Diversity Statement - Thaleia Dimitra Doudali - `thdoudali [at] gatech.edu`

In this statement, I describe my cultural and family background regarding diversity and my personal actions towards building an inclusive environment around me and emerging as a strong female presence in a male-dominated research field.

Diversity background.
Growing up in Greece, a European country of just eleven million residents, let alone in a small town by the sea, I thought that diversity was all about whether you are a boy or a girl. Being the youngest child in my family and having two older brothers, who treated me like a princess, I was raised in an environment that supported me and pushed me to excel. Attending a Greek undergraduate program in computer engineering was the first time I felt part of a minority group, as the number of females in my class was limited. Even so, I was fortunate to feel valued and appreciated throughout my studies and interactions with students and professors, by actively participating in student organizations, mentoring junior students, and completing an undergraduate thesis in a big research lab.

When I moved to the United States for my Ph.D. in computer science, right after completing my bachelor's degree in Greece, it was the first time I was exposed to a fully diverse environment. Let alone moving to Atlanta, a metropolitan city in the South of the United States, it felt like being in the center of a multi-cultural and all-inclusive world. This was and continues to be an eye-opening experience for me. At Georgia Tech I am part of a big research group with students from all around the world and a female advisor who not only strives to maintain an inclusive and supportive lab culture but also acts as an exemplary role model in terms of academic achievements. However, the percentage of females pursuing a Ph.D. or an academic position in the sub-area of computer systems is particularly low. As described in an NSF report regarding women in computer systems research [1], "*the systems community prides itself on being intimidating, an attitude that can be off-putting to many*", especially females whose "*perception for computer science being not-for-girls is reinforced both at home and at school*". This shortage of women in computer systems is profound in conference participation and distinct among conference speakers and program committees, as it increases the feeling of isolation and the need for more female representation.

Actions towards inclusion and female representation.
I feel passionate about being a strong female role model in my academic and social environment given my outgoing personality and urge to mentor and give back. At Georgia Tech, I have had the chance to enhance the female graduate student representation in computer science. At the university level, I was the only graduate student selected to participate in the inspirational talk series "Illuminate Tech" organized by Georgia Tech's Student Government Association [4]. At this event, I chose to present at the university community the four life quotes that shaped my Ph.D. journey. I shared my personal stories and struggles of how I manage my imposter syndrome, how I try to strike a work-life balance and overcome times when I felt particularly low. At the school level, I have been featured in the newsletter, which highlighted my research progress and achievements [2, 3]. In addition, I

work towards enhancing the school's student diversity through the Ph.D. recruiting process, by helping run the visit days and encourage students to join the program. I especially help international prospective students by sharing my experiences and clarifying questions regarding life in the United States. Finally, I participate and support the activities of the school's graduate women in computing club.

Regarding the limited female representation in the computer systems research area which I focus on, I attend many of the conferences and participate in Ph.D. forums, women in computing breakout sessions and strive to enhance the female presence. Additionally, I was selected to participate in the Shadow Program Committee of the European Conference on Computer Systems (EyroSys) 2020, and I was one of the three females out of thirty participants who attended the committee meeting. This was a valuable experience that I shared with other Ph.D. students and encouraged them to apply. Earlier in my Ph.D. I attended the CRA-W Grad Cohort workshop, which made me realize the strong female presence in computer science outside my own bubble. I still cherish the encouraging keynotes and friendships I made at this event, and I greatly encourage my junior female labmates to participate. Finally, I like to give back to my alma mater in Greece, where I presented my current research at the 5th Computing Systems Research Day at the National Technical University of Athens [5], hoping to encourage female undergraduate students to not be afraid to attempt graduate studies in a male-dominated research area.

Lastly, regarding cultural diversity and inclusion, I have been part of the 'Hellenic Society at Georgia Tech' cultural organization that primarily connects students of Greek heritage with each other. Moreover, we participate in university-level events and proudly share Greek traditions, and celebrate the rich historical achievements of ancient and modern Greece. Interestingly, the organization's board, which I lead this year, has had all-female members for the last three consecutive years [6].

As I continue my academic path I will vigorously work on enhancing the female representation in my research domain, while preserving a diverse and inclusive environment that respects the individual's cultural background and lifestyle.

References

[1] Leana Golubchik and Jennifer Weston. 2018. Women in computer systems research: increasing community, awareness, and communication. Technical Report. National Science Foundation, USA.
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[6] Hellenic Society at Georgia Tech. 2020. http://www.hellas.gtorg.gatech.edu/