Diversity Statement
Frederic Sala

I recognize the significant challenges and barriers faced by underrepresented groups in engineering and computer science. I believe we are in an important period for our field in tackling these obstacles, and that to do so, we must create a positive, safe, and inclusive environment for students at every level. I am committed to this task. As a faculty member, I will place special emphasis on outreach to women and underrepresented groups, providing mentorship, encouragement, and resources.

Creating and Maintaining an Inclusive Environment  My goal is to create a learning and working environment where all members feel safe, respected, and capable of producing their best work. To foster such an environment, I will listen to the concerns of each member, communicate policies clearly, and emphasize openness. In the research group I will build, I will focus on providing opportunities for everyone to speak by prioritizing clear policies that ensure everyone has had the chance to express themselves. I will also work to ensure that responsibility and leadership positions, both in my lab and outside of it, will be available to those from underrepresented groups, and I will encourage taking on such positions.

In the courses I teach, I will encourage students from diverse backgrounds to act as teaching assistants. I will create class material in a variety of formats and will seek to provide easy access to this material. In entry level courses, I will emphasize campus resources such as counseling, ensuring that everyone has access to all of the tools conducive to learning.

I will also reach out to underrepresented groups, recognizing that members of these groups often do not have access to academic and professional opportunities. I will seek out ways to improve this access. In particular, I will obtain funding for travel to conferences and will encourage students from these groups to participate. For example, I have and will continue to encourage students I have mentored to participate in the excellent Women in Machine Learning (WiML) workshop. Finally, I will do my best to help students with any of their needs—as an immigrant who first came to the United States accompanying parents entering graduate school, I recognize how the kindness and constant help my parents’ academic advisors provided us eased our transition. I hope to have the same impact for the next generation of students.

Mentoring  I am committed to mentoring those from underrepresented and minority backgrounds. I believe access to such mentoring is critical. I am fortunate to have had the opportunity to mentor several students from underrepresented groups. During my doctoral studies, I mentored Homa Esfahanizadeh during her Ph.D. at UCLA working on spatially-coupled codes in information theory. During my postdoctoral studies at Stanford, I mentored Ines Chami as she developed exciting advancements in non-Euclidean graph neural networks; she will present her work at NeurIPS. I have mentored Paroma Varma during her Stanford Ph.D.; she has successfully completed her doctorate and is commercializing this line of research at a startup. I mentored Beliz Gunel, who is a Ph.D. student at Stanford working on NLP; her work was included at the Women in Machine Learning (WiML) workshop. I have also mentored Shiori Sagawa (Ph.D.) on time series and weak supervision, and Mayee Chen (Ph.D.) on the theoretical aspects of weak supervision algorithms.