

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Statement

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I firmly believe that promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) should be part of the core values of an academic institution or a research community. The diversity of people from different cultures, identity groups, and socioeconomic classes brings together various knowledge structures, perspectives, and values, which is essential to cultivating new ideas and eventually yielding substantial and interdisciplinary research. However, diversity must be built on equity and eventually prosper with inclusion. This is because, first, talents are scattered among all human beings, but opportunities are not as equally distributed. It is the social responsibility of any academic community to ensure that diverse populations have equal opportunities to receive education. Furthermore, we need to ensure that all voices are heard and that all contributions are recognized for the robust exchange of ideas and viewpoints. Finally, the ultimate goal of DEI is to make all members feel like they belong and are part of the community, so they can enjoy growing and contributing to the long-lasting prosperity of the society.

My DEI values have gradually formed through my own life experiences. I have lived in different cultural environments for extended periods on three continents, Asia, America, and Europe, and each transition provided me with a new experience of cultural shock and a new understanding and appreciation of diversity.

Promoting Equity in the Educational System and Research Community

I was born and raised in China, where I spent the first 2/3 of my life to date. I am aware of the socioeconomic inequities in China, at the end of 2019 there was still a 600 million poor population, whose annual income is below 2000 dollars. My awareness of the inequities around me also led me to self-examine my own privilege and inequitable advantages. As the only child and son of a middle-class family, I was very lucky to receive the best possible education my family could afford, including expensive higher education abroad, which allowed me to become the first generation in my family to go to graduate school and eventually earned a Ph.D. degree.

I have participated in the fight against educational poverty. In Summer 2014, I joined ([Overseas China Education Foundation](#)), and became a volunteer teacher in Huining County, Gansu Province, one of the impoverished rural areas in China. For two months, I taught 120 schoolchildren, lived in their dormitories, and visited their families. I learned that many children from poor families, especially girls, would drop out of school after 9 years of compulsory education. I believe that, like China, the world's educational resources are inequally distributed among nations, races, genders, socioeconomic groups, etc. Minority groups in academia often suffer from various discrimination in their pursuit of education. Therefore, we must employ inclusive and equitable practices that do not discriminate on characteristics that are not related to intrinsic academic potential. I will always maintain my philosophy of educational equity during student recruitment and when I serve on admission committees as a faculty.

Inequity, however, does not only exist among minority groups in academia, it also often occurs among seniority in academic communities. This bottleneck manifests itself in research as the lack of people who are approachable to discuss ideas and who feel safe to receive feedback without judgment. Although I have encountered frustrations from time to time, I am grateful to have received a lot of guidance and support from my mentors and senior colleagues. I have always considered that a privilege and have tried my best to pass it on to the next generation. I have mentored more than 15 bachelor's, master's, and even junior Ph.D. students. When working with them and mentoring them, I always make sure to treat them as equal scholars, no matter how much more senior I am. I value their opinions, encourage them to initiate new ideas and take responsibility for their mistakes.

Fostering Inclusion in the Academic and Research Community

At the age of 18, I came to the United States for the first time alone and became an international undergraduate student. It was my first time living and studying in such a diverse community that possesses a wide array of races, ethnicities, nationalities, cultures, faiths, etc. One of the most valuable lessons I learned during my freshman year at UIUC was to appreciate diversity and contribute to the inclusion of the community. However, as an ethnic minority in the community, it was not easy at first when I was struggling with language and cultural barriers in the new environment. I benefited from actively participating in extracurricular activities and taking leadership roles in student organizations not only in my own cultural and ethnic group, but also in the broader department and campus.

For four years of my undergraduate studies, I have played a critical leadership role in the Chinese Student and Scholars Association at UIUC. I took on the responsibility of promoting the inclusion of the more than 6,000 Chinese student population and the even larger international student population at UIUC. To do so, my organization reached out and initiated close collaborations with university units such as International Student and Scholar Services, [Asian American Cultural Center](#), and other student organizations such as the Asian Pacific American Coalition. We planned a series of events to help new students better adjust to US culture and college life as quickly and smoothly

as possible. We also encourage them to get involved with the broader campus community. Furthermore, starting in my sophomore year, I became an orientation leader with the new student program, where we planned welcoming and orientation events for the diverse population of all incoming students. We also organized special events for minority groups, such as first-generation students (neither parent has earned at least a bachelor's degree). My experience of feeling isolated at first and then managing to become more and more involved in the inclusion community taught me the importance of feeling of belonging in an academic and research life.

In my Ph.D., I was part of a very diverse research group. Since then, I have been working with and later mentoring a diverse group of students, which continued after I moved to Switzerland in March 2023. Through my Ph.D. and professional experience, I have worked and collaborated with mentors, collaborators, and students from a wide range of cultural, ethical, racial, and sexual backgrounds. For example, geographically, they spread across China, South Korea, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Lebanon, Iran, Egypt, Turkey, Israel, United States, Mexico, France, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Poland, Finland, etc. I am deeply grateful for the diverse community of which I have been a part and even more so for being treated equally and inclusively. Furthermore, the different perspectives everyone brought onto the table create a robust community that is immune to "jumping on the bandwagon". Therefore, I will continue to commit to building a resilient and robust community (both culturally and intellectually).

DEI Commitment

I will always uphold my DEI values and continue learning about DEI and improve my understanding and practice.

Creating an Inclusive Classroom and Research Group

First, the most direct way for me to contribute to DEI at the university is to promote DEI in my own classroom and research group. I will start by actively looking for talented students with diverse backgrounds to join my team. To do so, I will leverage my personal connections with students from all over the world with whom I have worked. I will ask them to promote the graduate program at my future institution and my own research research group within their alma mater and their junior fellow students. For the groups that are not yet on my radar, I will try to reach out to faculties working in those regions through professional networks. I would also like to serve on the graduate admission committee in my department and try to help motivate and attract promising but underrepresented students.

The next step is to continually improve my teaching and mentoring strategies to create inclusive classrooms and research group. In my courses, I will plan as many group projects and other teamwork opportunities as possible and encourage the collaboration of students with different backgrounds (e.g., through random pairing). I believe that this strategy can help to cross the lines of different thoughts and drive innovation work. I will also provide undergraduate research opportunities within my group as much as possible, especially during the summer, when I will try to create internship opportunities for international undergraduate students from different countries.

In my own research group, I want to work and communicate closely with my students, understand the problems and unique needs of each student in research and life, and adjust my mentoring accordingly. I will educate them about DEI and appreciate the diversity around them. I hope that all of my students can not only overcome the inequity of different backgrounds, but also turn their experiences into opportunities and tools, and ultimately achieve the success of the research. For example, I will encourage them to brainstorm real-world impactful research problems that can actually link to their life experiences.

Proactively Promoting Equity and Inclusion

As a faculty member, part of the dominant groups in an academic community, it requires me to proactively promote equity and inclusion in the campus community. My practice will include, but not limited to, encouraging and pushing for diverse representation on panels and committees, promoting awareness around inappropriate conduct and discrimination of any kind, building bidirectional communication and feedback channel between faculties and students in my department and on campus, etc.

Broadening Participation to the Entire Society

I also believe it is the social responsibility of academics and scholars to promote DEI beyond campus and extend to the broader society. For one thing, we can do so by developing technologies for areas and populations around the world. These efforts can be initiated by students with diverse life experiences. For another, we should make our research and courses accessible to the local community and try to inspire children, especially those of underrepresented groups, to pursue STEM careers. Fortunately, both UIUC and EPFL have campus-wide events designed for this purpose. I have actively participated in the UIUC [Engineering Open House](#) and [Saturday Engineering for Everyone](#), and [EPFL Open Day](#) events, where we designed interactive demos based on our research for families and schoolchildren of all ages. We received great feedback from the audience that they are excited about the potential real-world applications of our research and that children are motivated to become engineers and researchers. In the future, I will also reach out to local minority communities and encourage them to attend these events.