

## Diversity Impact Statement

My personal background and experiences throughout my graduate life have made me realise the importance of a) the necessity of diverse backgrounds, genders, identities, upbringings, viewpoints, and age to have a vibrant research atmosphere and b) the fact that equal opportunity is an empty phrase for a significant majority of the talented undergraduates of the world who do not know their own potential, simply because of being born in a weaker class, gender, race, or nation.

For a bit of a background, I am an Indian and did my undergraduate education from my home country. Thereafter, I did my Masters from Georgia Tech and then my PhD from University of Maryland. In my alma mater, I'm the first student in its entire (albeit very short) history to do a PhD from outside the country (and among a handful who did a PhD at all), the first student to get into a school as good as Georgia Tech for a Masters, the first student who ended up forming a trivia quizzing society (the concept of clubs and societies was very nebulous at my time), the first student to do many things which are considered possible, if difficult, parts of the undergraduate life in the West. For an undergraduate from my background, it was all too clear how much difference just *knowing what to do* can make in the eventual career, nay life, of a student. This is a reason that throughout my PhD whenever I was a teaching assistant in a course, I would make certain that aside from teaching the material to students, I would keep informing them about resources they might find useful for their future careers. I kept my eye out for students who are minorities in USA, or whose English is not fluent, or who commuted long distances, or who didn't speak much in class, so that they are not missing out. If I get the position at your esteemed institution, I'll bring this long experience of my own undergraduate life, and that from teaching nine courses as a TA, of how to design classes which provide opportunities to the weakest, and how to make certain that students reach their maximum potential. I would, in collaboration with people and resources at the university develop strategies to advance students with potential who might be from under-represented groups, and make certain that in my class and office they have a place on the table and a voice in support.

In my last six years of PhD, I've met a lot of researchers from a lot of different backgrounds, and I've realised that a person's background and subtle biases really effects their research. Even the way one sets upon decided what is a *researchable* problem has a lot to do with their academic and social upbringing. I deliberately surrounded myself with people who are different from me, as I had seen a lot of foreign graduate students who would only talk and work with their compatriots, and would not broaden their horizons. I wished to avoid that. This led to not only me finding my best friends (who are Chinese, female, and have very different ideas of doing research from mine), but also me growing as a graduate student. I have seen labs which are too homogeneous become echo chambers with closed doors and their vitality fades, and thus, once I become a professor I would actively hunt for students who challenge mine and each others' ideas. Who look, act, think, and are different from each others. I have also seen a lot of PhD students burning out and dropping, and these are not untalented people. Often what happens is a communication problem with their advisors or peers, a lack of publications due to not finding collaborators, and thus frustration sets in. Combine that with the high pay of industry jobs, it is not surprising that many PhD students drop out. As a faculty I would focus on retention of talent and individual growth, especially with students who might be feeling alienated.

In my PhD experience I have found that one easy way to ensure diversity, is to just listen. This is an important skill for a researcher. Often, I've seen discussions which would have been more productive if all members were encouraged to contribute. As a faculty I would always be a ready ear and my door would always be open.

---