D. Pillis
Statement on Contributions to Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

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Throughout my artistic and academic career, I have always been deeply committed to values of diversity, equity and inclusion, both inside and outside of the classroom. Teaching a diverse and inclusive student population requires a dedication to ensuring equity in the educational environment, and I work towards this by enabling each student's success through an emphasis on collaboration, respect and community building in the classroom culture. When teaching interdisciplinary students from a wide range of backgrounds, I believe it is crucial to emphasize support to students to accommodate a wide spectrum of interests, responding genuinely to each student's unique background and cultural identity to encourage meaningful work and growth. My teaching practice merges technical instruction with broader contextual, social and civic implications; teaching media technique alongside theory and historical context, with the ambition to encourage students to create meaningful and thoughtful work with an emphasis on social good.

Growing up queer taught me the importance of identifying and advocating for the empowerment of under-represented groups and individuals. My commitment is an integral part of my research and academic work, and I pride myself on fostering an inclusive and accessible classroom environment, where each student is respected, valued, and encouraged to express themselves openly. While researching and teaching at Virginia Tech, I was an active member of the LGBTQ Caucus, a group of faculty and staff that met bi-weekly to discuss intersectional diversity initiatives to engage with our diverse student population, collaborating with diversity-oriented student outreach groups and emphasizing recruitment and retention for diverse faculty applicants. I was a regular faculty participant in Student/Faculty mentorship events hosted at the LGBTQ Resource Center, and annually walked with LGBTQ+ students in a "Lavender Ceremony", a graduation ceremony to highlight graduating members of the LGBTQ student community.

I am a founding member of the Diversity, Equity and Inclusivity Committee of the international SIGGRAPH conference, the largest and most established academic conference dedicated to interactive computer graphics, XR, VR and AR. Sponsored by Activision, the ACM, and SIGGRAPH, our first summit featured multiple panels with D&I representatives from Pixar, Weta Digital, MIT and a variety of independent artists from our international community. By fostering conversations between academic and industry D&I representatives, we are forging a network that continues to shape and connect communities, expanding our knowledge base on the important issues, deficits, and leading to proactive measures for encouraging diversity in recruitment and education in our field. Our committee also creates opportunities for students and new members of the SIGGRAPH community to engage and connect with mentors and peers, through a series of meet and greets, panels, outreach events and lectures during each conference.

Since 2017, we have worked to encourage under-represented students and industry colleagues to find mentorship in order to thrive in the fields of interactive arts and computer graphics. In 2017, I was invited by Diversity and Inclusion Chairman, Tony Baylis of the Lawrence Livermore National Lab, to participate in a panel discussion about how my experience of queer identity impacts my work in the computer graphics industry. For SIGGRAPH 2018, I organized a panel of scholars from the University of California, Berkeley and UC Irvine, theorists Jacob Gaboury and Bo Ruberg, and led a discussion on the representation of gender and queer identity in animation and interactive media. In November of 2019, I was an invited speaker at SIGGRAPH Asia. This past summer, I assisted with Diversity and Inclusivity planning for SIGGRAPH 2021 by leading teams of student volunteers to create animations about D&I issues to feature as filler content between speakers, during the Zoom based remote conference. Featuring

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panels from international speakers on interactive technology, virtual reality, computer science and animation, this five day conference was a celebration of diversity in the XR industry. In the last several years since its inception, our annual summit has grown to feature lively panels, external events, and ongoing discussions that continue year round. I am proud to be a part of a group that incorporates meaningful initiatives on DE&I during a conference typically dominated by technology and industry, where audiences can hear the stories of legendary women in animation, groundbreaking African American Disney Imagineers, or LGBTQ theorists discussing gender and interactive media.

While a visiting instructor at Princeton, I was a regular participant in events hosted by the LGBT Resource Center, hosted virtually via DISCORD. Through a unique partnership with the LGBT center, I spearheaded a series of initiatives under the concept of LGBTQ+STEM. We hosted an online event, "Snap the Drag", an augmented reality drag show, bridging the gap between technology, diversity and LGBTQ+ communities, at the intersection of STEM and queer cultural theory. Students worked with visitors and faculty across the LGBTQ+ spectrum via Zoom, with the aim of providing a safe space for culturally relevant augmented reality experimentation and discussions on how gender is portrayed and can be explored. We engaged in thoughtful conversations about how race and gender are characterized in augmented reality applications like Snapchat, and how these filters can be used politically to counter surveillance techniques or explore new modes of self expression. The final event, a Zoom-based "Drag Karaoke", was a fun and lighthearted way to use augmented reality to think about broader issues of representation in our intersectional communities. This past spring, I was invited to be a speaker by Princeton's ResInDe, Princeton University's student-run design consultancy, founded with "an emphasis on principles of empathy and intentional innovation". Last Spring's theme was engaged with "Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility". I was invited to present on the research and outreach I had stimulated in conjunction with our LGBTQ+STEM series.

As a researcher active in the international LGBTQ community, I am engaged in serving and representing underrepresented populations in academic environments, both as an ally and advocate for all in academia and industry. Throughout my work and practice, I am proud to have demonstrated the ability to successfully lead teams of future leaders. Furthermore, I am committed to expanding and opening up opportunities to develop new leaders from underrepresented groups. As someone who strives for diverse representation to be reflected in all walks of life, I am committed to educating a diverse populace, and connecting them with opportunities to succeed. Both in and out of the classroom, I am consistently engaged in both volunteer work, as well as in my creative practice, in serving underrepresented populations, as a staunch advocate for diversity, equity and inclusivity for all. I pride myself on extending my commitment into the classroom, and I remain open to growing and actively listening to those often underrepresented in our industry and academia to develop, strengthen, and further contribute to a diverse, equitable and inclusive future.