DIVERSITY STATEMENT

Qin Yang (RickYang2014@gmail.com)
Personal Website: https://rickyang2016.github.io

Diversity is extremely important to me. I have long understood the value of working with and interacting with diverse groups of people, and this will continue to play a central role in my future career. However, Diversity is an inherently complex issue and everyone makes their own trade-off between ideal equality and dealing with historical inequality. I want to briefly include my own take on this topic alongside what I hope to do.

I believe that diversity is fundamentally the relationship between a community's distribution along a multitude of dimensions (e.g., physical traits, interests, cultures) and that of of the general population. I am strongly in favor of a diverse community that samples broadly from the general population. From a selfish perspective, it lets me learn from a variety of different, strange, and interesting people. From a larger perspective, it creates a robust community that is immune to "jumping on the band-wagon", and provides the source of innovative ideas and creative accomplishments.

Left to itself, there is a natural tendency to tighten this distribution. This is understandable, because similar groups are more predictable, more agreeable, and tend to share similar goals. This results in preferential treatment for the common and shunning of the outliers – outliers in race and gender are popular targets, but so are outliers in thought and habit. The heavy cost is that both the common and the shunned limit the experiences that they are willing to even consider.

From my perspective, I love to cook. By taking a diverse set of complementary ingredients, spices and flavors, and combining them I can create a dish that is better than any of the individual ingredients in it. This melding of different flavor profiles together to create a dish better than the sum of its parts parallels my beliefs around diversity in an academic setting. I believe that diversity is essential to creating a rich, productive academic environment. Creating an inclusive environment, with a diverse set of contributors from all backgrounds (including gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic, and ethnicity) will help bring these different perspectives, ideas, and skill-sets, creating a community that is much stronger than any one of its many diverse members.

Thus, my goal is for everyone passing through the university to accept that people vary widely along every attribute imaginable, and that this is valuable. The following are some ideas on how I can make an individual impact. Additionally, I would love to learn ways that can scale my efforts, and am open to other initiatives such as IDEA, the faculty mentor program, and diversity committees.

I will strive to create a positive environment. This means I will highlight everyone's contributions, push shy or junior students to voice their opinions, speak up when there are subtle or blatant put-downs, support broad collaboration and encourage non-academic interests. These are minor details, but these everyday experiences do matter. Furthermore, I take creating a productive learning environment where all are comfortable, and enabled to succeed seriously, and I have taken several steps to ensure students I work with feel included and comfortable. Inevitably when teaching a diverse group of students, I encounter a diverse set of strengths, weaknesses, and learning styles. To best serve my students I employ a wide array teaching styles including explaining traditional reasoning as well as background, applications, examples, posing open-ended questions, and using analogy to relate foreign topics to familiar ones. I use all of these techniques in a classroom settings, and often adopt my individual instruction to match the skill-set of the student or students I'm working in small group or one-on-one sessions.

In a similar vein, I want to find ways to showcase the fact that everyone, including the faculty, is an outlier along some dimension. By publicly applauding individual eccentricities, I hope that it can encourage students to do the same. For example, weekly trivia posters about different community members may have a positive effect.

While I believe in individualism, and respecting each student uniquely, I believe that for a diverse classroom to strive, it must be fundamentally rooted in equality. To ensure I don't show favoritism, I am fairly regimented about creating objective criteria for evaluating both my fairness in interactions with students as well as grading and evaluating student progress. For instance, I will often limit myself to answering only one in-depth question at busy office hours before I make a student re-queue themselves in the office hours line, ensuring that all students get an equal chance for my time. I do, however, ensure that students have high availability to aid, so that a student who requires more aid is not without the ability to get the help they need.

In summary, I believe that diversity is essential to growth and solving many complex problem in computer science. I work hard to ensure that all students I work with are encouraged to succeed, and that I treat everyone with respect, dignity, and fairness. A diverse student body is like cooking, having too much of one ingredient is not ideal, but when the correct mixture of spices comes together, the overall dish is far greater than the sum of its parts.

Google Scholar: https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=t6e_A9kAAAAJ&hl=en