In the summer of 2020, I received some very disappointing advice. As was the case at so many departments and universities across the country, trainees in our department had started a DEI committee. As a founding member of that committee, I helped set up a meeting with a professor in our department who had a long-standing commitment to justice and inclusivity. We wanted her to tell us whose door we should knock on to demand systemic change, or how we could instantly and permanently change our department at the structural level. Her advice? Think small. The kinds of systemic changes we were demanding were beyond our abilities as trainees to control, she said. Instead, we should focus on the individual and discrete spaces where we did have power: our classrooms and our labs. The silver bullet we were looking for didn't exist.

We all came away from this meeting dejected and frustrated, feeling like we'd lost a potential powerful ally in the fight to make meaningful and immediate change within our department. But as I've progressed and grown in my academic career, I've come to realize that this professor had a point – so much so, that I've decided to work with her for my postdoc at Columbia's Center for Justice (CfJ), where she is the director. Of course, I can (and should!) be vocally supportive of systemic changes, but at the end of the day, creating diverse and inclusive spaces in academia isn't as easy as tinkering with some policies or adjusting some incentives. Real, visible change can only come about when all of us work, constantly, to produce change within our own personal spheres. My contributions to diversity and inclusion at Columbia, both during graduate school and in my postdoc, have come about in precisely this way, whether it's through the students I mentor on research projects, the topics I focus on in the classroom, or the extra time I commit to science education beyond typical university structures.

DEI in the lab: Making change happen in my own sphere means taking an active role in deciding who is provided with particular opportunities, and letting people know what opportunities are available to them. During graduate school, I worked on a massive, multi-site study aiming to replicate and clarify the stereotype threat effect in Black college students. I approached a sophomore we had interviewed for a different project to ask if she would be interested in helping with data collection. I thought that this project would be uniquely relevant to her: She was double majoring in Psychology and African American studies, and would likely have a personal connection to the research topic as a Black college student. She enthusiastically said yes, kicking off an incredibly meaningful mentor-mentee relationship. Her work on the stereotype threat project led to my advising her on her senior thesis project, which focused on how social support helps Black students deal with racial stress. She recently began medical school, and because of her experience in our lab, she intends to pursue medical/clinical research as well.

I've taken this same approach at the CfJ, where many of the staff members are formerly incarcerated. One formerly incarcerated staff member also runs a non-profit that seeks to change the general public's perceptions of incarcerated people. I recognized a link between this mission and my own interest in belief change, so I approached him and asked if he wanted to collaborate on a research project on the most effective ways to change beliefs about the moral character of incarcerated people. He was very interested, and we've already begun a literature review and have selected stimuli that we think will target the most relevant psychological factors. This collaboration has also led to a general working relationship, and I'm now advising him on another research project using survey data collected from nearly 200 incarcerated men. In both of these cases, I sought out people whose identities have traditionally made them feel excluded from academia with ideas for research projects relevant to their interests. In doing so, I created circumstances, in my own individual sphere of influence, in which these mentees were able to thrive and see a future for themselves within academia.

DEI in the classroom: In my classes, I similarly take an active role in helping students see themselves as members of our class and our field. For example, nearly every class has to deal with the

issue that some students feel more comfortable participating than others. I try to mitigate this imbalance in my classes using small group discussions, where students typically feel more comfortable speaking up. If I hear a student who doesn't usually participate make an interesting point in their group, I will encourage them to share that comment with the full class when I ask groups to report back. This strategy proves effective because it actively signals to students that they and their ideas belong in our classroom. The fact that this strategy works so well demonstrates that when students don't participate, it's because they aren't sure if their ideas are worthwhile contributions, not because they don't have any ideas to begin with.

Similarly, I work to make sure students can see themselves in my course material. This fall, I am teaching a research methods course on how data science can be used for justice and social change. My curriculum deliberately draws on studies and datasets that focus on groups that are the most impacted by injustice, and I have a lineup of guest speakers – including data journalists and policy-makers – who are members of those groups. In all of these examples, I don't wait for students to demonstrate that they feel ready to be part of our class or our field. Instead, I actively and preemptively work to show them that they are welcome in the individual spaces that I have control over. In so doing, I hope to create new norms that can be adopted by the individual spaces of others, and over time, elicit real, lasting change in our classrooms.

DEI in the broader community: I have also made a point of devoting significant amounts of time to science education beyond traditional undergraduate environments. This commitment includes working with high school students from underrepresented backgrounds, because I believe that these students are a crucial component in making scientific spaces more diverse and inclusive: I spent three years during graduate school as an instructor and a curriculum developer for a program run through Columbia's Zuckerman Institute that gives minoritized high school students the opportunity to learn about neuroscience and complete a paid summer internship in a neuroscience lab, and I've served as a mentor for a Women in STEM program run through a science outreach nonprofit called BioBus.

This commitment also includes working with students who have alternative paths to receiving an education: This spring, I will be teaching a data science course at Sing Sing prison as part of Hudson Link's prison education program. I'm looking forward to helping my students there build an academic identity, as many of the formerly incarcerated people who work at the CfJ see themselves as academic researchers precisely because of their educational experiences while in prison. When I work with students outside traditional university structures, I strive to show them what it might look like if they were to pursue an academic career in the sciences. Making time to be a part of these programs gives me the ability to uplift, support, and inspire the individual students within them.

What role can I play in the urgency of our current moment, when educational institutions and diversity programs are under attack? No matter how vocal and passionate I am about systemic issues in academia, I alone cannot solve those problems immediately. What I can do, however, is make diversity and inclusion integral to the spaces I have control over. I can be intentional about the research opportunities I make available to my mentees. I can make sure my classroom is a place where students know that they belong. I can devote time to programs for students outside of the university system. Each of these actions alone will not produce lasting change. But with concerted effort – over long periods of time and across contexts – I can help create an academic community that is welcoming to those who aren't sure if academia is for them. I am committed to putting this concerted effort at the forefront of all that I do.