Research Philosophy

The Distributed Artificial Intelligence Research Institute (DAIR) produces interdisciplinary Artificial Intelligence (AI) research. Instead of constantly working to mitigate the harms of AI research performed by dominant groups without an analysis of potential risks and harms, we encourage a research process that analyzes its end goal and potential risks and harms from the start. Our center is distributed to ensure that researchers from many different backgrounds can participate while embedded in their communities. Finally, we aim to communicate our work in forms that are accessible and useful to members of impacted communities, rather than purely based on research papers accessible to a select few.

To perform long term community based and interdisciplinary research rather than the current trend of constantly rushing to publish work every few months, we hope to incentivize researchers to take their time and maximize the impact of their work. While there are specific research directions we are interested in such as,

- developing AI for low resource settings;
- language technology serving marginalized communities;
- coordinated social media activity;
- data related work;
- robustness testing and documentation,

we strongly believe in a bottoms up approach to research, supporting ideas initiated by members of the DAIR community, rather than a purely top down direction dictated by a few.

Community, not exploitation: We believe that research should center the voices and experiences of those most impacted by technology and should be rooted in their communities. Our distributed research institute allows us to remain embedded in our communities in the U.S. and globally to include a greater diversity of perspectives and lived experiences.

Healthy, thriving researchers: As researchers ourselves, we understand that the current environments in which we conduct this work do not prioritize our well-being. We value the commitments required to produce strong research and are committed to being a place where researchers do not have to choose between their work and their health.

Comprehensive, principled processes: We believe that groundbreaking research happens when researchers have the space to thoroughly conduct their work. We value deliberate, comprehensive processes that lead to quality findings.

Proactive, pragmatic research: We believe that artificial intelligence can be a productive, inclusive technology that benefits our communities, rather than work against them. However, we also believe that AI is not always the solution and should not be treated as an inevitability. Our goal is to be proactive about this technology and identify ways to use it to people's benefit where possible, caution against potential harms and block it when it creates more harm than good.

Meet the team

Timnit Gebru (she/her)

Founder and Executive Director

Timnit Gebru is the founder and executive director of the Distributed Artificial Intelligence Research Institute (DAIR). Prior to that she was fired by Google in December 2020 for raising issues of discrimination in the workplace, where she was serving as co-lead

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Alex Hanna (she/her)

Director of Research

Dr. Alex Hanna is Director of Research at the Distributed AI Research Institute. A sociologist by training, her work centers on the data used in new computational technologies, and the ways in which these data exacerbate racial, gender, and class inequality. She

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Dylan Baker (they/he)

Research Engineer

Dylan's engineering and research work is broadly focused on ethics in machine learning, particularly how it relates to data labor, classificatory systems, and identity. Coming from an interdisciplinary background, they are also interested in finding accessible and creative ways to

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Raesetje Sefala (she/her)

Research Fellow

Raesetje Sefala is DAIR's first research fellow. She uses computer vision, data science, and machine learning techniques to explore research questions with a societal impact. Her current research uses satellite imagery to study the legacy of spatial apartheid in South

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Safiya Noble (she/her)

Advisory Committee Member

Prof. Safiya Noble is member of the advisory committee of the Distributed AI Research Institute. Dr. Noble is an Associate Professor at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) in the Department of Information Studies where she serves as the Co-Founder and Co-

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Ciira wa Maina (he/him)

Advisory Committee Member

Dr. Ciira wa Maina is a member of the advisory committee of the Distributed AI Research Institute. He is a lecturer at Dedan Kimathi University of Technology in Nyeri, Kenya where he conducts research in a number of areas including bioacoustics, IoT, machine learning

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