Statement of Diversity
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I grew up in a communist community (Kibbutz) in the northern part of Israel. The prosperity of such a community depends heavily on the level of trust and cooperation among its members. Growing up in such a unique environment taught me first-hand the positive impact of cultural diversity on the one hand, and the negative consequences of its absence on the other hand. For instance, our community frequently cooperated with the neighboring Bedouins to produce successful agriculture products while leveraging the community’s resources and the Bedouins’ unique knowledge.

Shortly after the fall of the USSR many former soviet citizens joined our community and contributed unique cultural customs which I found to be fascinating. Specifically, their appreciation and aspiration towards academic training (mostly in technical fields) resonated with me. Later I was recruited in to the Israeli military where I served alongside soldiers from a mixture of religions, races, genders, and social statuses. My unique experiences taught me that I can learn most from those with backgrounds different than my own.

In a similar way, during my time as a post-doc at UT-Austin, I have encountered the positive impact of collaborating with students and faculty members from different cultural backgrounds. As part of a research project spanning the computer science and civil engineering departments, I led a group that composed of three students, two post-docs and four professors. The group members where of various origins, and the cultural differences where clearly observed and cross-fertilizing. As I understand the value of a diverse research environment, I will make a special effort to recruit students from various backgrounds for my lab.

Apart from contributing to a fruitful work environment, diversity has an important role in creating a more just and equal society, which are values that I strongly believe in. As I see it, higher education is a gateway to integration. Academic training is commonly affiliated with an honorable profession, financial security and, mainly, a recognition of one’s level of intelligence. As such, it is not surprising that most white-collar professions and influential positions require an academic degree. Consequently, a key factor in integrating any minority group into society on an equal footing is academic integration.

I believe that the first step towards minority integration is creating a safe and comfortable environment. People are generally more comfortable when they are not the only representative of their gender or race in their environment. Consequently, I will make a special effort to identify minorities that are underrepresented among the students. I will then request assistance from the university’s division of diversity and community engagement in devising suitable high-school outreach programs targeted at such underrepresented minorities.

As a faculty member, I intend to do everything in my power to emphasize the value of diversity and integration. I will actively encourage minority members to take leading positions in order to, firstly, inspire other minority members and, secondly, to create a culturally diverse work environment that allows cross-fertilization of ideas and customs.