

Diversity statement

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Equal opportunity for all people, regardless of gender, race, religion, socio-economic background, or sexual orientation is a fundamental goal for any society. Furthermore, a diverse work environment is more innovative and productive than a homogeneous one. Unfortunately, societal factors, as well as both conscious and unconscious discrimination, have led to poor diversity in computer science. It is saddening to know that, in 2014, only 18% of US computer science undergraduate degrees were awarded to women. The situation is even worse in my home country (India): In 2018, only 8% of students entering the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) were women.

My undergraduate curriculum at IIT-Delhi included 100 hours of social service. This acts as a great forcing function for students to explore diverse aspects of society, and I believe that more schools could benefit from such programs. My service included teaching basic arithmetic to kids in the slums of Delhi. This experience made me appreciate the tremendous challenge of improving literacy in poor socio-economic groups. I also helped develop an application to track financial donations for Goonj, an Indian NGO that manufactures cheap sanitary pads for women.

I plan to work towards increasing diversity in computer science in three ways. First, to help increase the representation of underrepresented minorities in computer science, I will encourage such undergraduates in my class to apply to PhD programs. Doing so can dispel a minority student's belief that they are not good enough, which is what they are often told by society. It is also important to spread awareness about STEM degrees. For example, students from financially poor backgrounds sometimes do not apply to PhD programs just because they are unaware that such programs are typically fully-funded.

Second, I will assist in tackling unconscious bias in the student admissions and faculty hiring process. This can be achieved by explicitly defining what we are looking for in successful candidates, and ignoring details that reveal discriminatory information such as gender, race, and age. I hope to replicate and improve upon CMU's laudable efforts at reducing unconscious bias, in the form of Bias Busters workshops, and mandatory training videos that help understand unconscious bias for admissions and hiring committees.

Third, I will foster an inclusive and empathetic environment in class and in my research group. I wish to showcase that everyone is welcome, and there is no room for discrimination or aggression in any form.