Diversity Statement of Geoff Pleiss

My commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion is rooted in three core tenets. First, there is a moral imperative: all people, regardless of their background, have the right to pursue and succeed in higher education. Second, there is desperate need for equity in statistics: statistical methods play an increasingly prevalent role in society, impacting all aspects of life, and people from underrepresented populations must have a seat at the table to determine how these technologies will affect them. Finally, there is tangible value to the academic environment: a diverse community yields diverse perspectives that fuel creativity, innovation, and progress.

My personal academic journey has been marked by many privileges that I know are not afforded to everyone. In order to be an ally and steward of diversity, I must take an *active role* in educating myself, reflecting on how I can create a more inclusive environment, and pursuing broader change through concrete service and actions. Below I outline my contributions to date, as well as my delineated objectives towards promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion in the field of statistics.

Mentorship. I am an (ally) member of emerging affinity groups, such as Black in AI and Latinx in AI, and I have mentored undergraduates and junior Ph.D. students through Latinx in AI's mentorship program. Such opportunities allow me to leverage my academic privilege in support of those who have faced barriers, hardships, or limited representation. Beyond offering guidance and career support, my approach to mentorship of underrepresented students addresses three primary goals: 1) promoting my mentees and their work to the larger statistics community, addressing needs for increased visibility; 2) fostering connections between my mentees and other researchers, addressing needs for inclusion; and 3) creating an open and safe environment for discussing microaggressions, feelings of imposter syndrome, and other issues. Though the Latinx in AI mentorship program was officially one month long, I have continued to support all of my mentees for well over a year, offering to review presentations, make introductions, or simply listen to their experiences. I helped one of my mentees prepare for her first-year Ph.D. qualifying exams, and I have begun helping another mentee connect with colleagues in his research area.

Targeted outreach. Beyond mentoring current students, it is important to provide access and inspiration in STEM fields starting at a young age. At Cornell I participated in several STEM outreach programs for underrepresented elementary and middle school students. I led a four-month-long after-school program teaching coding to mostly minority fourth graders. I also volunteered yearly with the "Expand your Horizons" program—a workshop for seventh and eight grade girls focusing on hands-on math and science activities. These experiences are necessary to improve diversity and inclusion beyond the walls of academia, while developing rewarding connections within the larger community as a whole.

Teaching and research. Part of my research directly investigates how statical models affect equity in society. My collaborators and I studied how calibrated predictive models, objects of immense interest in statistics, are fundamentally at odds with various notions of fairness, creating disparities between different subpopulations [1]. I believe that this line of research is necessary for two key reasons. First, it generates an awareness of how our field directly impacts traditionally marginalized groups, with the goal of creating better policy and more equitable technology. Second, topics exploring the intersection of statistics and society can motivate students who may have otherwise overlooked the study of statistical methods.

Vision for an inclusive classroom and research lab. Looking forward, I will draw upon these experiences to shape my role as a professor and leader in the field of statistics. Through self-education and conversations with colleagues in academia, I have devised a set of rules and heuristics to promote diversity, equity, and inclusively within my classroom and research group.

1) **Establish an explicit code of conduct.** While most universities and departments have policies against harassment or discrimination, I have found that these efforts are reinforced by explicit lab/classroom codes of conduct. Codes of conduct accomplish three objectives: a) they establish that all students, especially those from underrepresented groups, should feel safe and welcome in classroom/lab settings; b) they offer a tangible set of actions if students are made to feel unsafe of unwelcome; and c) they create a set of *shared values* that classes and lab groups can espouse and unite around.

2) **Actively recruit underrepresented students.** Traditional sources of recruitment for graduate studies—such as one's alma mater, network of prior collaborators, or top-tier conferences—must be supplemented with direct outreach to underrepresented students who may not have access to this path. Affinity groups like Black in AI, Latinx in AI, Queer in AI, and Women in ML are fantastic resources to advertise graduate positions to large groups of potential students from diverse backgrounds.

3) **Never assume that my experience is universal.** During my Ph.D. I was lucky to be healthy and relatively free of outside responsibilities, allowing me to work late hours or weekends for urgent deadlines. I also realize that this situation was a luxury. One of my closest friends was battling a chronic illness, and her health was affected each time her advisor asked her to perform weekend lab work. As a professor I will strive to create a work culture suitable for all—regardless of neuroability, physical ability, mental health, socioeconomic status, family status, religion, race, gender, or sexuality. I will of course push students to achieve academic excellence, but I recognize that this requires working with each student to develop a personalized environment that meets their needs and best allows them to thrive.

4) **Promote awareness of diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts.** Part of my responsibility as a professor is to train students to be positive members of the statistics community. Consequently, I aim to make my students active stewards of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Part of my teaching and mentoring will be devoted to discussing why these efforts are important and necessary. I will advocate for my students to become members of affinity groups, and to volunteer in outreach positions.

5) **Continuously reassess opportunities to improve.** My understanding of diversity, equity, and inclusion is constantly evolving, and I know that I will not always be a perfect ally. I will seek opportunities to improve my own awareness through workshops and reading so that the work does not rest on the shoulders of underrepresented groups. Of course, I will also pursue opportunities to listen when my students and colleagues express feeling hurt or marginalized, and I will take action to improve this set of rules and my own conduct.

REFERENCES

[1] **Geoff Pleiss**, Manish Raghavan, Felix Wu, Jon Kleinberg, and Kilian Q. Weinberger. On fairness and calibration. In *Neural Information Processing Systems*, 2017.