

Statement on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

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I believe creative and intellectual diversity should be a key measure of success of a university. In fact, inclusion and seeking talented minds from diverse backgrounds should be one of the core values and missions of any university. Therefore, I am committed to **supporting students from diverse backgrounds, particularly focusing on three fronts: academic, mental health, and financial.**

To promote diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), we need to recognize specific issues, determine their extent, and devise concrete steps forward. I believe the first step in assessing these matters is forming committees with a specific focus, and providing them with necessary support to carry out their actions.

I am currently involved in the activities of two DEI committees at CMU. The first is the computer science department's DEI committee comprising of faculty and students. Here, I am specifically responsible for our efforts in safe and efficient reporting of bias, discrimination, and harassment within the department. Currently, there are multiple authorities to report such incidents at CMU: the student DEI center, office of human resources, university police, etc. But since the role and purview of different authorities is different, students are often unsure of the best authority to approach depending on the severity of their situation. In the long run, this can discourage reporting. In response, I am drafting clear guidelines towards defining negative and discriminatory conduct based on gender, race, color, origin, etc. and the relevant authority. Relatedly, we are also designing bias awareness and training programs for students, faculty, and leadership to create broader accountability for bias incidents.

The second is the university-wide graduate student DEI committee. Here, we are working towards advocating for international and underrepresented minority (URM) students, specifically

- designing an **anti-racism course** directed towards learning about the history of privilege and race, defining systemic and institutional racism, and steps to develop anti-racist ideologies.
- creating a **mentorship program** for URM and international students applying for graduate studies to get feedback on their application materials.
- appointing student representatives who can **build a social community** within their department and can be approached to confidentially discuss sensitive matters surrounding DEI and mental health issues.

Being part of these committees, I have learned how to **identify and evaluate DEI matters, and crystallize long-term goals into shorter-term action items.**

Graduate student life is already stressful due to adapting to a new physical and social atmosphere, high course load, and extra-curricular activities. It can be particularly tough if students additionally face discrimination or harassment. At such times, to handle stress, students often turn to counseling and psychological services provided by healthcare providers. But such services can have language and cultural barriers, and may not be available to students from diverse backgrounds. In the future, **I will work towards promoting greater integration between academic departments and healthcare services to address mental health issues faced by graduate students particularly from URM communities.**

Minorities often come from economically marginalized communities. In my own family, I know many students who could not afford higher education due to financial hardships. Thus, I believe it is important to support URM students financially especially when the current pandemic has caused severe financial disruptions. I want to get involved in **initiatives to alleviate the financial stress on URM students, e.g. (i) application fee waivers, (ii) department fellowships and scholarships, and (iii) tuition fee reduction.** Recently, CMU has started a fully-funded research program for undergraduates from diverse communities to work with a faculty member of their choice. I wrote a grant proposal for the same which successfully attracted a female undergraduate from University of Kansas to join our group. I have also been **mentoring students through the Programming Language Mentoring Workshop (PLMW) and SIGPLAN Long-Term Mentorship Program.**

Ultimately, it is my responsibility to create a safe, secure, and welcoming environment for my students, be it physically, socially or emotionally. Research has also shown that diversity in research groups boosts creativity and productivity, introduces fresh perspectives, and reduces fear. I believe that education is one of the most effective levers for societal change, which must start with universities.