

Diversity Statement

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I strongly believe that diversity is extremely important for social wellbeing and growth. Diversity is a boon that allows people from different backgrounds to work together, learn from each other, and respect each other. A diverse environment is particularly significant in an academic setting, whether it's a classroom, a research lab, a faculty meeting or a conference. I feel that people coming together from diverse backgrounds and experiences can drive exciting innovations. In this statement, I first talk about my personal background that has shaped my perspective on diversity, followed by how I plan to encourage diversity as a faculty member.

I came to the U.S. from India in 2010 to pursue my M.S. in computer engineering. It was a daunting task as I had no friends or family in the U.S. at the time. There was always this question on my mind: how will I fit in a society that is very different from India? My fears were put to rest when I met the residential assistant of my on-campus housing in Logan, UT, who welcomed me with a big smile. Furthermore, I had two great roommates: one from the Philippines and the other from Utah, who became a second family. We are still in touch. My research group at Utah and the classes that I took also had people from different backgrounds, race, religion, gender, and we all learnt so much from each other. It was fun! For my Ph.D., I came to New York; it was the first time for me in such a big city. During the first couple of years of my Ph.D., I stayed at the *International House*. It was an amazing experience, as people from all over the world stayed there. Not all of them were students at Columbia: some came to become actors, musicians, or work for the United Nations. My roommates changed every 3-4 months as people usually came for small assignments. During my two years at International house, I lived with people from Taiwan, China, the Netherlands, Canada, U.S., and Germany. I learnt so much from them about their cultures. I also attended several diversity events here, which were always very informative. My research lab at Columbia combined students from 5 different professors, and was very diverse. I never felt out of place in my lab, and enjoyed working with people from various backgrounds. As a teaching assistant also, I took extra time to teach and help students who sometimes had difficulty understanding concepts due to language barriers. Similarly, as a post-doc, I have had the pleasure to collaborate and work with people from different countries, cultures, genders, and religions. Having faced the challenges of being an international student in United States, I deeply understand (i) how students from diverse backgrounds feel, and (ii) how support from faculty, staff, and administration can have significant impact on their progress.

As a faculty member, I will create an inclusive environment that embraces diversity. This applies not only to the classrooms and my research lab, but also more broadly to the department, institution and the conferences/events that I will organize. This environment will be welcoming, free of any biases, and provide an open and comfortable space for students from different backgrounds to learn about computer science and engineering. I will help students from underrepresented minority groups to overcome any barriers they face. I will attend as well as encourage my students to attend conferences that are organized to address the challenges faced by the underrepresented groups in engineering, for example the SWE (society of women engineers) annual conference, and the national society of black engineers (NSBE) convention. I also plan to engage with K-12 students to motivate them to pursue STEM-related higher education studies. My objective is to bring everyone together, irrespective of their gender, background, religion, and culture, with the common aim of learning about computer science and engineering and to drive innovations that will help our society.