

Statement of Diversity and Inclusion

One of my goals as a professor is to promote a safe environment for the students to learn the topics and grow professionally. At the same time, I want to support students who feel they do not have a voice.

By safe environment, I refer to a climate in the classroom and Q&A platforms where students feel secure to ask questions, express their concerns without fear of retaliation, and share their curiosity. During the first day of a term, I tell my students that mutual respect is crucial for the good development of the course. I encourage students to let us know how they prefer to interact with other students or course staff. For example, in Q&A platforms, I invite students to post their questions and use anonymity to make them feel safer. Also, I accept private questions for teaching assistants. In these questions, I invite my teaching staff to be more personal yet professional when giving answers. I also ask students with authorized accommodations to let me know if our work is adequate and helpful for a meaningful learning experience.

As part of my student engagement strategy, I present the course content in multiple formats that fit different learning styles. For example, in Spring 2021, I decided to mix online and traditional instruction during the synchronous sessions. The traditional part included real-time handwritten examples during the lectures. I gave pen-and-paper examples using a document camera rather than a digital tablet for the sake of a more classroom-like setting. I was glad the change had a positive impact on the students, who later thanked me for keeping lectures akin to in-person ones. Students suggested such a change in my Fall 2020 course evaluation, and I was happy to have an opportunity to implement change that benefited my students' learning styles. Now that we are back on campus, I continue to use different technologies to maintain dynamism in the classroom. Also, I provide recorded lectures for the students to review and use according to their learning style preferences.

To encourage student growth, I address their common goals and move towards their specific struggles. A few terms ago, I began to refer to my students as future computer scientists when asking a general question or introducing a topic of high relevance. To solidify the impact of these words, I also shared a few experiences I had as a researcher or software engineer where I had to make decisions based on the course topics. By the end of the term, I had students thanking me for the experience by helping them think and feel more like computer scientists. Additionally, students became more comfortable sharing their concerns about professional life once they finished their studies. Finally, I had

students who felt confident to approach me and be candid about their course and career struggles. In these cases, I prefer to be a mentor to give proper assistance. I listen to them, call them by their [preferred] names, and validate their successes while showing them how to learn from their mistakes.

During the individual discussions with my students, I have noticed that their diversity in cultural and socio-economic backgrounds becomes more evident. After I address a student's questions during my office hours, I follow with *"Is there any other question or comment you have for me?"* That question has opened many memorable discussions that let me know my students better, where they come from, their goals, and their challenges. In many cases, their struggles come from the stark differences between their own cultures and university life. When adequate, I advise them based on my experience as a student and encourage them to keep me updated with their progress.

I also found a number of these individual discussions to come from students who did not know how to share their difficulties. My most recent experiences include students with mental disorders and visual impairment. In such cases, I consult with the professionals providing support. Most importantly, I meet with these students to know them better and learn from their success in previous courses. Most of the time, their required accommodations are already satisfied by the different formats I use to give course material to the students.

Sometimes, students need support to express themselves. Early in my academic career, I gave a talk about developing interactive media. In the talk, I shared my interest in Computer Graphics and how to create dynamic apps and videogames. By the end, I encouraged students to register for a summer workshop I would host and think about exciting projects they would like to work on. On the first day, I noticed almost half of those in attendance were female students who wanted to learn about video game development. I talked with some of them after the first session about the games they liked. The discussion went from personal preferences to stereotypes about women and their role in STEM fields. Having learned from their frustrations, I gave them extra support and provided a safe environment to express their creativity and gamer spirit.

My appreciation for diversity in my classroom increases continually. I work to support and gain the trust of my students. As future computer scientists, I want them to learn the topics well, become excellent professionals, and use their programming skills to express themselves. My effort is to listen to my students well and act accordingly for their success.