

## Overview of My Diversity and Plans

I will discuss three experiences: **Family Diversity**, **Educational Diversity** and **Research Diversity**. My family is diverse: my mom is an immigrant and my twin brother is gay. Seeing life through their eyes has given me a deep appreciation of what it feels like to be an outsider: this has, in turn, given me an understanding that has helped me connect to students with diverse backgrounds. I have taken many approaches to educating and connecting with students: teaching large classes and directly mentor 27 undergraduate students from different race- and class-backgrounds. Finally, all of these have informed my research, which seeks to **bring together different fields for a common goal of information sharing**. My consistent experience, both growing up and working with students, has been that a clear and socially-oriented educational/research mission will speak to students across racial and class boundaries. I have consistently worked to frame my research, which focuses on “saving local journalism”, to speak to these ideals. **Some of the most disempowered communities are also those that need local news the most: journalism brings knowledge, and knowledge is power.**

**My plan to foster diversity:** my plan is to establish a safe space, first and foremost, for students of different backgrounds. I hope to help them see how their educational journeys can help them engage with and lift up their communities. As the child of an immigrant, I will be welcoming to immigrants in our university community: I will host dinners at my house and community events to provide a community for immigrants who cannot travel home. I will actively work with the UCSD LGBTQ communities on campus, and I will seek to include students in my research group from these backgrounds. I will work to encourage and open doors for students from all backgrounds to see themselves in the work we do. I will grow my research in ways where students will be able to see themselves and their communities in the work they do. Whether it is (1) working directly with news outlets covering different communities, so students will be able to see their work have an impact in these groups, or (2) developing recourse and misinformation research in directions that these students can actively participate in, I hope for all students to be able to see tangible ways they can help. In my experience, this sense of purpose can broadly encourage students to participate, grow and feel proud of their education.

## Familial Diversity: My family's diversity has informed my understanding of diversity

As a straight, white male from a middle-class background, who is a U.S. citizen, I acknowledge I am incredibly privileged. Despite my best efforts to own this and work on reducing my blindness to the experience of racial and class-based minorities in this country, there are likely ways I remain blind: this will be an ongoing process I am deeply committed to in my life.

There are aspects of my familial diversity that have added to the breadth of my perspective and inform how I am able to connect with students that I mentor. My family is a diverse family: my mother is a first generation immigrant who came to the U.S. to pursue her PhD and eventual professorship at Stony Brook University in relational psychology and my identical twin brother is a wonderfully supportive gay male.

My brother has impacted my worldview, and our ever-evolving relationship has led me to a deeper affirmation of value and diversity. My relationship with him as a gay man, and crucially, the surprise I felt during his coming out, has led me to a non-assuming posture towards the people I interact with. I was 18 years old when my brother came out as gay. Despite being the closest person in the world to me, I was surprised. In the immediate months that followed, our relationship went through a rupture as I struggled with a lack of trust and he struggled with what he perceived as non-acceptance. I have gone to lengths to integrate into communities that he has been part of. I spent months living on the floor of his Berkeley graduate student cooperative where, as a PhD student, he felt finally welcomed and embraced. I have raised money with him for AIDS nonprofit organizations; we have planned and performed piano and cello duets in concert series aimed at raising money and awareness of underprivileged communities.

My mother, as a first generation immigrant, did not always find a welcome home in the conservative community we grew up in. My mother came to the United States in 1972: from then onwards, her accent marked her as different. I remember growing up feeling like our family was continually on the outside; the food we were eating was different, our accents were different, and our lifestyles (eating past 9pm was normal) were certainly strange. For her, academia is a refuge; it is a place she could feel safe, accepted and understood in a diverse, cross-institutional community. As I have progressed and found mentors in different institutions, across different departments, I have found a sense of reciprocity that transcends transaction, institution or generation. I have felt a “pay it forward” mentality, whereby mentors will offer advice, thoughts, close-reads, edits, and, most importantly, their time; their only expectation being that, one day, I will pay this forward, giving students, younger peers and collaborators the same affordances they gave me.

## Educational Diversity: I have worked multiple ways to engaging students from underrepresented groups

I have tried to bring this feeling of academic community into the mentorship and teaching that I have conducted at USC. As a computer science TA, I often worked with first-generation college students as well as students from lower-income communities.

I came to appreciate the ways students could struggle in class – not because they lacked preparation or effort – but because they lacked confidence or believed they did not belong at an institution like USC. Accordingly, I sought to be patient and develop their problem-solving skills in order to build confidence. I learned to pair them with students of similar abilities so they could instruct each other, to reward them with lots of praise and affirmation, and acknowledge every instance of improvement they made.

I have not learned these lessons of group management perfectly, and I always in the process of updating my approaches. One notable failure that sticks out in my mind is the way I structured teams throughout my mentorship and lab-building period (which I discuss more in my teaching assignment). Many of my students this summer were from underrepresented groups. I wished to assign each group a leader, to coordinate the structure of the group and take on more responsibilities; to identify leaders, I asked individuals to self-nominate. I came to realize, through the summer, that the most qualified and dedicated students were usually not the people who self-nominated in the beginning. In fact, the people with the confidence to self-nominate were usually simply the most confident and privileged, and I had some students leave my groups out of frustration with the structure.

This was a learning experience for me. While, going forward, I wish to allow all students to have self-determination, especially when I am working with them in the capacity of a research mentor, I also wish to create space for students without initial confidence or hubris to step forward. I realized that it was hugely important to assess ability in a neutral way, that allowed students' enthusiasm and skill to shine without being potentially crowded out by those with more privilege or confidence. Looking forward, I am excited to fine-tune my approach and continue to use my position to engage and support students from underrepresented groups.

### **Research Diversity: I have focused on cross-disciplinary research aimed at equity and fairness**

Finally, I will return to the core values of my research. I entered journalism and academia out of the conviction that encouraging high-quality information in society could have broader social benefits. In fact, much research has shown that a strong and independent press also holds powerful institutions accountable. By scrutinizing government policies, corporate practices, and social structures, journalists provide transparency that helps to dismantle systems of privilege and exploitation. This accountability pushes leaders to adopt more equitable policies and practices, ensuring that those in power serve all segments of the population, not just the privileged few. By strengthening the abilities of journalists to cover stories, cheaply and broadly, I hope to play a role in these processes.

Another pillar of my research, *recourse*, is explicitly aimed at promoting equity. By assessing a machine learning models' propensity to deny users access to resources on the ability of attributes they may not be able to change: race, gender, age and economic status. Specifically, I focused on credit scores and loan likelihood. My work on recourse shows how credit scores that use alternative data may harm consumers by violating their autonomy. The formulation of mutability and immutability in featuresets was a design decision that I specifically brought to the table when we were formulating these concepts, and it is one that I am proud of.

I hope to continue on these research directions in the future. I hope that I can build an interdisciplinary research group that will merge directions in journalism with directions in fairness and transparency. We will analyze coverage patterns in news deserts and the impacts these deficits have on lower income and minority populations. I plan on recruiting from diverse groups and minority populations (including, specifically, former journalists.)