

DIVERSITY STATEMENT

Ahmed Saeed

I recognize the importance of diversity, not only as a way to provide opportunities for individuals coming from underrepresented groups, but also as a way to enrich and strengthen the community through the diverse point of views of its members. My approach to diversity and inclusion follows two paths: representation and knowledge sharing.

I have been an active member of all communities I joined. During my undergraduate studies, I was the representative of the computer science class of 2010 for three semesters. I helped deliver the concerns and demands of students of my class to the faculty. I also took part in several on-campus initiatives aimed at spreading technical knowledge between students. For example, I gave several talks on the open source movement and open-source projects, encouraging students to use and contribute to open source projects. Further, I organized the first Software Freedom Day at Alexandria University, which included two weeks of talks that attracted more than 600 students from all over Egypt, ranging from high school students to professionals. The team that helped me organize the event was 40% female volunteers. Diversity in the organizing team was reflected in the diversity in attendees allowing us to reach more female students and students from other schools.

When I started my PhD, I joined the graduate student senate of Georgia Tech, representing students from the College of Computing. I was also the Vice President of the Graduate Student Council for the College of Computing. During my tenure, I advocated lowering the mandatory fees that most students have to pay out of pocket, despite receiving full funding for their studies. These fees adversely impacted international and low-income students. This push eventually led to an increase in stipend for graduate students at the College of Computing. I also advocated student clubs that represent cultural minorities and helped with the PhD visit day for incoming students. As a member of the faculty, I plan to continue being an active member of the community, supporting and mentoring student clubs and initiatives.

My approach to knowledge sharing during my doctoral and postdoctoral work is through mentoring and teaching. On the mentoring side, I try to make my work environment diverse, equitable, and inclusive. I mentored students at different schools, different stages of their education, and different genders. My experience working with this diverse and talented group of students helped me understand how to leverage the strengths that come from their different backgrounds and interests while focusing on helping them overcome their weaknesses, as discussed in my teaching statement. I plan on building an inclusive lab culture where all voices are heard and students can feel free to innovate and contribute. On the teaching side, I expanded my knowledge of diversity and inclusion practices in the classroom by attending teaching workshops on diversity in the classroom. I look forward to employing several of the techniques I learned. For example, I plan to develop content that appeals to a diverse classroom (e.g., providing examples and use cases that capture the interests of underrepresented minorities). Further, I plan to highlight role models from diverse backgrounds, genders, and ethnicities, encouraging students to see themselves as future leaders in the field of computing.

As a member of the faculty, I realize that my sphere of influence will be expanding and with it my responsibilities towards creating an inclusive and diverse environment on campus. As a student, I have seen the many professional, mental, and financial struggles that graduate students go through. In many cases, such problems can be resolved or greatly reduced if the faculty are aware of the problem. I plan to use my voice, as a member of the faculty, to advocate for students. Another objective that I am passionate about is improving the diversity of the student body. To that end, I plan to mentor undergraduate students, encouraging them to consider a career in research. Moreover, I was fortunate to observe the *Civic Data Science* program started by my advisor Prof. Ellen Zegura. The program hires undergraduates from different schools to work on summer projects that solve problems faced by the civic community around the university campus. I plan to start a similar program and introduce a lighter version of the program, targeting K-12 students. The program will allow me to improve the diversity of the student body by hiring and encouraging students from underrepresented groups to pursue a career in research. Further, it will help identify and develop preliminary solutions to problems grounded in reality, starting a conversation between the university and the community, enriching my research agenda with impactful and relevant problems.