The Power of the People: How Activism Promotes Better Student Learning

Joyce Wu, PhD
Australian National University
2019 Fulbright Senior Scholar, Kansas State University
I wish to acknowledge that we are standing on the ancestral lands of the Kansa (Kaw people) and Kansas State is the home of four tribal nations: the Iowa, Kickapoo, Prairie Band Pottawatomie, and Sac and Fox. I would like to recognize and pay my respect to the leaders past, present and future of the four tribal nations.
The Two Sides of a Nation

“One America is flowing with the milk of prosperity and the honey of equality. That America is the habitat of millions of people who have food and material necessities for their bodies, culture and education for their minds, freedom and human dignity for their spirits. That America is made up of millions of young people who grow up in the sunlight of opportunity. [...] But [...] I’m sure that each of us is painfully aware of the fact that there is another America, and that other America has a daily ugliness about it that transforms the buoyancy of hope into the fatigue of despair.”
What is Activism?
“And the great tragedy is that the nation continues in its national policy to ignore the conditions that brought the riots or the rebellions into being. For in the final analysis, the riot is the language of the unheard.”

Martin Luther King Jr. “The Other America.”
Allow me for a brief interlude…

• Gender and international development research and practitioner experience in countries including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, China, Myanmar, Nepal and Pakistan

• Kansas State University’s Fulbright fellowship = opportunity to look at the university’s equity, diversity and inclusion initiatives

• Why? To understand cross-country experiences of integrating equity, diversity and inclusion policies and practices

• Personally, to understand what I have learned from two decades of professional and personal engagement in activism
That’s nice, but why should I care?

• Equity, Diversity and Inclusion are big words and becoming increasingly marketized

• Simplest terms: you need people skills to handle everyday situation at the workplace, and people are complex
Department of Gender, Women and Sexuality Studies (GWSS) has been holding workshops during the first semester to support teachers to better support students.

- Learning about good practices of how to support students, challenge them on critical thinking and respectful dialogues in the classroom.
- Also a safe space for teachers to share own experiences and support one another.
For a Good KAWSE (Kansas State Office for the Advancement of Women in Science and Engineering)
1011 Seaton Hall, kawse@ksu.edu
Centre for Advocacy, Response & Education (CARE)  
206 Holton Hall  8:00 AM-5:00 PM  
Ph: 785-532-6444  
ksucare@k-state.edu
August 2016, Rakhine State
Satellite images of the village of Thit Tone Nar Gwa Son in Rakhine state, Myanmar, shown in December 2017 last year and again in February 2018

• Your workplace (travel intensive) is in a discussion on how to have sustainable environmental policies when substantial air and local transport is necessary;

• The organization has two different salary scales for the same position based on the size of each department. This has unequal outcomes for different departments even though staff do the same amount of work; and

• You are a graduate teaching assistant. Your students point out that the current teaching and tutorial sessions are not flexible with their work schedules. They need the money for rent, food and payment of uni fees.
Conclusion

• Diversity and Inclusion initiatives go beyond guest speakers, events and public celebrations
• They have the goal of eliminating inequality, the “two sides of America” that Dr King talked about
• K-State has an active and evolving set of initiatives to support your learning
• When it’s your turn, how will you contribute to Dr King and the world’s commitment to a more equitable society?