

DIVERSITY STATEMENT

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As a teacher, researcher, and community member, I have sought to use my position as a leader and my resources to promote diversity and inclusion.

My commitment to diversity grew out of my early experiences with computer science. While I was one of only three girls in my high school AP CS classes, the three of us bonded and later formed the only all-girl competitive programming team in the region. Having that support group of peers at the start of my exploration into CS was crucial to me continuing in the field. It meant that despite being a minority, I did not feel intimidated or out of place in a mostly male room, as was the case in all of our programming competitions. Since then, I've supported programs that foster connections and community between women in CS. In college, I was the president of our local WICS chapter, where I set up mentorship programs between students in different years and organized career events where women alumni returned to campus. One of my proudest achievements was setting up yearly fundraising drives to support free enrollments for girls in CS courses led by the Women's Technology Empowerment Centre (W.TEC) in Nigeria. In the future, I plan to foster connections between women academics through giving back to programs like the EECS Rising Stars workshop.

Through my work as a teacher, I aim to foster an environment that is welcoming to a diversity of experiences, backgrounds, and interests, and that is mindful of the different struggles and challenges that students face. For instance, I remember as a varsity tennis player in college, I often needed to miss class for tournaments. Last spring, I was an instructor for MIT's User Interface Design class of nearly 250 students, some of whom were traveling often due to extracurriculars, or completely new to web development, or were international students uncomfortable with English. In an institution where the culture can often be stressful, I sought to support students through fair, transparent, and flexible policies for extensions on assignments and multiple weekly TA and instructor office hours. Our class materials also focused on how to design for inclusion. For instance, I incorporated lectures and readings on accessibility design for people with disabilities and internationalization design for different languages and cultures.

I gained insight into how to support a diversity of students in their residential life during my four years serving as an undergraduate resident advisor to Harvard University undergraduates in Cabot House. I received yearly training on microaggressions and implicit bias, sexual discrimination and Title IX, as well as how to support students dealing with anxiety and mental health issues. This training was important as I navigated difficult conversations and incidents and strove to serve all of my student community during my four years living with undergraduates. As a resident advisor, I was on the frontlines when students ran into problems, including visiting students when they were in the hospital and checking in with students regarding their academic progress, peer relationships, or mental health. As the advisor for career development, I also put on events showcasing alternative career opportunities to counter the mainstream career paths well represented at career fairs and networking events. In one case, I organized a panel on alternative careers in the natural sciences and invited professionals working at the intersection of science and government, education, museums, and journalism.

Finally, my commitment to diversity and inclusion has also guided how I approach my research and research mentorship. During my Ph.D., I have successfully mentored students from diverse and under-represented backgrounds, include 10 women, a student from Ethiopia, and two international students visiting from Korea. One of my research projects with Kaitlin Mahar, an M.Eng. student I was mentoring, focused on the issue of online harassment, a problem with outsize impact on women, LGBTQ people, and people of color. For the project, we interviewed 18 people who face online harassment, 16 of whom were women or non-binary, and had received online harassment in their private life or due to their public role as a professor, journalist, activist, or social media personality. From listening to people's experiences, we learned how to design a tool that would give harassment recipients back a sense of control over their online interactions. Beyond the research insights we gained, I found it emotionally rewarding to play a role in highlighting and combating an under-reported and harmful practice that disproportionately affects women and minorities online. Since then, I have become an advocate on this topic, including speaking at RightsCon, leading a workshop at Mozilla Fest, advising the nonprofit OnlineSOS, as well as counseling colleagues who have dealt with online harassment.