

Diversity Statement

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My perspective regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion revolves around two key principles: *equal opportunity* and *diversification*. I believe that these two principles, together, can impact the society and its people very positively.

I grew up in Bangladesh, where equal opportunity across gender still does not exist: women often face gender-based violence and other social obstacles in many parts of their lives. Being the only female child of a conservative and over-protective family of Bangladesh, I was also prohibited to take part into activities such as mathematics camps, as it required staying outside home overnight, which is considered *unsafe* for women in Bangladesh. Consequently, as a high-school student, I could not take part into mathematics and informatics olympiads, even though I was extremely passionate about these events. Fortunately, my situation took a positive turn when I started my bachelor's program: with the support of several professors of my university, I was able to take part into programming contests. I soon established myself as one the best contestants of the whole country and undoubtedly the best female programming contestant. I was a key member of my team and won several national- and international-level championships and awards. That time, I was able to prove what difference *equal opportunity* can make. I believe I was able to be a role model, which encouraged many young women in my country to follow their dreams despite social obstacles.

As a faculty, I intend to support my students, regardless of their background, equally and help them pursue their goals. I want to make sure that no one is held back because of their gender, race, or nationality. The first step towards that is to give everyone a platform where they can express their concerns, discuss their issues with peers and mentors, and ask for help and support, without worrying about consequences. One such platform is CRA-W Grad Cohort for Women. I attended the cohort in 2017 and it helped me tremendously during my Ph.D. in many different ways. I intend to continue participating in these workshops, and mentor female graduate students to help them overcome their obstacles.

My second principle is to *diversify* teams. Here too, my personal experience taught me why diversity is so important. The formation of my programming contest team was very unique and diverse: one female (me), and two males, one with a walking *disability*, who had to use a wheelchair to move around since the age of two. Bangladesh and neighboring south Asian countries do not follow building codes for disability access, and, thus, moving around was a big challenge for us. Nevertheless, with this diverse and unique team, we ended up winning national championships in multiple competitions. That time, I realized that a diverse and inclusive team can make a big difference.

During my Ph.D., I entered into an international and diverse community at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, where I was welcomed warmly with much enthusiasm. Over the last five years, I learned a lot from my peers, mentors, and mentees. I always found that diversity in a group gives different perspectives, which always leads to a positive boost. I found a similar culture for diversity and inclusion during my two internships at Microsoft as well. As a faculty, I intend to diversify my research group: by recruiting students from a diverse background, and by collaborating with researchers with diverse experience and skill sets.

My general philosophy is that everyone and every option should be given equal opportunity and we should always try to diversify workgroups. I wish to uphold these ideals and lead by example through outreach, and promote people from all gender, race, and nationality alike.