

Philosophy. I firmly believe that part of my academic job is to improve my community and society at large. I believe that an academic community is stronger when a diversity of backgrounds and perspectives are represented. I hold that **all** people should have the opportunity to participate in, contribute to, and enhance the computer science community independent of their socioeconomic status, their race, their gender, the country of their birth, or anything else. To this end, I am active in many efforts to diversify the perspectives present within the computer science community.

Efforts in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Gender. The majority of my service has been toward women in computer science. I am a strong advocate for *both* (1) improving the environment for women currently in the field and (2) increasing the number of women who choose to study computer science. During my undergraduate education, I began to observe how my life path as well as my experiences within mathematical fields were shaped by being a woman—from being discouraged to pursue computer science, to automatically receiving labels (the most serious woman, the most social woman, the most *anything* woman) as a result of being the only or one of a few women present, to having my successes attributed to my gender. In response, during my final year of undergrad, I co-founded Oberlin’s “Women in Math and Computer Science” organization in order to gather women, share our experiences, and determine how we could find support from one another as well as the department.

My involvement in similar activities continued throughout graduate school, inspired by the many pivotal female role models, mentors, and collaborators in my life. During the 2015-16 academic year, I co-chaired UW CSE’s graduate women’s organization, organizing quarterly lunches for graduate and faculty women, and initiating an annual “welcome brunch” for women new to the department. I co-founded and participated in UW CSE Women’s Mentoring, where graduate women mentored undergraduate women. Throughout all of graduate school, I took on various roles for UW CSE’s “Women’s Research Day,”—including organizing, being a panelist, and presenting research. This event is modeled after the Grace Hopper conference, with the goal of introducing undergraduate and advanced high school women to a research career. In 2016, I co-chaired UW CSE’s prospective student committee, which organizes “Visit Days” for accepted PhD students. Part of my role was also to co-chair of the “Visit Days Committee on Women’s Interests,” where we contributed by initiating the first Visit Days Women’s Reception, ensuring that women had the opportunity to meet women peers during their visit, etc. For these numerous efforts, I received the 2016 Google’s Anita Borg Memorial Scholarship, which is awarded to women in computer science who have “exemplified leadership and demonstrated passion for increasing the involvement of women in computer science.”

Inclusion. In addition to gender representation, I am active in other efforts aimed at making computer science more inclusive to all. During my first year of graduate school in 2014, Satya Nadella famously made remarks that women should “trust the system” and wait for a promotion, despite evidence of systemic sexism in promotions. In response, some graduate students and I started “diversity allies:” an opt-in, moderated email list where participants can share resources and news for learning to becoming a better ally to underrepresented groups. In 2016, I was active in bringing forth a redesign of the UW CSE Diversity & Inclusion Committee. Presently, in the wake of the George Floyd protests and ensuing heightened awareness, I am active in efforts to combat anti-Black racism within academia, both within Columbia CS’s Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee and from a more grassroots group of Columbia affiliates. In the past six months, we have already made research-backed changes toward the admissions process: the removal of GRE scores, the addition of a “personal background statement” on how an applicant’s lived experiences contribute to their desire for graduate study, and the addition of a Pre-Submission Application Review program to give feedback to applicants who may not otherwise have guidance on what a PhD application should look like. Other initiatives include working to increase funding for Columbia’s Bridge-to-PhD (research masters) program. We are also encouraging Columbia faculty

to apply for NSF Research Experience for Undergraduates (REU) grants in order to create more research opportunities for undergraduates from other schools who would not traditionally have them. For this, we are working on recruiting a pool of diverse applicants, and planning an event for the applicants to learn about the variety of REUs to be offered at Columbia.

Mentorship. My path to computer science and eventually toward pursuing faculty positions at research institutions was crucially impacted by the support and guidance from my own phenomenal mentors. As a result, I pay forward the mentorship, both formally and informally. As mentioned, I co-founded UW CSE Women’s Mentoring, and through this program I mentored 4 women over four years, all of whom have gone onto careers in computer science (both in industry and research). I have also participated in programs such as the Mentoring Workshop at the ACM Conference on Economics and Computation, where I led a mentoring group of 4 early PhD and late undergraduate students. Currently, I am mentoring three PhD students, both by working with them on research projects and by guiding them as researchers. In general, I naturally gravitate toward a mentorship role, as I am open with my experiences and generous with my time. As a result, students and junior researchers often approach me—to ask questions about initiating a conversation with their advisor, or preparing a conference talk, or making connections with other researchers. In this capacity, I serve as an informal mentor to many students and junior researchers. My mentees have included students from, e.g., Nigeria, Morocco, Israel, Iran, are more than half women, and have included other private underrepresented traits. I think it is important to build a diverse community and ensure that they have guidance, particularly for those who are underrepresented in the field.

Organization. I keep diversity, equity, and inclusion in mind as I participate in admissions, recruiting, and conference organization. I served on the UW CSE PhD Admissions Committee for two years during graduate school, guaranteeing an extra pair of eyes on applications from non-traditional backgrounds, and recommending impressive applications to appropriate faculty members. As the Prospective Student Committee co-chair organizing Visit Days, I made decisions to try to increase representation during Visit Days, e.g. the aforementioned women’s reception, an LGBTQ+ reception, a panel that included discussions about mental health and available resources.

During the organization of the second Mechanism Design for Social Good (MD4SG) workshop at ACM EC, we applied for and received both a Schmidt Futures Grant and an Institute for New Economic Thinking (INET) YSI Grant. We used this money to fund 18 underrepresented participants, students, and social good practitioners to attend the workshop. As a result, we were able to facilitate the participation of practitioners from e.g., the NYC Commission on Human Rights, as well as multiple people from the African continent to attend both MD4SG and EC for the first time. Subsequent MD4SG workshops and EC conferences have continued to provide travel grants, in particular for people from low-income nations. Our most recent MD4SG workshop provided live translation into Spanish—we have leveraged virtual conferences and live streams to increase participation from those in Latin America and in the African continent.

Future Efforts

Going forward, I will continue similar efforts. As always, I will continue to informally mentor people of all backgrounds, and heavily participate in efforts for women in Computer Science.

As a faculty member, I am eager to have greater capacity to effect change with respect to admissions and recruiting. I am interested in finding better methods to evaluate applicants from non-R1 backgrounds, as well as building institutional memory for how to evaluate such applicants. I also want to develop a guide of what context to provide in recommendation letters for faculty advocating for these students, e.g., one should explain that a student sought out opportunities that weren’t available to them, or that grades are non-standard at their school. In addition, I plan to acquire REU funds and provide research internships for those from underrepresented backgrounds in order to give them research experience and to build their CV for future applications.