

Diversity Statement  
**D. Carrington Motley**

**Why does diversity matter?**

Diversity is increasingly a priority as universities and other organizations look inward. My experience as an underrepresented minority has often been a painful reminder of how possible it is to feel alone in graduate programs. First, it is difficult to find a community of similar peers; I will be just the third black student to graduate from my research group since and one of two since 1999 (with just over 6% black doctoral candidates, STVP is actually better than the national average<sup>1</sup>). Perhaps as important, it has been even tougher to find mentors. Without these peers to support you or mentors to help guide you, it is easy to understand why universities struggle to recruit and retain individuals from underrepresented backgrounds.

In my experience, finding similar others further along my chosen career path has been crucial to facilitating my success. My mentors have provided me with access to opportunities I would otherwise have been missed entirely. These include formal ones, like fellowships and social organizations at the graduate level, and informal ones, like access to a network of people from similar backgrounds. Given my direct experiences, I am uniquely positioned to help enhance diversity in the university setting and help the next generation of scholars from underrepresented backgrounds succeed.

**What experience do I have?**

As a huge believer in the importance of mentorship, I have been actively involved in mentoring the next generation of scholars at the undergraduate and graduate levels. As an alum, I have continued to stay involved with my alma mater as a mentor to current students and other alumni, helping to mentor ten people from MIT in the past two years. I plan to work with MIT's Community Catalyst Leadership Program this upcoming year, which pairs alums with sophomores at MIT for two years of one-on-one mentoring. As a result of my mentoring efforts, I have also been invited to participate in several different alumni panel discussions to provide guidance and advice to current undergraduate students at MIT about future career options, including higher education. In addition to these formal roles, I have informally helped recruit and mentor incoming doctoral students in my program, including helping my group recruit its third black PhD student.

**How is diversity connected to research?**

Beyond mentoring, I also have incorporated diversity into my research. My first dissertation paper investigates the relationship between functional diversity and new venture performance. I aim to build on this research by investigating aspects of demographic diversity such as ethnicity and gender. For example, my advisor has administered several alumni surveys focused on entrepreneurship for use in research. I am very interested in administering my own survey and plan to investigate diversity's broad role in entrepreneurship. In particular, I envision investigating the mechanisms through which demographic diversity is related to entrepreneurial performance. One hypothesis is that low levels of demographic diversity may be negatively related to performance as it could trigger fault lines and lead to people feeling isolated. However, with additional demographic diversity, these negative aspects of diversity may be overcome, allowing organizations to benefit from diversity's positive effects such as increased innovation and improved analysis capabilities.

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<sup>1</sup> According to the [NSE](#), the national average of black doctoral students is approximately 5%.