

Diversity and Inclusion Statement

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I believe computer scientists have an obligation to elevate society as a whole. However, to be able to do this in an equitable way, I think we need to ensure that computer scientists are as diverse as the broader society we live in. Improving representation in the field of computer science can help us better understand the problems faced by society, and better understand the effects of proposed solutions. Computer science departments can play an important role in solving this problem by shaping a more diverse workforce, and training skilled engineers with various backgrounds.

As a faculty member, I will strive to be a teacher and researcher who fosters diversity. I believe empathy and respect for every person's lived experience go a long way toward ensuring a better feeling of inclusion, and I intend to emphasize these values in the classroom and in my research group. Teaching has been an important part of my experience as a student. Through my stints teaching various classes at MIT and Stanford, as well as tutoring individual students, I have noticed that a student's background can have a big role in how well they can assimilate a course. For example, the introductory computer science class at MIT was much harder for students who had never programmed before. As a Teaching Assistant, my philosophy has been to try to create an atmosphere where students feel comfortable asking any question they might have, and to destigmatize asking "dumb questions." I have personally tried to give individualized attention to students who seemed to be struggling with the course material, including looking at code or proofs after office hours over email. In my opinion, creating a friendly and open environment that is conducive to learning is very important. I hope to apply this teaching to my research group as well. Research works better when it is more collaborative and less competitive, and I want to create a research group that is energetic, diverse, welcoming to all backgrounds, and cognizant of the societal implications of our work.

Additionally, my experiences on various university committees as an undergraduate and graduate student at MIT and Stanford have helped me better understand how we can make computer science a more inviting discipline. In 2014-15, I was part of the Undergraduate Student Advisory Group in EECS (USAGE) committee at MIT, whose goal was to improve the undergraduate experience for students in the department. We ran surveys and provided feedback to the department on a number of issues, including changes to the curriculum to make it easier for students without prior experience to get into the major, efforts to understand why diversity in the department was low (e.g., are females taking classes that are similar to what males take?), quality of advising, and effectiveness of the undergraduate research program. More recently, as a Ph.D. student, I was on the faculty search committee at Stanford, where I helped support our mandate to improve diversity in the department, and ran the Stanford DAWN Seminar, where we tried to foster diversity by inviting speakers with different backgrounds. I also ran a weekly TGIF event for the department, which attempted to build a stronger sense of community within the Stanford computer science graduate student cohort. These efforts have helped the department become more open and inclusive.

I firmly believe that we can do a better job of getting students excited about computer science and programming earlier on, and making computer science a more accessible major. My school in India had basic programming as a requirement from the first grade, which gave me a head start in college. As a faculty member, I would love to create a summer program that covers the basics of computer science and programming for underrepresented school students in the local community. I would also love to invite high school students every year to do summer research in my lab.

I am strongly committed to improving diversity and inclusion in the department and across our field.