



HackIllinois Self-Reflection

To the hackathon and larger CS community,

Today, we wanted to take the time to acknowledge our nation's current climate. We have witnessed dozens killed unjustly at the hands of the police. This is a product of not only rampant racial injustice but also systemic and institutional racism - a problem in America that extends beyond law enforcement and into American communities.

This is an issue that lies within our communities, and therefore it is time that we recognize our own shortcomings and work towards progress. HackIllinois strives to build an environment that is conducive of this. We place a great emphasis on diversity of thought within our community, and maintaining a welcoming and supportive environment. We encourage each and everyone one of you to continue to educate, donate, and push for change in any way that you can.

Recent events have opened our eyes and have helped us realize the importance of creating an equitable atmosphere for our attendees and staff. We have spent the past month self reflecting as an organization, noting shortcomings and reasons for them. We hope to normalize this conversation within the CS community and would love to hear the community's thoughts and feedback.

This document outlines our thoughts on inclusion in our organization. However, we recognize that we are not experts on this matter but we would like to learn. If you have any thoughts, suggestions, or concerns please do reach out to us via our social media platforms or via contact@hackillinois.org.

HackIllinois

Roadmap

Our Ideal Community

Here we break down what values we'd like our organization to hold.

Our Community Today

Here we self reflect on where our organization stands today on the metrics outlined in the previous section.

Plan of Action

Here we detail specific action items to address our shortcomings.

Our Ideal Community

We have chosen these values to outline what we strive for as an organization.

Inclusivity Within Staff

Everyone within our organization should have the opportunity to voice their thoughts, and be aware that they have the right to do so. We value diversity of thought and background within our staff. Through one-on-one meetings and team bonding events, we aim to promote a supportive environment for everyone at our staff meetings. All staff members should feel comfortable asking questions and contributing to discussions.

Diversity of Backgrounds

We want to be a community that values diversity of thought and backgrounds. To do so, we must enable many different voices. This includes those of the Black community along with Latinx and Native American communities. We understand that differences in race provide different perspectives in both problem solving and leadership. Lacking these voices would be a disservice to our community and so we must make these voices heard.

Promoting an Environment Conducive to Learning

As an organization, we want our events to inspire curiosity and enable and empower attendees to learn more about their subject of choice. An attendee benefits the most from an environment conducive to learning, which we promote through workshops, speaker panels, and by encouraging mentor interactions. Our event should be designed to be a collaborative learning experience for each of our attendees rather than a competition.

Welcoming and Supportive Community

Outside of our organization, we want mentors, speakers, students, and staff members alike to be in a supportive and open atmosphere. We welcome attendees with open arms regardless of their experience or background. Each and every person involved in our event has the opportunity to openly speak their mind and give us feedback on our event, our culture, and their experience. We value this feedback and use it to continue improving our events.

Widespread Access to Resources and Opportunities

We want to provide opportunities and resources to all our staff and attendees regardless of their experience level or background. However, students from underrepresented groups have access to a disproportionately smaller network to help them develop their careers. As an organization with a wide range of resources it is our responsibility to help students become aware of and use these opportunities. This puts our organization in a unique position to create a more equitable environment for students from different backgrounds, making the tech community be more accessible to a broader group of students.

Our Community Today

In the following section, we have highlighted where we currently stand based on our core values for our organization, shedding light on our shortcomings and strengths.

Openness and Understanding

We are proud of the culture of openness we've cultivated amongst our staff. We make leadership accessible and see staff as peers. We understand that our staff is human and that their first priority is to themselves and their own wellness, and we communicate this to our staff. We have observed that our staff members listen to and build on each other's ideas, and we encourage them to give healthy and constructive criticism.

At our events, we strive to cultivate the same culture of transparency and openness. We create channels of communication between ourselves and our attendees, mentors and sponsors in order to be able to easily address any issue and grow from feedback as an organization. Our events are tailored in a way so our attendees have the best learning experience while sponsors and mentors contribute in meaningful ways. In order to do so, we collect feedback from each of these parties detailing additional improvements we could make. However, we would like to do more to make this culture more apparent - especially amongst underrepresented groups.

Code of Conduct

At our events, we make attendees aware of our code of conduct. This code of conduct highlights our expectations for professionalism throughout the event. We are working to create a more comprehensive code of conduct that strictly prohibits any actions that may contradict our goal of having an open environment.

Learning Community

As an event, we emphasize a community where students come to learn new skills rather than to compete. At our open source events, projects are required to be affiliated with a specific mentor to be eligible for many prizes. This is because we believe that the guidance that a mentor offers is unparalleled and encourages further learning as opposed to students working on their own. In addition to that, we encourage our sponsors to host workshops. There is a great emphasis on having workshops at our event to foster growth, and we will clearly advertise our priority of learning over competition at our events.

Within our staff, this year we have created an atmosphere where members can get involved with different aspects of the event planning. Although staff members are placed on different teams, they are encouraged to take tasks they are interested in even if they were not originally assigned to. We create an environment within our staff that is conducive to learning by giving them flexibility as to how they contribute. We sincerely believe the key to creating a successful event is for our staff to be truly passionate about what they do and plan to support them as they go about finding what they truly care about.

Diversity Within Staff

The HackIllinois planning team has no minority members. It also had no minority applicants. A large part of this failure is that these groups make up only 5% of the general UIUC CS community. We acknowledge that in order to have a larger population of the already underrepresented students within Computer Science apply to be on HackIllinois staff, we must take actions to conduct outreach accordingly. Having a diverse set of backgrounds on our staff not only brings new opinions to our discussions, it also makes our team more balanced and aware as individuals.

Diversity at Events

We also recognize the need for increasing diversity and representation among our attendees and mentors. This issue is apparent across the tech community as a whole, and our event is no exception.

As of now, we do advertise our event to minority CS organizations on campus. However, we have not collected information on this outreach's success amongst minorities. This measurability, in addition to new diversity initiatives, is something we realize is essential to succeeding in our goal of creating a diverse event.

Plan of Action

HackIllinois 101: Our Organization Culture

HackIllinois wants to ensure that staff members understand the mission and values that HackIllinois holds, and that they are expected to uphold. We want to ensure that each and every staff member understands that they represent HackIllinois, and therefore they need to understand the organization's goals. To do so, we will conduct an orientation at the beginning of the fall season with a focus on HackIllinois organization culture. We will make sure that our team understands the importance of our core values described above, including diversity, and why we adhere to them.

Sensitivity Training Against Microaggressions

It is crucial that we bring awareness to the importance of applying the principles of diversity and inclusion to our daily interactions with others. Our directors as well as other leaders in the student CS community will attend targeted sensitivity training. We believe that as leadership, we still have a lot to learn on the subject and we want to understand what's best before we impart that culture onto staff. This includes material in staff orientation materials to personally highlight our emphasis on sensitivity and acceptance. By doing so, we would like to create active allies within our organization and greater CS community.

Outreach to Organizations and Universities

We understand that as our event outreach extends beyond our own campus, our outreach to minorities in the CS community should too. This is especially true for our new virtual event as it can reach all corners of the world with access to technology. We are no longer limited by travel times and cost, and will now capitalize on this to make our resources more accessible.

We believe that one of the most important things to do in order to enact change is to ensure that underrepresented groups have access to the resources they need to advance themselves in the field of Computer Science. To enable them to do so, we plan to expand outreach to minorities in CS on campuses across the country utilizing professional contacts and social media.

We will continue to conduct outreach to groups such as Women in Computer Science (WCS) and Black and African Americans in Computing (BAAC) for staff applications, however with an added emphasis on follow-ups and personal engagement. We hope that students from these groups will bring a new perspective to our staff.

Measuring our Progress

We understand that the first step in meeting a goal is being able to properly measure our progress. Thus, in order to improve diversity across our events, we will begin to measure progress on both our efforts and our results.

To go about improving diversity within our staff, we would like to start by keeping track of outreach we conduct, especially to minority organizations.

We plan on working more closely with clubs representing minority groups to understand how many students we are reaching out to are applying to be a part of our organization or why they are choosing not to.

To go about improving diversity within our attendee and mentor groups, we are actively expanding our outreach off campus by working to find new ways to advertise our event. This would include a special focus on outreach to minority groups.

To measure progress, we will also include an optional question regarding race in our application. We hope to see concrete evidence of our actions' impacts and learn how to better conduct outreach in the future.

Diversity Workshop During Event

In order to reach our attendee population and educate them with regards to diversity and inclusion, we will plan events that actively address these topics. We want to promote an atmosphere where people are comfortable discussing and sharing their experiences regarding diversity and inclusion in the tech community. This diversity workshop will continue in future events as it will continue to be important for attendees to learn about in years to come.

Our diversity initiative will encompass a panel, followed by time for open discussion. We want to promote discourse surrounding topics such as Imposter Syndrome, microaggressions, and educate attendees about the social climate of the world as it is today. Our workshop should make an impact on attendees such that they feel motivated to work towards change. We hope to give attendees insight into how to educate others about this topic and how to bring it up as an important topic of discussion as students go about their daily lives.

Marketing

In order to successfully carry out the aforementioned outreach, we have created a marketing committee. We want our event to be accessible not only to students actively involved in the tech community, but also those who are interested in tech but currently do not have the opportunity to attend such events.

The marketing committee will be responsible for attendee outreach. A large portion of this outreach will consist of us actively reaching out to minority groups in computing through organizations equivalent to BAAC (Blacks and African Americans in CS), LCS (Latinxs in CS), and WCS (Women in Computer Science) beyond our own campus. We will also be utilizing social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn to reach a wider audience.

We hope that our virtual event in August will connect a diverse group of passionate students around the world. With no barrier to admission and talks, workshops, and panels open to all, we strive to leave our mark on all members of our greater student community.