

Diversity Statement

Marcie Harris-Hayes, PT, DPT, MSCI

I am from a disadvantaged background. My father had no formal education and was unable to read and my mother dropped out of school at age 16. I grew up in a small, rural community, qualifying for the free lunch program and receiving federal Pell grant assistance as a college student. Because of these supportive programs, I became the first in my family to complete collegiate and doctoral training, however I found there was a steep learning curve to undergraduate and graduate training. Referencing the work of Carol Dweck, PhD, I had a fixed mindset, which led to frustration when I didn't grasp concepts quickly, and a hesitancy to ask for help, for fear of appearing dumb or lazy, or for fear of bothering a busy professor. I maintained this mindset through graduate school and into the early part of my career. While investigating methods to improve my teaching, I discovered the concept of the growth mindset. With further inquiry, I realized my previous approach to learning was problematic and have continuously worked to make changes in both learning and teaching.

In response to the events of 2020, Washington University's Program in Physical Therapy (WUPT), organized listening sessions for students, faculty, and staff. The listening sessions were both eye opening and heartbreaking. I was saddened by the experiences our students described, yet inspired by their bravery for speaking their lived experience in a room of faculty and peers. Why had I not understood, until now, that our students were facing these challenges? Why hadn't the students come to us before? Deep down, however the little girl from that small town could feel why students might be hesitant to reach out to faculty. Additionally, there are events from each student's lived experience that I haven't experienced and may not understand, that deeply affect them and impact their ability to feel safe and supported. I needed to act.

Coming from a poor family in southern, rural Missouri and being female, I had never felt in a position of power, and in the past, that feeling has led to a hesitation to act. Additionally, the problem of systemic racism has seemed too big and too complex for me to even grasp. Through independent readings and participating in WUPT Diversity training sessions, the YMCA's Witnessing Whiteness program, and ongoing monthly group discussions with my colleagues, I now realize that I do have privilege and that I need to use my privilege to facilitate change. Participating in Witnessing Whiteness in particular, allowed me to reflect deeply on my lack of understanding, personal bias, and past inactions. These trainings and self-reflection have resulted in my commitment to contribute to the diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) initiatives in our community, including those activities in the TiDe program.

My personal commitment is to provide enhanced opportunities for individuals from historically under-represented backgrounds, including but not limited to Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), people with disabilities, people from disadvantaged backgrounds, and people in the LGBTQIA+ community. I have served as a Bridge Coach for the Youth Learning Center's Two Degrees Program, a program that provides training for students from under-represented backgrounds in pursuing careers in STEM fields. Within WUPT, I serve as the faculty liaison for the BIPOC Student Alumni Mentorship program, an alumni-led program that has successfully matched students and alumni, based on their interests and lived experiences, and member of the WUPT DEIB committee that will serve to implement the Program's strategic plan to achieve the mission to "create an environment that is conducive for all Program members, not just to survive,

but to thrive academically, personally, and professionally”. As I reflect on my career path, I recognize how fortunate I have been. I have been given opportunities to seek my passions and been allowed to ‘grow my mind’ in a supportive environment. I want to be sure that others, irrespective of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, or background, have the same opportunity to thrive.