

# Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility Statement:

## Clayton Thomas

I come from a very privileged background. I went to a good public high school and undergrad, my father has a Ph.D. in agricultural sciences, and my family never worried about money. From my privileged viewpoint, I do not think I can fully understand the immense barriers-to-entry faced by underprivileged and systematically oppressed groups in academia. Nevertheless, I constantly strive to understand these challenges and reduce marginalization.

As a professor, I will work to reduce barriers and correct for historical “pipeline issues” through different outreach activities such as speaking about career paths in academia and serving on admission committees. I will work particularly hard to recruit qualified Ph.D. students from underrepresented groups. Since my research focuses on how algorithms interact with real people, diverse viewpoints on important problems (such as affordable housing or referendum voting) and important properties (such as interpretability or transparency) are particularly useful, squarely aligning research and inclusively goals.

I strive to be an accessible, respectful, and adaptive mentor. As a Ph.D. advisor, I will hold scheduled non-research meetings with my students to provide a space for voicing any concerns or needs. If my group is small, this could simply take the form of individual “career meetings”; if my group is large, I will host regular lab meetings to foster a sense of community support which I find often missing from theoretical research groups. As a professor, I will be available to listen and offer suggestions to any student struggling to find an advisor. I will also make my expectations of my students and advising workflows very clear through a publicly posted note.<sup>1</sup>

Awareness of different peoples’ experiences is a crucial step towards a more just world, and something I strive to further in myself and others. During my Ph.D., I attended monthly “RISE” (Research Inclusion Social Event) meetings, where we discussed a range of DEI topics (for example, “data gaps” that arise in medical research from treating white male subjects as the default) and educational material (for example, the documentary *Picture a Scientist* covering gender discrimination in STEM research). I also try to understand the experience that immigrants face in America through my international friends and coauthors. My partner is also an immigrant and has been marginalized in a number of ways during her graduate school experience based on race and gender. With her encouragement, I read *Minor Feelings* by Cathy Park Hong, an autobiography discussing systemic racism, which opened my eyes to the constant obstacles that minorities face in daily life. Going forward, I will continue my self-education and encourage the spread of awareness through meetings such as RISE.

Finally, I am a strong believer in diverse, multifaceted, and accessible teaching styles (such as supplemental exercises reinforcing the lectures, bullet-pointed notes, and optional recorded lectures). Such teaching methods may reach major sources of untapped talent in university education, including underrepresented minorities and also neurodiverse students. Overall, as a professor I will recruit and welcome diverse students, and (equally importantly) innovate on the teaching and advising methods to promote their success throughout their studies.

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<sup>1</sup>Advising statements that inspire me include: <http://yardi.people.si.umich.edu/advising.html>, <https://www.charapodimata.com/files/advising-doc.pdf>, and <https://www.kiragoldner.com/prospective-students.html>.