

AISHWARYA GANESAN – Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Statement

I am committed to creating a diverse, equitable, and inclusive environment in my classroom, research group, department, and the broader community. As a faculty member, I would strive to ensure that every student feels welcome and can thrive regardless of color, disability, gender, race, religion, socio-economic status, and sexual orientation.

Improving Diversity. In computer science, women and people of color are underrepresented. For example, according to the recent survey conducted by CRA [2], out of the doctoral degrees awarded in CS in 2019-2020, just about one in five degrees were granted to women. Outreach activities at different levels are crucial to increasing the number of women and underrepresented minorities entering the pipeline.

In the past, I have contributed to such outreach efforts and would continue them as a faculty member. In particular, I co-lead an outreach effort to encourage women undergraduate students to apply for graduate studies at UW Madison at the Grace Hopper Conference (GHC) in 2018. I first worked with faculty members from different research areas to create a research portfolio about the department. I then set up a booth at the career fair at GHC for our graduate program, where I presented the portfolio to prospective students and actively encouraged women to apply. I also answered their questions about our program and graduate studies in general. I followed up on this effort by organizing visit days for prospective graduate students, especially women. I helped organize a breakfast where potential women graduate students could connect with existing students to learn more about the program. As a faculty member, I intend to start or participate (if they already exist) in such outreach initiatives.

From my experience, I have come to realize that the most pressing problem for students from historically underrepresented groups is that of limited exposure to graduate studies or research. Therefore, I am keen to spearhead new outreach activities to address this problem. For example, I plan to organize workshops to help undergraduate women and minority students navigate the graduate admission process. Similarly, I will organize summer schools and programs to expose undergraduate students to research in computer science.

Retaining Diversity. While it is crucial to diversify the pipeline, we must pay equal attention to retaining students from diverse backgrounds and ensure that they can achieve their career goals. In my role as the President of the Women's Association of Computing Machinery (WACM) at UW Madison, I have organized many events to retain diversity. For example, I invited successful women in industry and academia to share their stories with students. Such events instill confidence in students, especially those who are starting out in CS.

Mentoring programs are another essential tool in retaining diversity. I have mentored several graduate and undergraduate women students at UW Madison over the years. I have also mentored students in the research community through mentoring programs at conferences such as SOSP, OSDI, and EuroDW. To help women students succeed in obtaining jobs in the industry, I have helped organize resume review sessions, technical interview practice sessions, etc. In my experience as a member and leader of WACM, students appreciate having support groups where they come together to help each other. Thus, as a faculty member, I would be thrilled to closely work with such student organizations in the department.

To retain diversity, we must create an inclusive environment both in the classroom and in research groups. In the classroom, I will take active measures to ensure all students participate in discussions. For example, to encourage participation, in the first lecture of my class, I asked each student to introduce themselves and explain their expectations about the course. Even such seemingly simple activities can make students feel they are an integral part of the class. In my research group, I will strive to recruit students from diverse backgrounds and create a collaborative environment where every student can realize their potential.

Finally, I realize that unconscious bias can hinder the creation of an inclusive environment. In my own experience, I have received casual remarks stemming from unconscious bias against women researchers. At VMware, as part of DEI efforts, the *Picture a scientist* documentary [1] was screened to our group, which was then followed by an active discussion. I came to realize that unconscious bias was widespread in the workplace. I believe the solution is to proactively educate students and members of the academic community of such biases.

Recognition for Diversity Efforts. For my diversity efforts at UW Madison, I was awarded one of the 2019 *Golden Brick Awards*, a department-wide award recognizing service to the CS department. Here is an anonymous comment from a department member: “As President of WACM, Aishwarya has demonstrated consistent leadership and commitment to creating diversity in the department. She is clearly passionate in her support for women in tech and shows it through tireless effort organizing events to bring women in CS together for the common good.”

To conclude, I have actively worked to improve and retain diversity so far. As a faculty member, I consider it my responsibility to continue and expand on these efforts.

References

- [1] Picture a Scientist. <https://www.pictureascientist.com/>.
- [2] Stuart Zweben and Betsy Bizot. 2020 CRA Taulbee Survey. <https://cra.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/2020-CRA-Taulbee-Survey.pdf>.