Diversity Statement

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Diversity is an inherently complex issue and everyone makes their own trade-off between ideal equality and dealing with historical inequality. It is exciting to see that UCSD explicitly emphasizes the importance of campus diversity. I want to briefly include my own take on this topic alongside what I hope to do.

I believe that diversity is fundamentally the relationship between a community's distribution along a multitude of dimensions (e.g., physical traits, interests, cultures) and that of of the general population. I am strongly in favor of a diverse community that samples broadly from the general population. From a selfish perspective, it lets me learn from a variety of different, strange, and interesting people. From a larger perspective, it creates a robust community that is immune to "jumping on the band-wagon", and, as the UC diversity statement notes, it is "the source of innovative ideas and creative accomplishments".

Left to itself, there is a natural tendency to tighten this distribution. This is understandable, because similar groups are more predictable, more agreeable, and tend to share similar goals. This results in preferential treatment for the common and shunning of the outliers – outliers in race and gender are popular targets, but so are outliers in thought and habit. The heavy cost is that both the common and the shunned limit the experiences that they are willing to even consider.

Thus, my goal is for everyone passing through the university to accept that people vary widely along every attribute imaginable, and that this is valuable. The following are some ideas on how I can make an individual impact. Additionally, I would love to learn ways that can scale my efforts, and am open to other initiatives such as IDEA, the faculty mentor program, and diversity committees.

I will strive to create a positive environment. This means I will highlight everyone's contributions, push shy or junior students to voice their opinions, speak up when there are subtle or blatant put-downs, support broad collaboration and encourage non-academic interests. These are minor details, but these everyday experiences do matter. For example, I started a chocolate fund that turned my office into a "watering hole" where students from every group on the floor comes to chat. Before this, cross-group interaction did not commonly occur. On a negative note, I have also seen students leave the graduate program because their group did not emphasize these qualities.

In a similar vein, I want to find ways to showcase the fact that everyone, including the faculty, is an outlier along some dimension. By publicly applauding individual eccentricities, I hope that it can encourage students to do the same. For example, weekly trivia posters about different community members may have a positive effect.

I would love to see non-computer science students such as artists, political science students, or architects take *and excel* in computer science classes. Computer science classes have historically been considered abstract, intellectual subjects, however big data and data science classes teach practical tools that are useful in any discipline. They could be the "gateway drug" we are looking for! For example, I co-developed an introduction to data science (`http://dataiap.github.io`) and a big data course (`https://github.com/mitdbg/asciiclass/`) at MIT. A number of the students enrolled and finished were from non-computer science fields. One was even a non-technical CEO from a local business!

I would also like to add new diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) courses. I noticed that the existing DEI courses focus on specific groups such as women or African Americans. I would like to add classes that speak broadly about the topic and emphasize the tangible benefits of embracing diversity. I believe negotiation courses such as Power and Negotiation [1] at MIT's Sloan school of management are very good candidates. Concepts such as growing the pie, and interest-based negotiation are tools that students can readily use, and highlight the value of embracing diversity from a practical perspective.

In 2010, I volunteered an instructor for MEET, a middle-east peace initiative that brings Israeli and Palestinian high school students together. As a result of this program, many of the Palestinian students learned about and pursued college degrees in the U.S. Initiatives that empower high school students to *consider* college (and STEM in particular) are important and I will actively help seek participants for these programs and hopefully have time to participate myself.

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[1] `http://ocw.mit.edu/courses/sloan-school-of-management/15-665b-power-and-negotiation-fall-2002/`