

Diversity Statement

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It is critical for the health of any institution to have representation of ideas and experiences of people from all races, genders and classes of society. It becomes further important for STEM departments as rapid growth of technology pervades the society more. I would work towards cultivating diverse populations and perspectives and promote equity and inclusion. Based on my experiences and interactions, I hope to contribute to promote diversity and inclusion in the department and university as follows:

Access to resources: During my high school years, we started the first financial inclusion initiative in the city of Pune by conducting surveys and setting up booths to educate and create bank accounts for people living in slums near our school¹. The initiative enabled parents from poor communities to take advantage of government education initiatives to educate their children. Even in the US, more than 67% of the schools lack the recommended bandwidth for connecting students in a virtual classroom². The need for distance learning due to the novel coronavirus pandemic has exposed the depth of the digital divide that drives the homework gap. I hope to contribute to initiatives that attempt to bridge this divide and provide better access to educational resources available to every interested participant.

Mentorship: Over my tenure as Ph.D student at Carnegie Mellon University, I have guided various undergraduate and graduate researchers from under-represented backgrounds in various aspects of research. My experience educated me on the importance of the feeling of belonging in research experience. This bottleneck manifests itself in research as lack of people who look approachable for discussing ideas and feeling safe to receive feedback without judgment. As a mentor and educator, I hope to create a welcoming environment at the university that makes it easier for students to approach faculty and peers for guidance, support and feedback.

Inclusion: Another key factor that affects the ability of students to succeed in and outside classroom is the spirit of community. Feeling included makes it significantly easier to approach peers and have access to more resources to grow. The COVID pandemic especially hit hard making it difficult for almost every student to interact with their peers. To overcome this digital divide and provide access to members in the SIGMOBILE community, I co-founded and organized Ordinary Wireless Lectures(OWL)³ virtual reading group attended by more than 78 members from over 30 universities. It organized talks by graduate students, professors and researchers from diverse backgrounds and affiliations building lasting connections and providing networking opportunities for every member of the community. I hope to form and organize similar avenues at the university for new students and researchers to interact and connect with senior members of the college community.

I look forward to creating an inclusive environment for students of all backgrounds to openly express and pursue their goals to the best of their ability. As a tenure-track professor, I hope to do this by participating in current departmental initiatives already in place, as well as, develop more if necessary. Further, over twenty years of interacting with people from diverse backgrounds has taught me that there will always be more to learn and understand.

¹Our project placed 3rd internationally in ThinkQuest Digital Media Event 2011 conducted by ORACLE Education Foundation

²<https://www.k12dive.com/news/report-67-of-schools-lack-recommended-internet-connectivity-speed/589537/>

³<https://owlwireless.github.io>