
Diversity Statement

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Given the increasingly pervasive role that computational systems play in society, there is a pressing need to incorporate diverse perspectives in all areas of computer and information science. However, according to the CRA 2020 Taulbee Survey, only 21.5% of computing bachelor's graduates in the US were women, 3.9% were Black or African American, 8.9% were Hispanic or Latino, and 0.2% were Native American. With regard to doctoral degrees, these numbers drop to 1.4%, 1.6% and 0.1% for African Americans, Latinos and Native Americans, respectively. Among international scholars, Latin Americans, Caribbeans and Africans remain vastly underrepresented. Similarly, first-generation and non-traditional students, neuro-divergent people, people with disabilities, and LGBTQ individuals often experience marginalization and discrimination. These disparities have several repercussions, leading to certain groups being under-served by technology, and to critical research directions being ignored.

My experiences as a member of the LGBTQ community, and as part of the Venezuelan diaspora -the largest migration and displacement crisis ever recorded in the Americas- have given me a unique perspective and sensibility towards institutional barriers and social inequalities. I believe that we have a collective responsibility to contribute towards a more diverse, equitable and inclusive academic community, and I have made it a priority to take an active role to make this happen. At Purdue, I have served as the Diversity Chair for the Graduate Student Association for two years. In this role, I worked with a group of undergraduate and graduate students, alumni, faculty and staff to put forward a comprehensive proposal to improve recruitment, retention, and departmental policies that affect underrepresented groups¹. This work included meeting with different stakeholders, holding town halls, and negotiating with the department leadership to devise a concrete, actionable plan and the allocation of funds to make it possible. I was also in charge of restructuring the GSA mentoring program, which pairs incoming students with senior students to help them navigate life at Purdue CS. This work involved researching successful mentoring programs, devising clear guidelines, and developing a training program for mentors.

In addition to my work in the GSA, I have served for four years as a Global Ambassador for the Purdue Graduate School. In this role, I have contributed to outreach activities targeting international applicants from Latin America and the Caribbean. Some of these activities include connecting with universities in the region, conducting live Q&As with prospective students and creating content about life in the US as a Latin American student. I am also part of the leadership team of the Purdue Graduate Women in Science Programs, an inter-departmental group that offers monthly programs for graduate students and postdocs of underrepresented genders and allies in the College of Science. In this role, I am in charge of putting together relevant science and life-skills events that allow students to network with each other and to learn from invited speakers. Some of the events we have facilitated include an invited talk from Dr. Ximena Bernal on how to build an inclusive lab, and a discussion panel on science careers and the job search process with folks from industry, academia and national labs, which I moderated.

Beyond my service at Purdue, I am a mentor in the Cientifico Latino Graduate Student Mentorship Initiative, a program targeted towards underrepresented graduate school applicants in STEM, and an active member of the LatinX in AI and Queer in AI communities, affinity groups that foster community, offer resources, and promote the work of latinx and queer researchers in AI.

Going forward, I plan to continue my efforts towards building a diverse, inclusive, and equitable academic community. I am particularly interested in offering research experiences to undergraduate students of underrepresented groups, and help build a pipeline of talented students into graduate programs, as well as mentoring and advising underrepresented graduate students. I am also interested in forming relationships and research collaborations with faculty in minority serving institutions, and with K-14 educators. I intend on pursuing external funding opportunities that can facilitate these activities, such as the NSF REU and RET programs, as well as participating in university-led and department-led initiatives.

¹https://www.cs.purdue.edu/diversity/diversity_equity_inclusion_task_force.html