Diversity and Inclusion Statement

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My thoughts on diversity in computer science are shaped in many ways by my own experiences with diversity and inclusion in graduate school, during which I became more comfortable with my identity as a member of the LGBT community (in particular, as a bisexual). As this is a relatively invisible trait, I haven’t experienced the same hurdles faced by women and other visible minorities in computer science, but I do think that my own experiences have caused me to be more receptive to issues of representation in science more generally. In my experience, the lack of LGBT role models and resources within the department, and the relative invisibility of issues of sexual orientation in conversations around the department, have made the process of coming into this identity a difficult one. This feeling has been expressed by others in the scientific community (e.g., [4, 2]) and while relatively little research exists on LGBT representation in academic science, it appears that some of the same factors that lead women to leave science affect gay and bisexual men as well, leading to retention problems among undergraduate science majors [1]. As a new faculty member, I will seek to foster discussions around diversity in all its forms, both visible and less visible. In particular, by increasing LGBT representation and visibility, I hope to make women and LGBT community members feel a deeper sense of belonging in the department.

An important component of this work would, of course, be in teaching. University-wide, international students make up approximately 22% of Carnegie Mellon’s undergraduates [5], leading to a wide variety of backgrounds and experiences that must be taken into account. Futhermore, over the last several years, the incoming first-year class for the School of Computer Science has been approximately half women [3]. I did my best as an instructor to promote this diversity, beginning with my selection of a diverse course staff made up of three female, one agender and two male Teaching Assistants. During the semester, I consulted extensively on my course development with a fellow graduate student who had previously served as an instructor for the course and who has had some experience in diversity and disability-related activism. He helped me ensure that my exams and other course materials were accessible to students with certain disabilities as well as to students with a wide variety of backgrounds. While I have more to learn, I am proud of my results in this area, including a score exceeding 4.75/5 on the “instructor shows respect for all students” question of the course evaluation.

I also believe that I can promote inclusion and outreach through programs, both informal and formal, that appeal to different cross-sections of the student body and faculty, as I have worked to do during graduate school. Early in my graduate school career, I was involved in organizing a CS graduate student musical production. This has become an annual tradition in which I’ve maintained an active involvement. Through most of the years I’ve been involved, a majority of participants have been women, in addition to strong international student and LGBT representation. I was also a founding member of Tech4Society, an organization made up of students from around the university (largely graduate students in computer science and related fields) that partners with community organizations to develop technological solutions for pressing social justice issues. While I believe that these types of groups are more effective when led by students, I would be happy to encourage such groups to form and would look for ways to continue similar efforts to promote diversity and outreach as a faculty member.

References


