The importance of an inclusive classroom which fosters a feeling of belonging is a cause very personal to me. Having experienced education as a woman in Computer Science in India and America, I recognize how feeling connected and valued in classes and groups have contributed to my growth. I believe it is necessary to create a diverse and accepting environment for students, and to provide resources to giving everyone a chance to succeed. Without these, no system is functional, and no education is complete. Here are some ways I plan to create a diverse and inclusive place for students.

Diversity in teams is diversity of thoughts.

Diversity is integral to the growth of individuals, knowledge, and thought. I have experienced this firsthand in my research group at Oregon State University where students in my group we came from six different countries. The diversity in our background and culture created a harmony in our cognitive styles and research approaches contributing to our success. As a faculty, it will be my priority to create a diverse representation among the students I advise. Having a diverse team of Ph.D. students will allow students to bring a wide range of experiences to solve the tough interdisciplinary problems I set out to answer [1].

As a faculty member, I will continue to recruit and tap into students who identify with a broad range of marginalized identities in higher education including students who identify as LGBTQ+, gender-nonconforming, international, and those who have proudly served in our military [2]. As a teacher, I will emphasize the importance and value of diversity in my classes. I will create an environment where students from different backgrounds and underrepresented communities can freely communicate and thrive.

Ensuring individual success through equity.

Success has a different meaning for everyone, and everyone takes a different path that leads to success. As a faculty member, I will give personalized attention to each student’s path to success, look out to where students are struggling, and provide the feedback and resources needed to overcome those challenges and help them succeed.

During my Ph.D., I have mentored students at different levels from high school to graduate school who came from diverse backgrounds. When mentoring ASE high school interns, Amelia Leon needed support in grasping how to interpret code through practice, Natalia Morales needed explanations through various examples. I experienced explaining complicated programming and psychological concepts without overloading then with information. At the undergraduate level, I mentored Thien Nam who enjoyed programming and building systems but needed guidance to not ‘build-cause-I-can’ and keep the scientific contribution in perspective. I also mentored Yenifer Ramirez who came with an Electrical Engineering background and needed support to express her findings in a domain specific format. All students successfully contributed to research and graduated.

As a faculty, I will establish consistent communication with students where they can comfortably discuss their objectives and ideas of success. It is important to create an environment where students understand what success means from each student. I will advocate for their success by discussing what it means to be equitable to my students and encourage them to explore how to value themselves and think about what is equitable for their career. As a faculty, it will be my job to empower my students by making them aware of resources, how to access them and feel comfortable and safe in doing so.
Celebrate differences to include everyone.

I had the opportunity to work with a diverse research group during my Ph.D. where we shared stories of our childhood and cultural beliefs over potlucks consisting of worldwide cuisine. This experience highlighted how important celebrating differences and feeling belonged to a group has on a person’s personal and intellectual growth. An inclusive group allowed students to consider different approaches in their research, learn from opposing views, and be self-confident.

As a faculty I will emphasize the value of celebrating individuality and creating a space where everyone can do so. In my research group, I will establish D&I communication channels, gather regular feedback from the students’ experience within the group, and periodic social gathering to celebrate the different cultures and backgrounds. I follow NCWIT’s Engagement Practices Framework to create inclusive student communities with positive participation [3] [4]. To create inclusive classrooms, I will ensure that assignments and materials are inclusive where lectures and topics are structured to cater for different cognitive styles [5].

As a new faculty from an underrepresented group, I recognize it is challenging to undertake the responsibilities of academic positions such as increasing service and mentoring. I will create and contribute to existing spaces where my colleagues can openly seek advice and share their burden, and offer my help by lending my attention, voice, and labor. I will listen to what my colleagues from underrepresented groups need and take on additional responsibility to assist when I can.

References


