

My personal journey drives my commitment to the goal of diversity, equity and inclusion in the field of artificial intelligence, and more broadly, computer science. Not only do I plan to achieve this through my own research goal of promoting equitable AI for social good, but also through an explicit effort towards creating opportunities for a broader community of researchers in AI, and computer science.

For most of my PhD, I was a visiting graduate student at the [University of Washington](#). I quickly imbibed the UW values of inclusion, and the dedication of UW students towards creating a welcome and [inclusive environment](#). Most significantly, I actively volunteered for UW CS-GradsWomen, a group devoted to bringing together women and gender minorities within the school of computer science. Throughout the year of 2018, I was in charge of running the annual welcome brunch and quarterly lunch meetings for CS-GradsWomen. To run these meetings, I collected anonymous questions from attendees (nearly 40 PhD students who attended regularly), synthesized the most important topics, and moderated the 90-min long conversations. While topics of discussion often included the Grace Hopper conference, and career-related questions from CRA-W, on many occasions, I personally ensured that trickier cultural topics about navigating the male-dominated field of computer science received attention. My primary motivation was to let the participants know that they were not alone in their experience, and their abilities were valuable, even as these were [sometimes openly questioned](#). Though these topics were uncomfortable, even among the members of CS-GradsWomen, I realized that avoiding them could lead to internalization of harmful stereotypes. Indeed, many CS-GradsWomen members have reached out to me subsequently, with personal notes about how these conversations helped them feel more accepted, and build their own community within the school of computer science and engineering.

At UW, I co-organized the annual [Women's Research Day](#) in 2018, where members showcased their research to high school and undergraduate women, and increased awareness about life in academia. During the UW visit days, I was in charge of the Women's Reception, a meet-and-greet event for all incoming women and gender minorities. Being in a room full of women scientists was a first for me; it inspired a sense of belonging in all of us, regardless of our seniority. I had a similar experience a few years later, when I was selected to attend [Rising Stars in EECS](#), a career workshop for women interested in academic careers. By surrounded by like-minded peers I could identify with, in no small part, encouraged me to pursue my own academic dreams, and taught me the power of role models. I have tried to be a role model to a [diverse group](#) of students, most of whom had no prior experience with research, but were able to learn quickly given the encouragement.

While at UW, I had the opportunity to participate in an outreach event at [Highline Public High School](#) in Burien, WA, and was glad to see the students' excitement for AI and language technologies. Having grown up in a lower middle-class household in a [small Indian city](#), with limited exposure to the world outside, I recognize the immense value of such outreach efforts. While I received ample encouragement at home, the broader society was not as kind—I was routinely bullied in high school and college simply for being ambitious. My personal experience strongly motivates my desire to continue outreach efforts where I can convey the importance of dreaming big to younger students, who I am confident can achieve a lot by having faith in their own abilities.

I served as a graduate student liaison for UW faculty interviews, co-organized and managed meetings between graduate student and faculty candidates. I helped with UW PhD application evaluations, organized the UW visit days for PhD admits and [welcome events](#) for new students, among other volunteering efforts at UW. I have also volunteered to organize research retreats within my immediate [research group](#). These efforts, while helpful for smooth functioning of the school, taught me the value of staying connected—an often-ignored but important aspect of grad school, crucial for good mental health among students and faculty alike. I intend to continue such volunteering, in whatever capacity I can.

At my current role in the Allen Institute for AI, I have invested my time into efforts for improving [diversity, equity and inclusion](#) within the organization through co-leading the DEI committee. Together with my colleagues, I started an initiative for rebuilding the interview process to consider candidates (especially interns) with non-traditional backgrounds, while providing them tools to ensure that their experience in the organization is not isolated. My efforts led to a change in how we hire interns—instead of making ad-hoc offers, we have implemented a structured process in 2020, in my team as well

as other teams at the Allen Institute for AI. We set a deadline for all internship applications, evaluated the entire pool of candidates based on not just their curriculum vitae, but also on their answers to questions about what research topics excite them the most, why they choose to work with us, and how they would contribute to DEI in their time with us. This ongoing effort has already resulted in a greater diversity of internship candidates, across universities, research backgrounds, as well as demographic groups.

I have interviewed underrepresented minority candidates for [the AI2 scholarships](#), and participated in outreach events such as [Black in AI at NeurIPS 2020](#). With two other colleagues, I started a reading group on equity, aimed at raising intra-organization awareness about the need for diversity in AI. This has become very well attended with loyal participation across teams, seniority levels and demographic groups. I also started an initiative which opens up 1:1 conversations of employees with the CEO, which is a hopefully a better opportunity for the management to be aware of personal struggles that employees might face in their daily work lives. While this is still in an early phase, I have received good feedback from our CEO, Oren Etzioni, about his listening experiences so far. Overall, I have made a conscious effort to use my own voice to amplify others that might go unheard, in the spirit of enabling positive change. I have also come to understand that my experiences might not always be relevant when it comes to minorities in our field; I pledge to listen and learn whenever that is the case. Going forward, I plan to continue endeavors towards diversity, equity and inclusion by giving opportunities to, *and* maintaining support for, students who might otherwise be overlooked, based on traditional evaluation metrics.

Computer science and AI are ubiquitous technologies with immense staying power in our society. Yet, the individuals behind these technologies today do not necessarily represent the society at large. Given their implications for social mobility, it is imperative to ensure accessibility for people from all backgrounds in our field. I am committed to the goal of leveling the playing field in CS and AI by *creating* opportunities for all, while paying attention to those who are traditionally overlooked, and finally, *maintaining* a nurturing environment for everyone. One key way in which I am trying to achieve this is through my research agenda which focuses on building responsible and equitable AI, and addressing societal biases, which disproportionately impact groups of people which are often already overlooked.

I recognize the power and privilege that accompanies a tenure-track faculty position at a reputable institution. Given this opportunity, I hope to be instrumental in empowering future students with the confidence and support necessary to pursue their ambition, and in the process, make impactful contributions to society.