Diversity Statement
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Strength lies in differences, not in similarities.
—Stephen R. Covey

Professional Experiences. My commitment to diversity has influenced my research career to a great extent. With my adviser Prof. Barford, I created a framework to address a diversity-related problem in the Internet: provide flexible decision support on opportunities for broadband deployment in un- or under-served communities in the US. The objective of our framework [1] is to employ multi-objective optimization to identify the highest concentrations of un- or under-served users and that can be upgraded to the broadband threshold at the lowest cost by considering economic and technical issues simultaneously. I strongly believe that this effort is part of a larger conversation. Specifically, the framework can be applied to answer other diversity-related problems including (1) digital inclusion of under-represented communities in technology and (2) minimizing the effect of deterrents such as gender [2, 3] and race [4] to close the “digital divide”. I intend to continue to conduct research on topics that can have a positive impact on under-represented groups.

In addition, as explained in my teaching statement, I also had the opportunity to mentor students of various backgrounds, races and ethnicities. Since many were international students (like me) from countries including China, India and Brazil, they had difficulty in articulating their work initially. By applying the guidance that I received from my adviser during my initial days in graduate school, I worked with every student individually by imparting key communication and presentation skills. Furthermore, I am working on a voluntary effort called Grad Student Life. The goal of this effort is to solicit true stories and experiences from the “role models” in academia and guide the next generation of foreign students to get better at surviving graduate school, with an emphasis on paper rejections, failed research efforts, and stress management—problems arising due to diversity-related issues such as cultural shock, lack of social support, and discrimination [5].

Personal Experiences. I have experienced the true meaning of cultural, language and religious diversities: I grew up in India (a land of “Unity in Diversity”), interned in Europe, and lived in the US for the last 5+ years. As a child, I grew up in a very diverse setting with Hindu beliefs, yet I was in a Catholic school. My undergraduate school was also very diverse. Though the majority were Indians, we have had students from all around the world in our exchange programs. Subsequently, I decided to pursue my PhD in the US, whose population is racially and ethnically diverse. My group of closest friends is made up of white and black, Asian and Asian-American, who are gay and straight, and who have several different native languages and cultural backgrounds.

My professional and personal experiences led me to understand, learn and respect the cultures and values of others. I am fully committed to working with women, minority, and under-represented groups. I look forward to actively contributing to existing diversity program(s) on the campus and creating new programs toward the betterment of students, regardless of their race, gender, or sexual orientation.

References