

Diversity Statement · Will Crichton

Note: this is an early draft for public circulation, not the final version of the statement.

Across the different institutions and CS sub-disciplines I have worked in, I have seen enormous variation in the diversity of student populations. Carnegie Mellon's undergraduate CS program does an excellent job at maintaining a roughly 50/50 gender ratio, in comparison to Stanford's abysmal 73% male / 26% female split in the CS Ph.D. program. The HCI and CS education research communities do an excellent job at recruiting and retaining diverse students, while the programming languages and systems research communities are extremely homogeneous by comparison. This experience is a stark reminder that there is not just a "pipeline problem" but a community problem — people from underrepresented groups join communities that welcome them, and they avoid communities that don't. I strongly believe that (a) all people deserve the opportunity to study computer science in any sub-discipline from undergraduate to the Ph.D., and (b) it is everyone's responsibility to take active steps to foster an inclusive community.

At the community level, I take strides to foster inclusivity by organizing events that help people from underrepresented groups connect to researchers and get research experience. For example, I organized the Stanford CS Ph.D. Admitted Student Weekend for six years, and I was given the Student Service Award all six years for my efforts. As a part of that role, I organized student Q&A panels that would help admitted students learn from current students whether Stanford was a good fit for them. First, I ensured that the panel was a safe space for discussion by excluding faculty and disabling video recording. Second, I recruited student panelists from a wide variety of backgrounds to give their perspectives, such as: women, students of color, LGBTQ+ students, international students, and students with children. These panels helped illuminate the lived experience of students from underrepresented groups at Stanford, and ultimately helped admitted students make an informed choice of which grad school to attend.

At the individual level, I do both outreach and mentoring with a focus on facilitating diversity. For example, for the last decade I have annually returned to visit the public high school I attended in Des Moines, Iowa. Most students there do not know anyone with a Ph.D., and so I give talks and answer questions about the experience of attending graduate school and studying computer science. One such student, Connor, attended a talk and got excited to do research. I mentored him in CS research for three years, and Connor is now about to start his undergraduate at Stanford. During my Ph.D. program, I mentored several students from underrepresented groups. Anna was a female undergraduate who I worked with for two years. We collaborated to publish a workshop paper at PLATEAU, and now Anna is pursuing her Ph.D. at MIT. Georgia was a female undergraduate from a low-income family in Brazil who I worked with for two years. We collaborated to publish a conference paper at SIGCSE, and now Georgia is a full-time software engineer at Apple.

Once I become faculty, my immediate goal will be to recruit a diverse group of Ph.D. students to mentor. I have seen time and again how professors will unthinkingly recruit a homogeneous group, and then be unable to improve their group's diversity years down the line. I hope to avoid that mistake by factoring in diversity from Year 1. That goal goes hand-in-hand with building a welcoming environment: regularly checking-in with my grad students for their well-being, and providing spaces for open discussion without fear of reprisal or domination. I will also seek to foster an inclusive attitude in my courses by setting standards for discourse: discouraging show-off behavior and claims that only certain kinds of people will "get" the material. By combining these practices with an ongoing reflection on my successes and failures, I hope to contribute towards a community where everyone feels welcome to learn and work together.