Diversity Statement
Steven Bethard

I believe improving diversity in the computational sciences is an urgent problem. In the "Broadening Participation in Computing" reading group at the University of Arizona, we looked at statistics of both Computer Science and Information Science and saw very low ratios of female students (around 25%) and even lower ratios of hispanic students, despite the University of Arizona being a Hispanic Serving Institution. I brought the urgency of this problem to the University of Arizona School of Information faculty, and helped to create a department committee on diversity, equity, and inclusion.

As a member of this diversity committee, I led an effort to explore the various levers we could legally use to increase diversity in our graduate admissions. I met with the U.S. Chief Data Scientist, Denice Ross, who suggested following the wording the Small Business Administration uses to navigate the legal issues. We explored several such approaches, but in the end, due to the state of Arizona's restrictive laws about diversity and the recent supreme court decisions, the University of Arizona lawyers concluded we could not consider any form of diversity while reviewing applications. This was a frustrating but very informative learning experience.

Thus, I focused my efforts on improving the diversity of our applicant pools, an avenue that was still legally open to us. I proposed a framework for identifying high-quality diverse applicants for our faculty searches, and used this to reach out to and directly invite applications from these faculty. In combination with efforts from others in the department, this led to the most diverse group of applicants we have had for a faculty search to date. We are now looking into taking lessons from our department's experiences in running the Knowledge River program (which has greatly increased the Latino, Native American, and Black students graduating from the M.A. in Library & Information Science) and applying those techniques (e.g., scholarships and cohorts) to broaden diversity in the rest of the School of Information.

Though it is less compelling than the direct actions above, I also note that I have a variety of experience working with diverse populations. My ability to interact with other cultures has benefited from spending significant time abroad, living and working in Belgium and the Netherlands for much of 2010-2013. I also have experience working with students and researchers from diverse countries and cultural backgrounds, having served as advisor to Ph.D. and M.S. students from Bangladesh, Belgium, China, India, Mexico, Nepal, Nigeria, Spain, Turkey, Ukraine, and Vietnam, all of whom successfully completed their graduate degrees or are currently making good progress towards their degrees. I have engaged in high school outreach, attracting a female African American high school student to join my lab for a semester and assist in various research-related activities. And back in 2008 I won the Daniel Henkel Service Award from the University of Colorado Office of International Education for my efforts as part of the CU International group, which helps new international students to acclimate to the school and culture by organizing tours, social events and other assistance.