

Lee Puffer
Diversity Statement

My experience as an adjunct instructor at multiple colleges has allowed me many first-hand experiences with diverse classrooms. Each college has their own community and each classroom group is distinct as well. Unique perspectives and cross-cultural contributions add to the richness of the learning environment. Allow me to provide some specific examples.

Due to its location in El Cajon, California, Grossmont College is a diverse community. Unlike other colleges in San Diego County, Grossmont serves a large number of Iraqi Chaldean immigrants as well as students from many other countries. The college has an effective program to teach language and culture, efficiently acclimating the newly arrived into American life. It can be challenging for these adults, many who left professional careers behind, to start over in a foreign place. Fortunately, the art classroom is an excellent place to process these experiences. The challenges individuals face can be shared and channeled into meaningful artwork. It is my responsibility to create the space for that to happen. Depending on the unique mix of students in any particular studio, I adjust my curriculum in order to allow for different modes of expression. I also create image presentations that give representative and relevant examples of art from many of cultures to my students. These historical and contemporary examples of art from diverse experiences allow students to find a way in to art. As much of recent contemporary art is about identity, students feel validated and encouraged to express themselves freely when they see these examples. Sharing of this work allows for cross-cultural understanding in the group, as well as growth for the individual.

Another diverse and unique community is Palomar College in San Marcos. There, some students travel from Native American reservations to attend college. We also have a large population of students who live on farms and ranches, many of whom are first generation college students. Some students have no educational background in art or design whatsoever, although they may have a strong cultural framework in place. The unique perspectives these students bring to their own artwork, as well as the thoughtful critique of classmates' work, is refreshing and exciting. I speak and understand Spanish, so I am able to help translate when necessary. Many of my Palomar students have never been to a museum or art gallery, and the vernacular of art can be intimidating. At Palomar, I work the vocabulary of art and design into the technical lessons to bring those without art background up to speed. Palomar College also has an excellent ASL program and the school serves many students from the special needs community. As a result, I have had the opportunity to work with young adults with a range of physical and mental abilities, as well as with their support personnel. Frequently I will have a deaf student in the classroom in addition to students from the ASL program, signing to one another and creating an inclusive, often silent, environment.

San Diego City College is an urban commuter college with serves unique communities as well. For instance, I often have active duty armed forces reserve soldiers, as well as veterans transitioning to civilian life in the classroom. There are students who commute to City College from Tijuana. There are also students from local high schools, which themselves are very diverse, representing Latino, African, African American, and Asian populations. Despite

the fact that everyone is a commuter, there are often deep connections to local communities in place already. In these art classrooms cultural identity is strong and, if nurtured correctly, a synergy happens when self-aware individuals create an environment of humor and freedom with which to approach often-difficult subject matter through their art.

In my experience there is no single correct way to nurture and serve an individual or group. My goal is to be aware of the dynamics in place and to continually adjust the emotional temperature in the classroom to meet the needs of the individuals present and the larger community.