Diversity Statement

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I view DEI as the basic soil for growing humanity and excellence in society, including the academic community; it is about the daily respect for people regardless of their self-identifications, and self-introspection on "whether I want to be treated like what I treat others". Everyone has the duty to foster DEI in her/his surroundings, because that eventually determines how the society will treat them in one day.

As a first-generation college student, my parents could hardly give me advice on how to succeed in college and in my PhD studies. However, I was lucky to receive tremendous emotional support from them. I was also fortunate to receive academic mentorship from a variety of professors and student peers. Thus, I am proud to be a faculty job applicant today, and I look forward to creating a sharing and inclusive environment in the classroom and in my research group.

My Past Contributions to Advancing DEI

Mentoring: During the summers of 2022 and 2023, I mentored four undergraduate students for research internships at Harvard: three came from non-US schools, with two being in the US for the first time. To help the students get familiar with systems research (and life in the US), I held weekly meetings with each student, talking about not only research but also various cultural acclimation challenges that I had experienced during my own PhD. At the time of this writing, one of them has co-authored a paper with me that was published at a premier system conference. This student was also accepted to the University of Washington as a computer science PhD student. The other three students have also decided to apply to systems PhD programs, including one that was hesitating for a long time before working with me. I also consistently (monthly) shared my research and internship experiences with five junior PhD students over the past two years. All of them are non-native English speakers and are non-white.

Occasionally, I received email inquiries from PhDs who are in other research areas or from underrepresented minorities; I often scheduled one-to-one meetings to learn about their difficulties or puzzles. For example, Jessica Quaye, originally from the Republic of Ghana in West Africa, was interested in system research though she is in an architecture research group. I had long meetings with her both in person and online, and introduced her to my co-advisor Minlan Yu to identify potential opportunities for collaboration and advising. Besides one-to-one mentoring, I also participate in one-to-many panels to share my research experience with junior system PhDs. For example, I was a panelist for the "Getting started with systems research" panel [1] organized by Students@Systems in 2022. The video recording for the panel is freely accessible online to help systems PhD students regardless of their university or physical location.

Talking: I extensively talk to undergraduates regarding computer science research. For example, in October 2022, I gave a research talk at a Harvard AM/CS/EE PhD recruitment event (accessible to all US universities) which targeted students "that hold membership in an underrepresented and/or historically minoritized group in STEM." In 2022, I also gave talks at the Harvard SEAS Undergraduate Research Open House and the SEAS Research Showcase, targeting Harvard freshman and sophomore undergraduates. These talks were well-received, with several undergraduates in the audience later contacting my research lab to learn more about participation opportunities; I still mentor one of these undergraduates.

Teaching: I make an explicit effort to help students with little prior exposure to computer science, and I try to promote inclusiveness during teaching. When I was the small-group "supervisor" for the Algorithm Design and Analysis course at Peking University, I realized that some students lacked high school experience with programming contests; these students often found it hard to catch up with peers who did have this experience. To help them, I wrote step-by-step, thorough explanations for the algorithms discussed in class, and I handed out these explanations after class. When TA'ing a course at Harvard University, I answered all questions that appeared in the Ed forum, no matter whether the questions were anonymous or not, to keep everyone's learning progress on track.

My Future Plans for Fostering DEI

Going forward, as a faculty member, I plan to take the following actions:

- *Advising:* Actively recruiting underrepresented students, being attentive to any anti-DEI atmosphere in my research group, and explicitly adopting counter-measures to foster DEI with affirmative actions.
- *Connecting:* Reducing the barriers of students finding research opportunities by organizing mutual-connecting programs like UCB DARE [2]—matching students with faculty members for research.
- *Teaching:* Being attentive to any students with weaker prior knowledge in my classes, and helping them build confidence with support on a case-by-case basis.
- *Daily life:* Being kind to people I meet, no matter their age, color, disability, gender, ethnicity, politics, religion, education, language, and more. I believe "kindness is the ultimate nobility" [3].

References

[1] Student@Systems. A panel on "Getting started with systems research". https://students-at-systems.org/pages/events/getting-started-with-systems-research.html.

[2] UC Berkeley. DARE: Diversifying Access to Research in Engineering. https://dare.berkeley.edu/.

[3] Amin Vahdat. SIGCOMM Lifetime Achievement Award 2020 Keynote (48m44s): kindness is the ultimate nobility. https://youtu.be/Am_itCzkaE0?t=2924.