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DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION STATEMENT

"When we listen and celebrate what is both common and different, we become wiser, more inclusive, and better as an organization." - Pat Wadors.

Diversity is a critical component of any institution of higher education. Engineering benefits from a diversity of perspectives and experiences. A lack of diversity can lead to homogeneity in thought and innovation, which can be detrimental to the field. In this document, I will share my experiences as an underrepresented minority (URM) and the importance of diversity in higher education in engineering.

I am grateful to have had the opportunity to participate in the Minority Undergraduate Research Program, sponsored by Alliances Graduate Education and Professoriate (AGEP), and the Institution on Teaching and Mentoring workshops, sponsored by the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB). These programs have been invaluable in my development as an engineering student and educator. The Minority Undergraduate Research Program is to be thanked for bringing me in touch with my interest in autonomous systems by initially connecting me with Edward Grant, my long-time advisor, collaborator, friend, and the former director of The Center for Robotics and Intelligent Machines (CRIM) at NCSU. Through my involvement in these programs, I have been able to gain a greater understanding of the importance of diversity in engineering education and research. I have also had the opportunity to collaborate with fantastic mentors who have helped me grow as a professional and an educator. I am confident that I would not be the engineer or educator I am today without these programs. I am proud to be a part of these programs and am committed to continuing to work to increase minority representation in engineering.

I want to share these positive experiences with the next generation of students. As an engineering professor, I will continue to engage students through similar programs and be an advocate for diversity in engineering. I would like to suggest the following activities to achieve a more diverse academic body:

- Undergraduate and graduate-level research mentorships
- Diversity training and leadership workshops, seminars, and international collaboration.

Research mentorships: As someone who has been mentored throughout my academic and professional career, I understand the importance of having a supportive and encouraging mentor. I also know that mentorship can be especially valuable for the under-represented in their chosen field. As a research mentor, I would welcome students from all backgrounds into my group. I would work to create a supportive and inclusive environment where everyone feels comfortable sharing their ideas and perspectives. I would also work to ensure that all students can develop their skills and pursue their goals. By mentoring minority students, I hope to help create a more diverse and equitable scientific community.

Diversity training: Hosting diversity training and workshops is one way to make the university more inclusive for everyone. By providing these opportunities, we can ensure that faculty and staff are trained on how to support diversity and inclusion initiatives effectively. Additionally, these programs can help identify unconscious bias and provide tools for addressing it. Existing programs, such as the SREB's Institution on Teaching and Mentoring, are essential for ensuring that all university community members have the opportunity to gain experience and grow. By expanding diversity training and workshops, we can continue to create a more supportive and inclusive environment for everyone. Luckily, the early diversity training of myself and my twin brother stemmed from two enlightened and loving parents.

One challenge to promoting inclusion in academia is ensuring that all students feel valued and respected, regardless of their background or circumstances. As an educator, I have had the opportunity to work with students from a wide range of backgrounds and experiences. I have learned that effective communication is key to promoting inclusion. By listening closely and being respectful of individual differences, I have created a learning environment where all students feel welcome and valued. I believe that promoting inclusion in academia is essential to ensuring that all students can succeed. We can create an environment where everyone can thrive by fostering respect for diversity.