Diversity Statement

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To avoid perpetuating a cycle of non-diversity, I have dedicated time to teaching, mentoring, and assisting computer scientists of all backgrounds throughout my education. These experiences inform my future goals for advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion. I plan to continue mentoring a diverse cohort, and supporting bottom-up efforts that target younger generations. As a future professor in computer science, I will support existing initiatives and enact new programs that ensure computer scientists of all backgrounds have the resources to succeed.

Upstream diversity outreach

Rather than accepting the status quo as-is, I believe that we have a social duty to reach out to the younger generations (i.e. middle through highschool) and improve diversity *upstream* of higher education. Such outreach programs can be empowered by recent efforts that improve the accessibility of quality computer science curricula.

During my PhD, I have taught middle schoolers basic programming skills as part of the Teknowledge program at CMU, an after-school program bringing coding opportunities to local schools. Specifically, I volunteered at the Obama Academy, a majority Black middle school servicing low-income neighborhoods of Pittsburgh. Students would come to work on CMU's CS Academy: a free, online computer science curriculum with middle school, high school, and AP level coursework. My role was to help run the program in coordination with the local teachers, and aid students by answering questions, demonstrating how to debugging errors, and explaining how programming works. Over the years, enrollment increased greatly from a handful to dozens of students. Several of these students were inspired to continue the program on their own or participate for multiple semesters.

My goal is to expose under-represented minorities to computer science at a much earlier age, in order to spark enthusiasm for programming and prepare younger students for a career in computer science. As a future professor in computer science, I plan to reach out to local schools and communities. Based on their needs, some actions I can take are to organize workshops for teachers to provide them with information and resources for supporting diversity in CS, or start programs that empower volunteers to inspire and support local students.

Diversity in mentorship

During my PhD and throughout my post-doctoral appointment, I have mentored students of varying diverse backgrounds in both formal and informal arrangements. I participated in the CMU AI Mentoring Program, a program for mentoring undergraduate women and minorities. There, I provided career advice and discussed research/graduate school life with my mentee, who was interested in pursuing graduate degree and is now a PhD student at UC Berkeley. At MIT, I participated in the Graduate Application Assistance Program, where I assisted applicants from under-represented minorities with their graduate school applications to MIT's EECS PhD program. I am additionally directly mentoring an undergraduate woman under the Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program, guiding her through a research project to develop new skills in machine learning. Of the junior PhD students that I have mentored, two of the four have been women in computer science, both of whom I have directly guided through multiple research projects.

In a different but related capacity, I have participated as a committee member for the Mentored Opportunities in Research program (METEOR). In this committee, I provided technical feedback for a postdoc fellowship selection process, which aimed to increase diversity among postdocs at MIT CSAIL.

As a future professor in computer science, I will continue to seek diversity throughout all of my interactions. From PhD students to undergraduate TAs, this means advertising open positions broadly to ensure visibility to under-represented minorities, correcting for unconscious bias, and contextualizing applications with background. I plan to also maintain a reference of existing resources and support networks for under-represented minorities to maximize their success and limit their overhead.

Concluding remarks. History dictates that diversity in computer science does not happen on it's own. As a leader in this field, I believe I have a responsibility to become part of the solution, which I hope to support through my past experiences and future aspirations.