Diversity Statement

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I have long been mindful of the barriers faced by the underrepresented groups in academia and tech industry. My own experiences of growing up in an economically- and socially-backward community in rural India, and later studying at an acclaimed private university with an overwhelmingly upper-class student population has made me understand the pernicious effects of exclusion, real or perceived, on one's academic performance and confidence. Considering that the duty of an academic is not merely to perform research and provide technical instruction, but also to engage with the community and aid in the collective advancement of the society, I believe it is imperative to address the social impediments to this cause by relentlessly promoting equity, diversity and inclusion. To this end, I have taken several initiatives, which I discuss below briefly alongside my plans to promote diversity and inclusion in academia in future.

I see inclusion as a foundational aspect of an effective teaching philosophy rather than merely an embellishment. Successful outreach efforts can help promote diversity in CS classrooms by driving the enrollment from underrepresented groups, but to sustain the diversity in long term outreach has to be substantiated by equally vigorous efforts to promote inclusion in classrooms. It is here that I believe an instructor can have the most impact. In my capacity as a course instructor at Purdue this semester, I have taken steps to ensure that every student feels welcome in the classroom, and included in the classroom discussion. Among the things I undertook is an effort to address the gender stereotype threat facing women in CS by carefully choosing examples, case studies and role models that *prime* the students with positive stereotypes [2, 3]. Another conscious effort was aimed at disadvantaged students whose education has suffered due to the lack of resources and unfavorable social conditions in inner cities and developing world. It is unfair to expect such students to have the same level of confidence as the privileged students, and therefore unreasonable to assume that they will participate in classroom discussion, or take advantage of learning resources without any external intervention. As an instructor, I have always strived to include disadvantaged students in the classroom discussion by fostering a conducive environment where everyone is encouraged to express their opinion without the fear of judgment, and every opinion is given a thoughtful consideration. I have also carefully refrained from speech or action that could directly or indirectly reinforce informal social hierarchies among students that contribute to defensive social climate [1]. In the future, I plan to continue these good practices, while also taking new initiatives to promote equity, inclusion and diversity. In particular, I would like to constitute a private forum headed by a non-male TA to address gender-specific issues that might arise when students work in teams on semester-long course projects. Such self-organized teams are microcosms of the software industry, hence often suffer from the same biases as the latter. Institutional efforts to address such biases are therefore essential if CS classrooms were to become more inclusive.

I have also long been committed to equity, diversity, and inclusion in my research, mentorship and professional activities. Over the course of years, I have developed a positive approach to-

wards research collaboration and mentorship that emphasizes strengths of my collaborators while acknowledging and embracing their weaknesses. This approach has helped me build great professional relationships with my fellow researchers, particularly my female colleagues. Among my mentees is a freshman female graduate student, who is now a productive researcher, and my immediate co-author on a recently published journal paper. Beyond the formal channels, I frequently engage my colleagues in conversations about diversity and inclusion, which I found to be effective in questioning stereotypes, raising awareness about implicit biases, and understanding cultural differences. As an assistant professor in the future, I plan to undertake more initiatives aimed at fostering a sense of belongingness in grad school among students from vulnerable groups. In particular, I am committed to the creation of a forum for Women in Software Engineering (WiSE), which understands and addresses the issues faced by women in software engineering research, and works towards making the research community more inclusive. I would also like to constitute a forum to discuss mental health issues in academia, which seem to disproportionately affect students from underrepresented groups. Furthermore, I will continue engaging the academic community in conversations about empathy, equality, diversity and inclusion, which I believe are necessary to substantiate the institutional efforts towards furthering these causes.

References

[1] Lecia Jane Barker, Kathy Garvin-Doxas, and Michele Jackson. Defensive climate in the computer science classroom. In *Proceedings of the 33rd SIGCSE Technical Symposium on Computer Science Education*, SIGCSE '02, pages 43–47, New York, NY, USA, 2002. ACM. ISBN 1-58113-473-8. doi: 10.1145/563340.563354. URL http://doi.acm.org/10.1145/563340.563354.

[2] Matthew S. McGlone and Joshua Aronson. Forewarning and forearming stereotype-threatened students. *Communication Education*, 56(2):119–133, 2007. doi: 10.1080/03634520601158681. URL https://doi.org/10.1080/03634520601158681.

[3] Steve Stroessner and Catherine Good. Stereotype threat: An overview. 2011. URL https://diversity.arizona.edu/sites/default/files/stereotype_threat_overview.pdf.