

Diversity Statements

Sample #1

Feeling ownership over my own identity is a continuous learning process and ultimately one of personal growth. I have not always felt Cuban or Latina enough, despite growing up with strong Cuban role models. Learning how to understand, challenge, and embrace being Latina has given me a stronger sense of self and a confidence to feel ownership over other aspects of my identity, such as being a queer woman. I have come to appreciate how these facets of my identity intersect and give me a multidimensional perspective that gives me an advantage both personally and professionally in life.

Despite growing up learning Spanish from my Cuban grandmother, I never had the fluency level that many of my Latina peers had. This lack of fluency often made me question how I could self-identify as a Latina. During college, the leader of the Latina student organization informed me that my non-native Spanish skills should make me “rethink” whether or not I should consider myself a Latina. Her tone dripped with condescension and pretension. I wish I had a different response at the time, but my reaction was exactly what she suggested- I began to question the validity of my Cuban-ness. How much Spanish did I need to speak to qualify as Latina? Could I truly connect to my culture and my family without fluency in Spanish? Most poignantly, I was frustrated that I let someone else dictate how closely I identified as a Latina.

No matter how much Spanish I speak though, in my eyes being Cuban is a privilege. My definition of *Latinidad* certainly includes bolero dancing, flan, and the occasional cigar during a game of dominoes, but being Cuban is far more than that. I belong to a rich cultural heritage of people who understand what it means to sacrifice everything for democracy. My grandmother, a political refugee from Cuba and a staunch American citizen, instilled in me the importance of serving the United States and championing democracy, even in the face of adversity. She has dedicated her life to the U.S., working for both the federal and state government as a legal translator at a time when women and people of color were especially underrepresented in government service. From her, I have learned that there is no single definition of being Latina.

Since coming out as queer, I have relived the process of both understanding how I relate to preconceived notions of identities and feeling confident in my own sense of self. Most importantly though, for me these experiences also highlighted the importance of empathy, and the ability to find inspiration in personal struggle. My grandmother often reminds me how one of the greatest things about America is that you have the freedom to be who you want to be. As a proud queer, Latina woman, I aspire to give back through public service to my country that has inspired me to take such pride in myself. And I hope to begin that journey in giving back at NYU Law.

Sample #2

I am both Hispanic and a woman. Hispanics, and in particular female Hispanics, are underrepresented in the legal profession. Data from the Hispanic National Bar Associates 2009 Report on the “Reality of Latina Lawyers” found that Hispanics represent 4 percent of the legal profession, and that although Latinas constitute 7 percent of the United States population, they only constitute “1.3% of the nation’s lawyers.” This lack of Latina presence in the legal profession likely has many effects. Not only does this mean less diversity in the law classroom, it also means there are less Latina role models in the legal profession. More Latina lawyers might increase the likelihood of other women of Latin American descent to pursue further education. Furthermore, increased presence of Hispanics in the legal profession would allow for greater advocacy for others, such as immigrants and other vulnerable groups in the United States.

I believe that my background would both increase the diversity in the classroom and allow for a larger change within the legal profession. With a legal education, I am hopeful to become a role model for others and to advocate for the needs of other Hispanics who are underrepresented and underserved in the United States. My unique point of view and advocacy for disadvantaged groups would provide an interesting perspective in the classroom, and could perhaps provoke a change in opinion or enrich the experience of other students.

Sample #3

I am convinced the section of the 805 interstate that runs from San Diego to Los Angeles serves only two purposes: to provide standstill traffic and to remind me of my Mexican American heritage. With a middle school education, my grandfather illegally crossed into the US as a migrant farm worker. When we moved to San Diego, we took numerous trips between the two cities. Instead of appreciating the ocean views, my eyes were glued to the rolling hills as my grandfather pointed to the fields he had once worked. To my grandfather, this was all distant memories of what he had to do to survive in the United States, far removed from his current home in a Los Angeles suburb. But to me, the sight of the fields stuck – they exist as symbols of a Mexican heritage I had never felt belonged to me. With a white mother and an upbringing far away from southern California, I had never even learned Spanish.

It was not until college that I was able to reconcile my lack of Spanish with my Mexican roots. At  University, I met other students also coming to terms with themselves as non-Spanish speaking Latinx, something that seemed almost impossible to those who view the Latinx identity as one unable to be dissevered from Spanish. When I was introduced to our Latinx community group, I shied away from joining, instead remaining on the periphery of the Latinx community. This exemplified how I perceived my mixed identity at the time – a delicate balance between hesitant involvement and genuine interest in my culture. But after graduation, as I began teaching, I encountered many students grappling with the same identity issues. As I watched my students become aware of their self-identities, I could not pass up the opportunity to turn my apprehensive embrace of my identity into a learning experience for my students. I shared what I valued about my cultural identity, emphasizing my inability to speak Spanish. I was met with a chorus of “me too,” reminding me that while a strong self-identity comes from within, affirmation from those around you serves to validate and strengthen your sense of self.

It is with this sense of validation I enter law school, as a non-bilingual member of the Latinx community. I have learned that self-identity is within my control and that I can foster genuine pride in others as a model. While some might perceive my cultural identity differently than I do, my experience will not be invalidated by external opinions. Rather, my identity is as strong as I am committed. It, much like the fields that line the 805, is a testament to my self-defined existence as a Mexican-American.

Sample #4

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There is a magic to be found in musical harmonies. Behind the effortless blend of sound and feeling is an ebb and flow of individual voices. They move in counterpoint to the melody, at times supporting, at times defying. It is a fragile relationship - have too many voices on one part, and the other parts waver, fighting the impulse to sing in unison. With the right balance, these harmonic voices can tell their own linear story, yet come together to create a piece so much greater than its individual parts. Without harmony, music feels woefully incomplete.

Finding harmony in my own community has rarely been easy. At times the only Latina voice in a predominately white classroom, I have had to navigate among uncomfortable dissonances in opinion. There were times that I failed to find that balance. Once in high school, my class had to report on various pre-selected human rights issues. One classmate, reporting on immigrant rights, chose to focus on “the crime of illegal immigration” and solutions to curb it, instead of touching upon concerns such as the plight of refugees, the challenges of Dreamers, and the exploitation of undocumented workers. Unsure if this omission was intentional, I asked my classmate if she had ever heard of immigration detention centers. I was furiously shouted down by my friends, who insisted I was spewing liberal propaganda. That day, I was covered into silence, and it is something I still feel regret over. I vowed in college not to let that happen again.

While at college, I joined a choir that could only be described as socioeconomically privileged. Our pieces, selected from a Western classical repertoire, prioritized intellectual exercises over emotional resonances, stoic stances over rhythmic movement, technical precision over a spirit of improvisation. There was an undercurrent of expectations - in how and when one should sing, in what to wear for a concert, in which pieces were more deserving of our time and

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effort - that were presented as being universally understood truths, as opposed to class-influenced preferences.

Determined not to repeat my high school silence, I forcefully contested the mainstream refrain whenever it came up. I connected my heart and soul to the music, and let my emotions guide my performance. That first year, I was continuously made to feel like I was doing something wrong. However, in the years that followed, my voice was joined by more and more singers, looking for a change. Slowly, our concerts began to reflect our diversity. To our usual repertoire of Bach motets and Gregorian chants, we added African-American spirituals, an Arabic chant, and Indonesian folk tunes paired with a traditional dance. Whereas once we were asked to hold ourselves in a composed and professional manner, by my senior year, my choir director would urge us to “find your inner [REDACTED]” before a performance, and to channel that energy into connecting with our audience.

It can be challenging to sing out with crystalline confidence when everyone around you is singing some well-known melody. Nevertheless, these experiences showed me that, with perseverance, even one voice can help change the conversation. I hope to use my voice to help broaden the harmonic landscape of my future community, to create a space where underrepresented voices can see their unique melodies interwoven into the larger composition of the school.

Sample #5

Within minutes of meeting someone new, I expect to be asked the same question: “What are you?” As a child, I struggled to conceptualize an answer that adequately reflected my diverse origins. I have my father’s dark hair and complexion, and was enamored with his youthful stories of riding his bicycle through the streets of [REDACTED] Ecuador. But I had never called those lively streets home. I shared my mother’s birthplace of [REDACTED] Louisiana, and experienced Mardi Gras and crawfish boils firsthand. But my physical traits distinguished me from my mother’s family as my darker hair contrasted with lighter shades of blonde and brown. I simultaneously belonged to two racial and cultural groups, but existed in some ambiguous area between the two.

Instead of celebrating my diverse background, I was consumed by self-doubt and anxiety. At school, my Spanish teachers looked at me and asked me why I was in lower-level Spanish courses. I had to tell them that I was Latina but had not learned Spanish as a child, denying half of myself in the process. Whenever I walked alongside my mother in the grocery store, I wondered if passersby recognized our relation to each other. If you looked closely you could see the common facial features we shared, but I was conscious of assumptions others made about me, and allowed myself to be defined by those assumptions.

As I matured, I began to shape my identity through experiences that have brought me closer to the two sides of my family. As a college sophomore, I accepted an opportunity to study abroad in Barcelona. The experience enabled me to improve my Spanish language abilities so I could more easily converse with my father and his family in their native tongue. When I returned to [REDACTED], I immersed myself in the historical study of the American South, concentrating my thesis research on the racial politics of Jim Crow [REDACTED]. I scoured the local archives for relevant primary sources with the help of my mother and sister, and we discussed our research

findings over bowls of red beans and rice with my grandparents. I felt increasingly comfortable in my own skin as I developed a stronger personal connection with my family members, one that did not require me to speak Spanish fluently or to possess certain physical characteristics.

There is a freedom in existing in a grey area. I now confidently identify as a chameleon, changeable and adaptable but grounded firmly in my own reality. My background equips me with an intrinsic desire for knowledge and understanding – a curiosity that will enrich my future law school classroom.