

## Diversity Statement

My commitment to fostering inclusivity in technology stems from personal experiences, such as supporting my younger brother, who has autism, through his nonverbal and self-harming childhood phases. These experiences have deeply influenced my approach to designing solutions that address the unique needs of underrepresented communities. Through every stage of his life, I have focused on helping him succeed and live independently by finding (or building) the right tools to assist him. I also am neurodiverse (ND) and have mobility issues stemming from an auto accident that makes it difficult, and often painful, to walk or stand for long periods. These core experiences have influenced how I look at problems, helped me incorporate empathy in how I approach designing solutions to others' daily challenges, and have deeply informed my commitment to fostering inclusivity and supporting underrepresented groups in academia.

**Finding Support in Academia:** While my personal experiences have had a deep impact on my research pursuits, they have also shaped how I approach and promote Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) more broadly. For much of my academic career, I kept my ADHD and mobility issues private due to fear of stigma. In 2019, I initiated and led "Ph.D. Mental Health" sessions, including remotely during COVID-19, to create a safe and inclusive space for students to share their challenges and experiences. Though I did not intend for these gatherings to support ND students specifically, it quickly became clear that many who attended were also ND students who masked their status, just like me. Many of their stories represented the common challenges of being disabled in academia. This initiative provided crucial peer support and highlighted the need for more formalized support structures within academia, particularly for ND students. Later, I joined AccessSIGCHI, an organization that promotes a more inclusive and accessible SIGCHI community. I received wonderful mentorship from academics with disabilities across numerous institutions. Their support encouraged me to be more open with my disabilities, enabling me to motivate fellow Ph.D. students to help me form an official organization sponsored by the UM College of Engineering called Knowledge, Inclusion, + NeuroDiversity (KIND) to support ND students at UM.

**Supporting Students with Disabilities:** Looking ahead to a future faculty position, my commitment to DEI remains steadfast. One area where I see significant opportunity for impact is mentoring and supporting students with disabilities—a population that remains severely underrepresented in academia. According to AccessComputing, while 12% of undergraduates in computing majors have disabilities, only 7% of doctorates are earned by students with disabilities<sup>1</sup>, even though 27% of Americans have a disability<sup>2</sup>, per the CDC. As a Ph.D. student, I proactively identified resources at my institution, such as securing an ergonomic lab-bench height chair, and collaborated with my advisor to tailor mentorship to my needs. Leveraging these insights, I have been awarded an honorarium by AccessComputing and am collaborating with Prof. Elaine Short (co-PI of AccessComputing) to develop a guide to help advisors of students with disabilities better support their students and secure them resources (e.g., the FASED NSF Supplement<sup>3</sup>). Through KIND, we have secured a partnership with the university to create an assistive technology library for ND Ph.D. students, whose needs are not addressed through traditional student accommodations (e.g., extra time on exams).

**A Broader Commitment to DEI:** My dedication to supporting students with disabilities is part of a broader commitment to addressing systemic inequalities through DEI initiatives. By advocating for inclusive curricula and policies, I aim to foster an academic environment where all marginalized groups are represented and supported. I believe that diversity is a moral imperative and essential for fostering innovation and excellence in academia; diverse teams lead to success in solving complex problems. As such, I am dedicated to advancing DEI efforts at every level of academia, from recruitment and retention to curriculum development and institutional policy. As someone with disabilities and a first-generation American (where English is not my first language), I believe I am uniquely positioned to understand and advocate for students who come from diverse backgrounds. My experiences have taught me that diverse students often face misconceptions and biases that can hinder their academic and professional advancement. By serving as a mentor and advocate, I aim to challenge these misconceptions and create a more inclusive environment where all students, regardless of their background or abilities, feel valued and supported in pursuing their academic aspirations. To come full circle, my brother is currently enrolled in a master's program in computer engineering, a long way from the child who was nonverbal with a tough road ahead of him. His journey shows me that, with the right support and mentorship, there is a home for everyone in engineering and academia. As I advance in

<sup>1</sup><https://www.washington.edu/accesscomputing/about/lessons-learned>

<sup>2</sup><https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/infographic-disability-impacts-all.html>

<sup>3</sup><https://www.washington.edu/accesscomputing/resources/accesscomputing-news-november-2023/have-you-applied-nsf-fased-supplement>

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my academic career, I am dedicated to leveraging my platform to mentor, support, and elevate marginalized voices, fostering a more inclusive and equitable environment where all students, particularly those from underrepresented backgrounds, can thrive and succeed. My brother's journey from a nonverbal child to a graduate student inspires my commitment to ensuring that academia is a home for everyone.

**Promoting a Culture of Kindness, Listening, and Holistic DEI Initiatives:** Building on my broader DEI efforts, I am committed to fostering an inclusive environment in my future faculty role. As a junior faculty member, I will promote a culture of kindness, inclusivity, and active listening, recognizing that diverse needs require tailored support. By grounding DEI in empathy and collaboration, I will foster a community where students feel heard, supported, and empowered to succeed, regardless of their background. While my experiences grant me greater insight into the needs of neurodiverse, disabled, and first-generation/immigrant students, they also help me better identify, empathize, and assist in the needs of other marginalized groups, all while recognizing that each individual's needs are unique. Diversity brings diverse challenges, and there is no one-size-fits-all solution. Thus, it is crucial to listen, especially to those who may be hesitant to voice their concerns. My past experiences have equipped me to listen to those who feel voiceless.

Yet, kindness and listening alone are insufficient to advance inclusivity. Recruiting diverse students without providing the necessary support only leads to isolation. I am committed to creating a holistic DEI approach where my students know I am their advocate. I will tailor my support to their individual needs, fostering a sense of belonging and community. While I will inevitably have shortcomings as an advisor, I am committed to continual growth in understanding, and I will cultivate a culture of kindness and listening where students feel comfortable voicing their needs, enabling me to better support their success.