Statement on Diversity and Inclusion

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"All that you touch you change. All that you change changes you." This legendary opening written by equally legendary science fiction author Octavia Butler has stuck with me as a core principle guiding my approach to diversity and inclusion. As educators, we influence every student we encounter, and we are in turn changed by them. We have a responsibility to ensure that we are making the changes that will lead to an equitable and inclusive society, a society that by extension will be rich and diverse.

Past efforts

I am proud to have changed and improved my local communities by participating in programs that aim to increase inclusion and equity in computer science even before the undergraduate level. Throughout graduate school, I worked and volunteered in several programs to bring cybersecurity and computer science to high school students who would not have otherwise entered the field: First, "Code Creative" was a program I helped lead and teach which explicitly recruited students at Boston-area high schools who did not have access to computer science courses in their schools. Second, I was one of a team of three women to build an intensive cybersecurity course for high school women called "Codebreakers" from the ground up in 2016; the program is still going strong six years later. Finally, I also volunteered with "RACECAR Crash Course" in two iterations, one for women, and one for people of races under-represented in STEM.

These programs proved to me something which I already suspected: it is not a lack of ability or interest that holds back many students, it is a lack of opportunity. This is often termed the "opportunity gap," but I dislike the term because it implies that there are simply two groups of students: those with, and those without. During my undergraduate time at Harvey Mudd, I participated in a program called Building Bridges, a weekly program which taught methods for building empathy and engaging with people of many different identities and backgrounds. That program, alongside many personal experiences, reinforced the lesson that the challenges people face can rarely be guessed at. And all the many people I have met along the way, both changed me and were changed by me.

Future plans

In academia, I have never felt significantly held back by my identities as a queer person or as a woman—on the contrary, I have felt supported and nurtured. This support came not only from my own actions and my peers, but also from my professors. Now I am hoping to use this privilege to magnify this positive change and provide support to another generation of students.

This support starts with small classroom interventions: calling on people using random cards for low-stakes questions, so that quieter students are given an opportunity to speak and so that I avoid any bias I might have in calling on someone. Another example is to perform low-stakes formative evaluations early and often, to identify students who are struggling before they face a high-stakes summative assessment.

Another component of this support is in curriculum design: I have met students who struggled to absorb algebra presented as-is but suddenly found that the concepts "clicked" seeing them used in applications, from high school to graduate school. The net widens in my own interdisciplinary field: many students who are not excited by cryptography alone are moved by the policy problems alongside technical challenges. How should governments legislate about encryption, transparency, identity, or authenticity? How should companies navigate the complex relationship between security, compliance, data analysis, and privacy?

Finally, some of the support is identity-based: I thank professors who directed me to on-campus resources like the Queer Resource Center at the 5Cs, and the Queer Alliance at Boston University. I have directed other students to similar such resources at various times over my academic career, and I will continue to do so as a professor. I have also been sought out or recommended several times specifically as a female in the department, and I am proud of my reputation as an approachable person in this regard.