Diversity Statement
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Prior efforts. Most of my efforts towards diversity, equality and inclusion in graduate school has been in providing a platform for people to have their voices heard. I volunteered to serve as the vice president of the computer science graduate students association at UW-Madison for the 2018-19 academic year. During my tenure, I observed that student interaction was low: students were unaware of what their peers were working on. To alleviate this issue, I helped organize the department’s first graduate student symposium. This provided many graduate students a platform to share their research with their peers and faculty members, engage in discussion and solicit feedback. To further improve student engagement and foster a sense of inclusivity, I also helped organize the weekly TGIF events where I actively attempted to source food across different cuisines to ensure that the diverse graduate student population felt more at ease. Both the graduate student symposium and the multi-cuisine TGIF are popular, and still exist.

Through my experience helping organize the dependable and secure ML (DSML) workshop collocated with IEEE DSN (https://dependablesecureml.github.io) across 2020 (where I was chair) and 2021, I have learnt to interact with researchers across diverse backgrounds and experiences, and across different geographic locations. I have always worked hard to ensure that my colleagues in different parts of the world feel comfortable meeting with me. To this end, I have often worked across multiple time-zones (or had meetings twice). In my academic writing, I have actively tried to avoid favoring one gender, and have made a conscious effort to avoid micro-aggressions with my collaborators and peers. I will strive to ensure that my students will learn similar skills.

Outside UW-Madison, I have worked with Jaydeep Borkar (now a PhD student at Northeastern University) on providing (graduate school) admissions-related advice to minorities and underrepresented populations from India during the COVID-19 crisis. I am also listed as a volunteer to provide technical feedback on machine learning papers (related to my research) to underrepresented populations; this was an initiative started by Nicolas Le Roux. Through this initiative, I was able to help 3 research groups (one from India, one from Bangladesh, and one from Africa) submit their research to NeurIPS in 2021.

Looking forward. Hailing from India, I understand the difficulties associated with access to education and effective communication skills. To this end, I will ensure that I will not have a one-size fits all approach, and instead calibrate my work-related expectations differently for different students. My mentors have been incredibly supportive with various non-academic issues (related to the health and well-being of my family in India) during my PhD; I hope to pay this forward. I will actively ensure that in recruiting efforts, I will be conscious of diversity outside of the circle of people (race/gender/ethnicity/orientation) I am most familiar with. Through my collaborations, I have gotten the chance to work with people with widely different backgrounds and experiences and this has positively influenced how I solve problems and interact with people. Through conversations with my peers, I have learnt that I should not overcompensate i.e., expect my students to undergo the same difficulties I had to. I have also worked hard to ensure that I actively avoid situations of an unequal power dynamic, and have treated all my peers equally. I will do the same as faculty. I am actively reading about unconscious biases and non-inclusive workplace environments being a factor against retention of women in STEM-related careers, and will work against these issues. The security & privacy community does not have groups where minorities can discuss various impediments to their progress within the research area, while similar groups exist in ML–such as Black in AI (https://blackinai.github.io), or {Dis}Ability in AI (https://elesa.github.io/ability_in_AI)–and computer architecture–such as WICARCH (https://www.sigarch.org/wicarch); I wish to interact with researchers from different sub-groups within the security & privacy community and establish similar groups. I strongly believe that education opens a lot of doors in one’s life. To this end, I will also actively work to regularly provide avenues for undergraduates to participate in research. I also believe that providing an avenue for students to participate in research (as early as at the high-school level) can help them develop an interest in, and better appreciate a college education.