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Diversity Statement

As a woman who works in two male-dominated disciplines, I bring diversity to my field through my background, perspective, and position as an educator. In the social sciences, life experiences often color our research choices; we tend to study those things we have seen, heard or lived through. In my field of political methodology—where advanced quantitative methods are applied to research on politics—the vast majority of researchers are men. Scholars such as myself, whose research substantively evaluates and investigates American political institutions, are also most often male. Hence, questions in these fields that intersect with gender have gone woefully understudied.

In my research, I bring methodologically rigorous approaches to the study of female candidate behavior, specifically, and descriptive representation, more broadly. For example, in a recent paper I employ advanced statistical methods (e.g. semi-supervised LDA topic models and a covariate balancing method for causal inference) to assess the normative impacts of female candidate emergence. I find that Democratic male candidates are thirty percent more likely to talk about women’s issues (i.e. equal pay, sexual harassment, and reproductive rights) in their campaigns when there is a female candidate running in their same race. Candidates from minority populations often feel that, in order to make their bid for Congress count, they must win their election. My work should be encouraging to minority candidates who want to run—the mere presence of their candidacy can make a difference. These results also suggest that, by redoubling their efforts to recruit candidates from diverse backgrounds, political organizations can help draw minority issues to the forefront of today’s political discussion.

I also promote diversity in my capacity as a women who teaches classes on statistics and empirical modeling. To recruit more women into STEM fields, visibility matters. As a female instructor, I am uniquely able to encourage and support women in my classes who show an interest in data science and applied statistics. For three semesters I have taught our department’s undergraduate course on quantitative methods in political science. Beyond the classroom, I manage a team of fifteen student research assistants who collect and clean campaign website text—the majority of whom are female. I take great pride in my past students successes, particularly those women and students of color who have gone on to pursue research assistantships, undergraduate teaching assistantships for statistical courses, and extracurricular programs in data science.

As an instructor, I place the utmost importance on cultivating a teaching environment where students feel comfortable asking for help and expressing their opinions. In my course evaluations as the primary instructor for *Introduction to American Politics*, multiple students pointed out the “politically neutral” and “sensitive” learning environment that I cultivate. A student commented that, “She did a phenomenal job of teaching [in] a highly polarized political atmosphere.” Through my approachable teaching style, I also strive to ensure students traditionally underrepresented in STEM fields feel invited, welcomed, and encouraged to pursue data science. Commenting on my instruction in *Data in Politics*, one student wrote: “[Rachel] is available to answer any and all questions and she does so in a manner that is always helpful and never condescending. I felt very comfortable asking her for guidance...and believe [Rachel] is one of the best instructors I have had at UNC.” These sentiments about my approach to teaching are echoed in other students’ evaluations, summarized in Table 1 below. I am excited and eager to further incorporate statistical programming

into my undergraduate classes. I believe increasing students' opportunities to engage with data science and statistical programming is key to increasing minority representation in STEM.

Supporting other female scholars is also among my top priorities as an academic and as an educator. For instance, I have been actively involved this semester in developing the Junior Americanist Workshop Series (JAWS), a platform which seeks to give graduate students and early career faculty the opportunity to present their work virtually in spite of the Covid-19 pandemic. In my capacity as a coordinator, I have actively solicited presentation submissions from female methodologists and congressional scholars to ensure that women—who underrepresented in these fields—have the opportunity to get critically important feedback on their work. In a similar vein, I hope to motivate more female graduate students into becoming active participants in the political methodology community by supporting their involvement in conferences like PolMeth and VIM.

Table 1: Evaluations Related to Diversity, Inclusion, and Support

	Promoted a climate of mutual respect	Treated students with respect	Encouraged questions	Promoted active learning
Average Evaluation	4.75	4.82	4.79	4.55

Each question is answered on a 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) scale. Presented evaluations have been averaged across all classes for all courses for which I was the primary instructor (Data in Politics: Fall 2020, Spring 2020; Fall 2019; Introduction to American Politics: Spring 2019). Full evaluations can be found on my academic website: rachelporter.org.