

‘Be the change you want to see in the world’

I feel very strongly about creating a diverse and supportive environment of equal opportunity around me, where I act as a role model, help people grow their abilities, believe in and advocate for themselves. My background, beliefs and interpersonal abilities allow me to successfully do so now and in the future.

Background. I consider myself fortunate to have always received great support from family, friends and collaborators. My family and mentors have taught me how to develop my skills, to not doubt my abilities and to be ambitious. However, my journey so far has been a roller coaster of doubt, growth and success. In an academic environment and research area of expertise, where the female representation is astonishingly low, I often felt lonely and incompetent. Let alone when moving from an extremely non-diverse European country, that is Greece, to the metropolitan city of Atlanta in the United States, famous for its all-inclusive and multi-ethnic character. Despite the initial cultural shock, this new environment has significantly broadened my horizons. I realized the tremendous benefits of working and socializing in a diverse setting, where everyone brings their unique abilities and opinions and learns from each other. Yet, not all have such opportunities to develop their skills and receive the necessary mentorship to succeed.

Enhancing the female representation. I am very passionate about encouraging the participation of more women in computer science, especially in areas of extreme under-representation, as well as in doctoral studies and leadership roles. The shortage of women in my area of expertise, that is computer systems, is profound among academic faculty, program committees, conference participation and speakers. In response, my approach in improving the female representation is the following. First, as a woman myself I always strive to have noticeable presence in conferences, participate in poster sessions, Ph.D. forums and women in computing breakout sessions. Similarly, I grasp opportunities to serve in Program Committees that have global reach. For instance, I was selected to participate in the Shadow Program Committee of the European Conference on Computer Systems (EuroSys 2020), and I was one of the three women out of thirty participants who attended the physical committee meeting. Second, I increase the representation of computer systems researchers in female-oriented venues. Recently, I was selected to participate in the 2020 Rising Stars Women in EECS workshop. In the past, I have attended the Grace Hopper Celebration and CRA-W Grad Cohort. In all these venues I enjoy networking with other female researchers and try hard to break the misconception that research in computer systems is hard, not rewarding or ‘not-for-girls’.

Fostering cultural diversity. Apart from the female presence, it is extremely beneficial to work with people from diverse ethnic and academic backgrounds, such as the research lab I am part of at Georgia Tech. To foster this diversity at the departmental level, I participate in the student meetings with faculty candidates, encouraging the recruitment of exceptional applicants with unique profiles. Similarly, I help organize the visit days of prospective PhD students, running panels and activities, urging students to join the program. Regarding cultural diversity, I am an executive board member of the ‘Hellenic Society at Georgia Tech’, a cultural organization that connects students of Greek heritage with each other. We always participate in multi-cultural university-level events, where we proudly share Greek traditions and historical achievements, as well as learn about other ones.

Broadening the mentoring outreach. I thoroughly enjoy giving advice and helping people overcome hardships that I have faced in the past. Although I can easily do that with friends and collaborators, I vigorously try to reach those who may not be able to receive such advice. For example, I was selected to participate in the inspirational talk series ‘Illuminate Tech’ organized by Georgia Tech’s Student Government Association. At this event I shared 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 feel particularly low.

Commitment to bring change. Moving forward, I am determined to establish a diverse and inclusive environment around me. As member of the faculty, I aspire to create a multi-ethnic research lab, recruiting students across the globe. I look forward to creating a safe space for respectful collaboration and expression of each individual’s opinions and cultural background. In addition, I will advocate for the hiring of faculty with unique skills from various backgrounds. As a mentor and teacher, I will provide equal opportunity for advice and help to all my students, expanding further than my department to the university-level and local community. Regarding my service to the research community, I will champion a vibrant and inclusive community, advocate for the engagement of more women and other under-represented groups, and for the creation of a robust support system that enables and celebrates our achievements.