DIVERSITY | STACY M. BRANHAM

I grew up in a wealthy, conservative, military family––a white woman without visible disabilities. When I entered my first classroom as a Computer Science B.S. major at Virginia Tech, my "otherness" was palpable, though I did not yet have a language for it. I was one of just four women, in a full section with 100 seats, a ratio that followed me to graduation. This was the first time I had ever felt that way, but clearly not the last.

That first semester of college, I also recall receiving an email invitation to the Women in Computing student group's holiday party. I was baffled that such a club existed; how was "woman" any more binding or relevant a category than "brown-eyed?" I did *not* attend. Three years (of male-filled class seats) later, I became the President of that organization. I have been active in efforts to increase diversity in STEM ever since.

This introduction helps me share two thoughts about my relationship with "diversity." First, diversity is my personal value and practice. I did not inherit it or even find it intuitive. Instead, it is a critical reflective achievement of mine, one that has brought joy and meaning to my life. Second, as a woman in my profession, I am both native to diversity challenges and foreign. The experiences of people from low income families, people of color, people with disabilities, people who speak English as a second language, people who are first-generation college students––these are not facets of my identity, yet they function as layers that compound oppression. As a result, **in my roles as diversity activist and leader, I take an approach of humility, openness to learn, and inclusion of underserved voices**.

Research
My research promotes diversity both in process and in content. I work hard to recruit a diverse research team. I have recently managed and published research articles with a team that included a blind Ph.D. student, a low-vision Ph.D. student, a transgender student, a wheelchair user, and a student with a cognitive disability, many of whom are women, people of color, and first-generation college students. I also focus my research on challenges to equity and inclusion for people with disabilities or marginalized gender identities. In the process of my work, I encourage my students to volunteer with organizations like the Columbia Lighthouse for the Blind. I work with diverse collaborators, like Blind Industries and Services of Maryland, the American Printing House for the Blind, and members of the ADAPT disability activist group. I follow and communicate with disability visibility activists on social media. These engagements help check that my work is participatory and socially responsible.

Teaching
I am committed to increasing retention in STEM by supporting an inclusive climate for women and marginalized groups in my classroom. In my undergraduate COMP 101 course, I hire a group of gender-, race-, and ability-diverse "peers" who co-teach the course and hold one-on-one check-in meetings with students throughout the semester. This provides an opportunity for the peers to develop leadership skills and for course students to find minority mentors. I also developed a diversity sensitivity training curriculum for COMP 101 students and staff to introduce implicit bias, microaggressions, and diversity challenges in computing fields. In line with best diversity practices, I include diverse professional role models in my slides, and I balance teaching technical topics with real-world examples of why they matter to society.

Service
As President of Virginia Tech's Association for Women in Computing, the budget increased from under $1,000 annually to over $20,000 annually, and our membership increased from fewer than 10 active members to over 40 active members. I continue this type of leadership and support for women on campus in my service roles at UMBC, including as a member on the advisory boards of the Women's Center and the Center for Women in Technology. Along with two faculty from other institutions, I am co-organizer of NCWIT's Aspirations in Computing scholarship program for technical high school women in Maryland. Annually, we invite and evaluate applications, select winners, solicit industry funding, and host a half-day awards ceremony with technical workshops for over 100 people. Last summer, I worked with an undergraduate to investigate ways we could more effectively recruit student applications from more racially and economically diverse parts of the state.

I look forward to bringing my experience of supporting diversity in my research, teaching, and service to UCI.