

Diversity Statement

I am a strong proponent of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), not only because they are essential to a healthy workplace that respects fundamental human rights, but also because, as a South Asian woman and the first in my family to pursue postgraduate education and a career abroad, my own journey would not have been possible without environments that embraced these values. Adopting these principles within an academic institution is vital, as this is where we shape the minds that will build the world we inhabit in the future. I also believe that meaningful progress, whether for a nation or for the world, cannot be achieved without the advancement of its underprivileged and marginalized communities. In my work, I aim to use technology as a tool to enable this equitable progress.

1 Experiences and DEI Goals

My future goals in improving DEI will focus on the following two fundamental directions.

Building a workforce that supports and promotes DEI principles. Only a workforce that is diverse in terms of gender, race, culture and language can identify and solve problems that benefit a broad range of communities. A diverse workforce contributes a wider range of perspectives on how we solve problems. To enable such diversity to thrive, I want to cultivate an environment that practices and actively promotes inclusivity—one that treats everyone with equal respect, provides opportunities that allow all members to advance equitably, and ensures that every individual feels comfortable, safe, and heard.

Throughout my student years and postdoctoral work, I have been guided by mentors who believed in the transformative power of DEI principles, and worked in environments where these values were the norm. This has deeply instilled the same values in me. During my PhD, I worked in a lab composed of students from across India. We came from diverse cultural and economic backgrounds, spoke different languages, and represented a range of gender identities, yet we collaborated and supported one another with mutual respect. In addition to conducting research within such a diverse team, I also led IIT Madras's first all-women team, IITM Guerilla, to win the Embedded Security Competition at the CyberSecurity Awareness Week (India Chapter) in 2017. At IIT Madras, I was also part of the Women in CS community, which worked to support and advance women in technical fields where they remain underrepresented. The group organized workshops, competitions, and other technical events to help build skills, confidence, and visibility for women in computing. I also tried to contribute to inclusivity beyond campus. While living in Kolkata, I participated in outreach programs where I volunteered as a teacher for underprivileged children and sponsored the education of one underprivileged girl each year for two years.

For my postdoctoral career, I proactively chose UBC Vancouver for two reasons: I had previously experienced Vancouver as a cultural melting pot that excited me, and I wanted to work in a lab with a truly diverse workforce. This decision enabled me to collaborate with and mentor students from Iran, Saudi Arabia, China, Korea, the USA, and India, further reinforcing my belief in the value of diverse perspectives in research and academic communities.

Conduct research that promotes a more inclusive and equitable society. I will continue to pursue open-ended research problems that contribute to a more equitable society. To this end, my work has focused on securing modern technologies that support communities with limited access to healthcare, clean water, and electricity, with the goal of enabling their broader and safer adoption. Going forward, I aim to focus on research that expands access, reduces inequities, and ensures that technological progress benefits communities that have historically been underserved.

2 Implementation Plans

While many barriers to equity fall outside the direct scope of a university, academic institutions are uniquely positioned to advance the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion. I hope to leverage this position to foster these values within both my research group and the broader university community. Consistent with the environments I have been part of, I aim to build a research group where every member feels supported, included, and able to thrive. A central pillar of this effort will be cultivating a strong sense of social belonging, which has been shown to improve academic and professional outcomes. To create this kind of environment, I plan to implement the following practices.

- I will explicitly communicate to my group that I value DEI, and I will maintain an open-door policy for discussions about any obstacles to inclusion, including improvements that I must implement within my research group.
- I will establish structures that enable group members to listen to and support one another. These may include monthly group lunches, a shared knowledge base, and regular practice talks attended by the entire group. While these benefit everyone, they also serve to establish systems that reduce bias and promote equity.
- I will structure my schedule in a way that I meet regularly with each group member. Research can be challenging for everyone, and consistent check-ins ensure that nobody has to face these challenges in isolation.