

The computer science community now broadly recognizes the importance of inclusion – ecosystems comprising people from different backgrounds increase social good. I was fortunate to experience this myself, as my PhD cohort had a significant representation of students and professors who were women and people of color. However, although there has been significant progress towards addressing issues and improving DEI in our community, we still have a long way to go to remove structural barriers and provide equitable access. While I cannot fully comprehend the challenges and discrimination faced by these groups, as an Armenian from a low-income family, I have experienced implicit and explicit biases while growing up in Uzbekistan and attending college in Russia.

Our community has also begun to reckon with how emerging computing tools cause disproportionate harm by making and amplifying biased decisions in hiring, healthcare, public safety, and financial services. A diverse and well-equipped community is the right way to discuss and design systems that will benefit our society. This commitment requires learning from communities of color, women, and people with disabilities and empowering them to take leadership roles.

I have been actively involved in DEI efforts throughout my schooling. In high school, as part of international summer camps, I volunteered at two orphanages, teaching kids English and drama and helping to renovate their buildings. At my undergraduate institution, I mentored multiple CS students with hearing disabilities and one student from Dagestan, a historically underserved region. Since starting a PhD, I have mentored multiple female, non-binary, and persons of color pursuing graduate degrees at Cornell, and have contributed to more systemic changes by taking on leadership roles. In particular, I co-led the Cornell Tech PhD student organization, where I helped to establish and promote institutional efforts for diversity and inclusion, anti-harassment policies, and an overall organizational support structure for students. I also co-organized a visit day for admitted PhD students, focusing on recruiting more students from underrepresented groups, which helped our department significantly increase recruitment diversity. Recently, I co-led a student proposal for new institutional measures to increase accountability and promote education on racial injustice and sexual abuse. Based on these experiences, I was asked by the Dean to serve on the recent search committee for the DEI Director at Cornell Tech.

As a faculty member, I will work towards providing equitable opportunities to students from underrepresented communities, women, and people with disabilities. I am inspired by the faculty-led programs and initiatives at Cornell Tech, such as Break Through Tech AI¹, that were created to bring undergraduate students from underrepresented groups to explore research and obtain skills for future careers. Academia has an essential obligation to create an inclusive and supportive environment. As part of the department, I will focus on

- **Building support structures for students** – I will help to organize activities and workshops that increase opportunities for underrepresented students. I will provide support for fellowship applications, career planning, networking, and navigating academic life and work-life balance (as a parent of a 3-year-old boy, I understand how challenging and important it is to study and work in a supportive environment.)
- **Recruiting a broad set of PhD students** – I will participate in outreach activities by giving talks in public and minority-serving universities with a diverse student representation. At conferences, I will reach out to communities such as Women in ML, Black in AI, and Queer in AI. I will seek to establish long-term collaborations with these communities and institutions.
- **Engaging minority, women, and people with disability undergraduate students in research** – I will work on getting research grants to organize research internships and summer projects that would be open to students from local institutions.
- **Selecting research topics that matter to underrepresented communities** – My research agenda will align with DEI values and I will continue studying the impact of new technologies on underrepresented groups.

Broadly, I look forward to contributing to a healthy campus culture that connects people of different backgrounds and abilities and amplifies efforts to increase social good.

¹<https://www.breakthroughtech.org/>