

Diversity and Service Statement

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It is no secret that computer science, broadly construed, has historically been inaccessible to many groups of people. Moreover, systemic barriers (whether rooted in discriminatory bias, socio-economic inequality, or lack of accessibility, representation, and/or support) that effected this exclusion continue to exist to this day. As an educator, I strongly believe it is my responsibility to (1) be cognizant and continuously educate myself about these barriers, (2) take individual action to counteract their effects, and (3) contribute to global efforts towards dismantling them. In this statement, I will highlight the ways in which I have worked to incorporate diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) principles in my mentorship, teaching, and leadership endeavors at CMU.

DEI in Mentorship. I strive to foster a diverse and inclusive environment for my mentees (and research group as a whole). For instance, every year, a number of students at CMU reach out to me to inquire about research assistantship (RA) opportunities. While all these candidates tend to be highly qualified, we can ultimately only afford to onboard one RA. The question then becomes: how do we decide between them? If the goal is to allow undergraduates to explore their research potential, then choosing the obvious candidate (i.e., the person with the strongest research credentials) is counterproductive because it results in the smallest marginal return. Instead, a conversation with my advisor, Prof. Justine Sherry led to a useful heuristic that I now adopt for taking on RAs at the undergraduate level: *pick the candidate for whom the RAship is most likely to be a positive, transformative experience*. Indeed, both of the undergraduate students I worked with (detailed in my teaching statement) were selected using this criteria, and they capitalized on the opportunity to the fullest.

DEI in Teaching. In the context of classroom teaching, my foremost goal is to ensure that students are comfortable telling me *when* they are uncomfortable. Talking to colleagues with disabilities has made me realize that, more often than not, violations of accessibility and inclusion goals are simply a result of *oversight* (e.g., the instructor didn't use colorblind-friendly colors because they forgot). When students feel comfortable sharing their accessibility needs, it reduces the frequency and severity of such oversights. To that end, if students do happen to volunteer pertinent information, I will consciously make a (mental) note of it in order to better accommodate their needs in the future. To avoid regressions, I also follow (my advisor's) collection of notes on DEI best-practices (e.g., avoiding use of certain terminology, safety factors in the course schedule to account for accessibility accommodations, and so forth). Ultimately, my objective is to create an environment where *every* student can perform at the pinnacle of their ability.

DEI in Leadership. In 2021, I was a founding member (treasurer) of a student body called the *Social Warming Initiative* (SWI) within the Computer Science Department (CSD) at CMU. My co-founders and I noticed that, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, social cohesion within CSD (once a thriving community with weekly social events such as tea and board-games nights) had deteriorated considerably. Initially, SWI's goal was to rebuild social engagement via new events, discounted apparel, and improvements to common spaces. However, recognizing unfulfilled DEI needs within the community, my co-founders and I also instated a student mentorship program (pairing junior Ph.D. students in the department with like-minded senior mentors), and a monthly women's lunch (to support women and other underrepresented members of our community). In 2022, SWI became an officially-recognized body,¹ and continues to focus on issues related to student advocacy and community building. Engaging first-hand with the most important stakeholders of the DEI effort has been both an eye-opening and fulfilling experience, and I intend to continue serving in the role of treasurer until I complete my Ph.D.

We have come a long way in our goal of making CS a more diverse and inclusive field. Nonetheless, I believe it will take the collective effort of everyone in our community to systematically eradicate the remaining issues, and I look forward to learning, practicing, and teaching better tools and techniques to further bolster my own contribution to this effort.

¹The CSD Ph.D. Student Council