

INCLUSION, EQUITY, AND DIVERSITY STATEMENT | ANNE SPENCER ROSS

Diversifying higher education brings important perspectives into technical fields, drives innovation, and creates economic opportunities for marginalized groups. As someone who did not discover computer science until mid-college and was then one of only a few women in my program, I know the impact of feeling out of place in a field. Driven by my personal and professional background, I focus on supporting two marginalized groups: people with disabilities and women in STEM. **I work to create equal opportunities for all students by (1) reducing barriers of entry to research through mentorship, (2) researching inclusive education strategies, and (3) creating accessible professional environments.**

Creating Entry Points into Research Through Mentorship

Perceived expertise thresholds and a lack of knowledge about opportunities can dissuade students from pursuing research, especially if they do not identify with many people in the field. As a mentor, **I work with students to build their technical capacity, introduce them to research, and build professional networks.**

I have advised four undergraduate women in summer research internships through the Women in Science and Engineering Bridge program and the DUB group's Research Experience for Undergraduates (DUB is a cross-departmental human-computer interaction group). Based on the goals of my mentees, I worked with them on coding, guided them in research projects, and connected them to predominantly female researchers in computing. They demonstrated their success through technical contributions to the research project and presentations in their programs. As faculty, I will continue to recruit and support diverse students.

Connecting students to individuals they identify with, who are a step or two ahead of them in their career, is one technique I have learned to support students [1]. I have facilitated building professional communities through PhD student mentorship programs and by introducing my undergraduate mentees across years.

I was a mentor and a program coordinator for my department's first year PhD mentorship program. I helped organize incoming students into small groups and paired them with existing graduate students. In building groups, we made mindful choices like ensuring all female students had at least one other woman in their group and at least one female mentor. This program provided points of contact, helped establish community, and reduce feelings of otherness as students transitioned into the PhD program.

Beyond summer research experiences, I maintain a mentorship relationship with my REU students and mentees paired through my department's Association for Computing Machinery's Women in Computing (ACM-W) chapter. I recognize the value of students not only having me as a resource but having each other, who may be closer to their current career stage, to connect with and ask questions to. I have semi-regular meetings with all my mentees as well as make myself available for 1-1 conversations. In our group meetings, mentees ask each other about their current challenges and benefit from hearing about different career trajectories (e.g., my choice to go to graduate school and my mentees' experience in their industry positions). As faculty I will continue to support my students by building communities and networks.

Creating Inclusive Professional Environments

I create accessible environments for academics with disabilities in my department, in cross-department initiatives, and at conferences through awareness building, training, and advocacy.

Inclusive environments must have accessible materials. For example, PDFs must be usable with screen readers, a tool used by blind and low-vision scholars. I have led training sessions within my department on creating accessible PDFs and volunteered to improve the accessibility of papers submitted to the flagship human-computer interaction conference, CHI. In my role as an inaugural Student Coordinator for DUB, I advocate for accessibility. For example, I have promoted hosting events at accessible venues,

captioning our online library of recorded seminars, and prioritizing accessibility when selecting tools for our virtual retreat. As I transition out of that role, I am focused on documentation and training to ensure accessibility is maintained in efforts moving forward.

I am actively involved with [AccessSIGCHI](#), a group committed to increasing the representation of people with disabilities in computing and academia by making ACM SIGCHI conferences more accessible. Within the organization, one of my main contributions was working with conference organizers and members of the disability community to develop accessibility training for student volunteers at CHI. The training manual has since been shared with other conferences. I am currently adapting the training for the virtual CHI 2021 conference. With AccessSIGCHI, I have also co-authored a report on accessibility and representation at CHI conferences [2]. This report helps create accountability for accessibility initiatives and grounds conversations with stakeholders at the CHI conference and ACM leadership.

These efforts have created lasting structural impact. I will continue to foster awareness and build capacity for creating accessible environments in my departments and organizations.

Evolving My Inclusive Practices

I view diversity as an ongoing and evolving commitment. I recognize limitations in my current experience and seek out opportunities to learn from diverse voices. I have attended discussions on best practices for diversifying academia at events such as the ACM Tapia Celebration of Diversity in Computing Conference, the Grace Hopper Celebration for Women in Computing, and the CRA-W Grad Cohort for Women. I also seek out diverse authors and activists outside of academia to inform my approach.

In an example of applying my learnings from these sources, I am co-leading an interdisciplinary seminar on “Race, Disability, and Technology” through the Center for Research and Education on Accessible Technology and Experiences (CREATE). In the course, I am facilitating discussions on the role and challenges of technology at the intersection of race and disability. This an opportunity to engage students in critical discussion and reflection as well as amplify writings by authors with minoritized identities.

My research, teaching, and service efforts **work to create opportunities in academia for students from minoritized groups, particularly people with disabilities and women in STEM**. As faculty, I look forward to applying and evolving my approach to inclusion, equity, and diversity to support all students.

References

1. Juan Gilbert. “Diversity in Tech: The Pipeline is the Solution Not the Problem.” Feb 8, 2018. Presented by the National Society of Black Engineers (University of Washington Chapter) and the University of Washington College of Engineering.
2. Jennifer Mankoff, **Anne Spencer Ross**, Cynthia Bennett, Katta Spiel, Megan Hofmann, Jennifer Rode. “2019 Access SIGCHI Report.” AccessSIGCHI Medium. Oct. 19, 2019. <https://medium.com/@AccessSigchi/2019-sigchi-access-report-a4bf3a2433d2>