

Alane Suhr: DEI Statement

Computing must be a welcoming and supportive environment where everyone can thrive. This is not only a matter of values. A more diverse community builds better technology, both by considering the needs of all affected by the technology, and due to the range of experiences and perspectives within the community. There are many examples of technologies that have resulted in harm, often unintentionally, to people who are not given influence in the design process.¹ A recent NLP-specific example of this is the practice of constructing and using lists of “bad words”, which results in censorship of marginalized groups, e.g., by suppressing discussion of LGBT topics.²

The computing community should welcome, include, and support people with a diverse set of identities, both in our academic communities and in the technologies we build. This includes actively countering implicit, explicit, and structural biases. I personally experienced how implicit bias can undermine a young scientist’s confidence and desire to continue in a field. My personal experiences were mostly related to gender, e.g., receiving uncomfortable comments. Although I cannot personally experience what it is like to work in academia through the lens of other marginalized identities (e.g., race, immigration status, disability), it is crucial to recognize and address the aspects of community that result in a climate that is unwelcoming and unsupportive of these students.³ Recent years have seen significant progress in improving DEI in computing (for example, by offering application waivers, programs for reviewing application materials, and removing GRE requirements⁴). There are still many steps to take to improve and support DEI in computing.

I have been concerned about access to and inclusion in computing since being fortunate to first learn about CS through two volunteer mentors while I was in high school. As an undergraduate student, I tutored local public high school students in STEM topics.⁵ For example, during my last two years of undergrad, I co-organized a STEM and FTC⁶ robotics club at Columbus North International School. This included securing a \$4,000 grant from the P12 Initiative at Ohio State to fund the club. As a graduate student, I continued to seek out opportunities to mentor students. Through the WiTNY / BTT program at Cornell Tech,⁷ I advised undergraduate women on research projects. Several of these students were undergraduates at CUNY, a public university system under the City of New York. CUNY provides quality, inexpensive higher education to a diverse student body, especially those excluded from private universities because of their high costs, or, in the past, discriminatory admission practices. However, there are few opportunities for research available to undergraduates at CUNY. The impact of these internships on my interns was beyond the research experience itself: it opened up new employment opportunities and paved the way to graduate education. I also advised several other undergraduates whose genders, nationalities, and backgrounds are historically underrepresented in computing. In 2019, I served as the co-president of the PhD student organization at Cornell Tech. Cornell Tech is rapidly growing, so it is vital to shape it into a supportive and diverse community. This experience gave me exposure to the wide variety of issues and needs that graduate students have, especially students from underrepresented groups.

¹Ruha Benjamin. *Race After Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code*. Polity, 2019.

²Tom Simonite. *AI and the List of Dirty, Naughty, Obscene, and Otherwise Bad Words*. Wired, 2021.

³Brandon Taylor. *Working in Science was a Brutal Education. That's Why I Left*. BuzzFeed News, 2020.

⁴E.g., at Berkeley EECS, who saw significantly higher representation in applications, offers, and matriculation of traditionally underrepresented groups by removing the GRE requirement for PhD applications; see: <https://ee.berkeley.edu/news/2021/05/eecs-faculty-votes-drop-gre-requirement-indefinitely>

⁵Columbus City Schools serve many students from lower-income families, see: <https://censusreporter.org/profiles/97000US3904380-columbus-city-school-district-oh/>

⁶First Tech Challenge, <https://www.firstinspires.org/robotics/ftc>

⁷Women in Technology New York / Break Through Tech, <https://www.breakthroughtech.org/>

As faculty, I will work towards increasing diversity in the computing community by recruiting and retaining students of underrepresented groups. Central to this is ensuring students have access to the resources they need to succeed, and creating an inclusive environment for students through:

- **Recruiting a broad range of students.** For recruiting PhD students, I will look to networks like Queer in AI,⁸ WiNLP,⁹ and Black in AI¹⁰. I will work to improve accessibility of applying to the PhD program, including supporting programs that provide applicants pre-review of application materials.
- **Collaborating with undergraduate students from different backgrounds.** I will secure funding for research projects (both summer internships and long-term research collaborations) with undergraduates at institutions that are typically underrepresented in PhD admissions and research in general (e.g., through NSF REU), especially from local institutions, and encourage final-year students from these colleges and universities to apply to the PhD program.
- **Supporting students.** I will advocate for students and connect them to department-specific and professional resources. I am interested in serving as a faculty mentor for student groups; in particular, I would be interested in working with a student group that promotes gender inclusion in computing.
- **Educating students about DEI and ethics in computing.** I will emphasize the importance of countering bias and harassment, and supporting DEI efforts, to the students I advise and teach. I will develop syllabi that embed discussion of ethics and DEI issues into the curriculum, and highlight the work of researchers whose identities are historically underrepresented in computing.

⁸<https://sites.google.com/view/queer-in-ai/home>

⁹<http://www.winlp.org/>

¹⁰<https://blackinai.github.io/>