

Service Statement

Nihal V. Nayak

I deeply believe in fostering a positive and inclusive culture in which people can pursue science. I want people to feel welcome, learn from one another, and receive the support they need to do meaningful work. Over the years, I have pursued these goals through community building, mentoring, and collaboration. I have also worked to make research more accessible by open sourcing my research artifacts and contributing to other open source projects. Below, I have briefly described these efforts.

Community Building

I view community building as an important part of departmental service. Strong academic communities require active effort. At Brown, I coordinated the Computer Science department's Ph.D. Mentorship Program from 2022 to 2025. The program paired incoming Ph.D. students with senior students outside their immediate research groups. For example, a Ph.D. student working on human-computer interaction would be paired with a student from cryptography. These connections helped students meet peers in other research areas and navigate graduate school. **The department provided \$8,000 to support the program and its activities for 89 students across three years.** We used these funds for coffee chats, lunches, and team building activities such as archery and escape rooms. I also organized a faculty panel where professors from different research areas discussed their Ph.D. experiences and challenges. We collected student feedback each semester and used it to improve the program. We also worked with Brown's LGBTQ+ community to help students find relevant support and resources. As a faculty member, I will support student-led initiatives that connect people across research groups and build welcoming departments.

Mentoring and Collaboration

I have made mentoring and collaborative research a key part of my academic service. Across my work, I have supported students at different career stages, including students from historically underrepresented groups and diverse cultural and national backgrounds. I have worked with them to shape project directions, run experiments to support their progress, and write and edit papers. Several of the projects I supported were led by Ph.D. students from historically underrepresented groups in the machine learning community and academia. **Their work resulted in their first first-author papers at top machine learning conferences.** I have also closely mentored 10 undergraduate and master's students. After graduating, several have gone on to attend top graduate schools or join well-known AI organizations. As a faculty member, I will continue to mentor the students I supervise and support researchers from a wide range of backgrounds.

Improving Accessibility Through Open Source

I strongly believe in fostering an open source culture that makes research more accessible and useful to the broader community. At Brown, I ensured that our papers where I was the lead author were accompanied by publicly available, easily readable code along with any new datasets and new models. I also released these artifacts under open licenses, including Apache License 2.0 and BSD licenses, so that researchers and practitioners could reproduce, extend, and build on our work. These **GitHub repos have received over a thousand stars**. In addition to releasing my own research artifacts, I have contributed to open-source projects such as PromptSource¹ and TextGrad.² At Harvard, I have continued these practices, working with collaborators to release well-documented code and research artifacts through GitHub and Hugging Face. In a short period, **the models we released on Hugging Face have been downloaded more than 175,000 times**. As a faculty member, I will continue to promote open research, build reusable software, and foster community engagement by making research tools and technology more accessible.

¹<https://github.com/bigscience-workshop/promptsources>

²<https://github.com/zou-group/textgrad>