

Diversity Statement

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As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, we must learn to respect others' interests, differences, and points of view. This is even more important when it comes to educators. Educators are often a student's first encounter with the outside world and can play a pivotal role in shaping their worldview, interest in a subject, and career choices. As someone who has nurtured the dream of joining academia since 10th grade, I realized the importance of having an understanding and an open mindset at a very early age. Throughout my academic career, I have been fortunate to have positive role models in my friends, advisors and mentors who listened to me, provided me with sage advice, and created a nurturing environment that helped me introspect safely. I consider this next part of my journey as a way of repaying this goodwill by setting up a positive learning environment both inside and outside the classroom.

My Ph.D. tenure at IIT Madras provided me with several opportunities to help me prepare for the same. My Teaching Assistantship enabled me to interact with students from various cultural, economic, and linguistic backgrounds. India is a country with a diverse mix of cultures. Every state has a unique language and a unique cultural diaspora. During my tenure as a teaching assistant for the data structures and programming languages lab, I had students from rural backgrounds who had never used a computer before. I strongly believe in the quote, "Education is the great equalizer," by Horace Mann. Despite their economic hardships, cultural backgrounds, and language differences, I could see students bond and break free from their economic and cultural disadvantages through education. As an educator, I want to be a part of this forward momentum in a student's life.

I also had the opportunity to serve as the Teaching Assistant for NPTEL courses which are IIT Madras online teaching platform. Online learning is quite different from the classroom teaching experience. An instructor in a classroom has a lot of cues to understand the students' psyche and interests, which is not always present in an online teaching experience. A classroom teaching model is synchronous since the student and the instructor interact simultaneously. However, online learning is asynchronous and is catered toward a wider audience. Thus I had to ensure that the students could easily understand any course material. To this end, I ensured that each course module was accompanied by closed captions and a transcript containing additional reference material and background information on key topics covered in the lecture video.

During my time as a Postdoctoral Researcher, I had the opportunity to interact with students from a wider diaspora. Being a part of a successful lab in a thriving university meant I got the chance to interact with students from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds. I mentored students from multiple countries, such as Cuba, the Philippines, Bangladesh, and Saudi Arabia, along with several students from the USA and India. Throughout my mentoring experience, I ensured that I carried forward the lessons I learned during my Ph.D. tenure. Mentoring non-binary and women Ph.D. candidates helped me understand their challenges in pursuing higher education in STEM. This interaction has been a tremendous learning experience and will help my academic career.

During the Spring of 2022, I co-taught a graduate course in the ECE department at the University of Florida. The course was offered during the pandemic, and several students were still in their home countries and were attending the classes virtually. To facilitate an easy learning experience, I ensured that all my lectures were pre-recorded and uploaded before the class. I also guaranteed that the lectures were subtitled and contained a handout that explained the key components in detail. My experiences as a teaching assistant for the Online Teaching platform at IITM helped me make the course accessible to students. I also ensured that the office hours were set up so students across time zones could interact with me quickly.

Similarly, to promote the transitions of younger students to college, I participate in an outreach initiative called "Letters to a Pre-Scientist," where I interact with K 12 senior students and inspire them to pursue academic research.

In summary, I will use the experiences I gained during my Ph.D. and Postdoctoral career to helping me create an inclusive, nurturing, and healthy learning environment in my classrooms, research group, and any professional activity. By incorporating viewpoints from diverse groups and communities, I will try to create a welcoming atmosphere for one and all. I will initiate and participate in research workshops to improve the participation of all minority groups in the community, both within and outside the university. Finally, using my prior experiences, I will try to constantly learn to be better and actively work towards the betterment of underrepresented communities by writing research and teaching grants. I eagerly look forward to starting my exciting journey as an academic and contributing to the diversity within the institution through my services.