are Hispanic. And we would work together to create a welcoming environment for all faculty and staff. I would eagerly partner with your offices and staff that lead equity initiatives and support your Vision 2028 plans to improve the success rates of underrepresented groups.

I appreciate your consideration of my application and hope this statement provides insight into how I would support diversity, equity, and inclusion at CSU Pueblo.