

Dear Members of the Computer Science Department:

I would like to seek the position of the chair of the Computer Science Department. I am asking for the support of every members of the Department. All of us have invested tremendous amount of time and energy in this Department. I believe that we all want to see a strong and united Computer Science Department, and a better and more rewarding work environment.

In the past 14 years, under the leadership of Mirek, we have set up a solid foundation for the Department to advance into one of the top research departments in computer science nationally. It is critical that the next chair, with the support of upper-level university administration and all members of the Department, can unite the faculty and staff members and lead the Department to reach this national recognition.

My vision and business plan for the Department is based upon the following four parts:

Build a strong and productive Ph.D. program:

- 1.) Increase the Ph.D. graduation rate. Over the past 4 years, we have had a large number of graduate students in our Department, about 80 Ph.D. students and 80 M.S. students. Our production of Ph.D. students is also increasing steadily. However, we still have great potential to build a top Ph.D. program. To be a top 20 public CS department, we should graduate an average of 8 Ph.D. students each year, based on our current faculty size.
- 2.) Reform the Ph.D. program. There are several strategies that can be implemented to increase the graduation rate of our Ph.D. students, both towards faculty and towards students. As a long-time member of the Department Graduate Committee and advisor of the largest Ph.D. student group in the Department, I have a clear plan to increase the graduation rate of Ph.D. students. Possible strategies include, but are not limited to, streamlining the Ph.D. breadth exams, recognizing top Ph.D. students in news letters, creating an annual Department award for a Ph.D. student with the highest publication record, providing additional travel funding for top Ph.D. students and their advisors to best conferences in their fields. We can be the #1 in the college in Ph.D. graduation rate.
- 3.) Improve the publication record of Ph.D. students. The Department should publicize students' publication activities in news letters and on web news pages, to make them feel proud of publishing and presenting papers at conferences, among their peers. The improvement in the graduation rate of Ph.D. students will also result in the improvement in publication record of faculty and Ph.D. students. These two factors (Ph.D. graduation rate and publication record) are probably the most important criteria in the National Research Council's assessment of Ph.D. programs. The publication record is also critical for student placement, and for building an academic reputation to attract top-level Ph.D. students. Through hard-work of the faculty and graduate students, we are already the #1 in student publication record in the college, we should strive to be the #1 campus-wide.
- 4.) Recruit top-level and diversified Ph.D. students. In coordinating with the Director of Graduate Studies, the Department should make every effort to recruit top-level graduate students from diverse backgrounds, provide every possible scholarship opportunity, increase the visibility of our Ph.D. students at national conferences, and help them locate productive placement opportunities. For example, with funding from faculty course buy-out, salary savings from sabbatical leaves, Wethington awards, etc., we may be able to create a few fellowships at the Department level to attract top-level Ph.D. students.

Recruit undergraduate students:

- 5.) Aggressively recruit undergraduate students to our programs. The Department should set up a committee to especially focus its effort on recruiting undergraduate students from high schools. Every possible option will be kept open. These include, but are not limited to, appointing a special liaison person, making information materials sent to high schools, visiting high schools by faculty members, inviting potential students and high school teachers to visit the Department, and elevating computer science interests on E-Days.
- 6.) Encourage undergraduate students to participate in faculty research projects, with support from relevant NSF programs. The Department should also have a certain amount of travel funding to send a few undergraduate students to regional and national conferences every year. I have worked with six undergraduate research assistants in my labs, and have very good experience in getting undergraduate students to work with Ph.D. students.
- 7.) Overhaul the department web page to provide timely information about the activities of the Department. We should use the web page as a live window to showcase the Department. The minimum change will be adding a running news page to the current main page, and let everyone know what is going on inside the Department and around us.
- 8.) Develop more service courses for campus-wide undergraduate students, and develop a new undergraduate program in information science, possibly with the business school.
- 9.) Enhance alumni relationships. This includes fundraising for possible undergraduate scholarships, collecting alumni comments on our graduate and undergraduate programs, and greater publicity of our undergraduate program and the success stories of our alumni.
- 10.) Improve the quality of teaching assistants with greater mentoring efforts, by collecting opinions and comments from undergraduate students and feeding them back to the TAs, and by creating an annual Department award for an outstanding teaching assistant.

Enhance achievement and recognition of faculty members:

- 11.) Explore every opportunity to seek upper level administration's support and external funding for additional office space to bring the whole Department physically together. Before we achieve that goal, we should continue to have faculty retreats once or twice a year to maintain our good collegiality.
- 12.) Encourage faculty members to seek external funding to support their research activities, provide reasonable support, such as matching funds, RA tuition scholarships, to grant applications if required by the funding agencies. Small amount of matching funds may come from the department's incentive account. I will actively seek support from higher level administration for large amount of matching funds.
- 13.) Encourage, facilitate, and organize group research efforts, involving faculty both inside and outside the Department, for large grant proposals. We should strengthen and better publicize the research activities of the Visualization Center and the Advanced Network Laboratory, with greater efforts to recruit top-level faculty and research students.
- 14.) Encourage research collaborations with national laboratories, provide travel support for faculty members to visit national laboratories. The Department, through individual faculty, should invite researchers from national laboratories to visit the Department and to present their research agendas.
- 15.) Aggressively recognize faculty member's achievements by nominating them for all possible awards, and seek better compensation for their great work. I have seen Mirek does this patiently for the faculty members. I have also done this for my graduate students, who received two Dissertation Year Fellowships, one Presidential Graduate Fellowship and several CS Department scholarships. I promise to do the same for all members (faculty, staff, and students) of the Department if I were the chair of the Department.

- 16.) Recruit top-level and diversified faculty. Working with the university administration, the Department should make every effort to recruit top-level faculty members, and members from under-represented groups. I will pay special attention to identify and recruit nationally prominent researchers, possibly with endowed-chairs or professorships.
- 17.) Explore all possible means to create endowments for scholarships, fellowships, research chairs, and professorships, and establish better connections and communications with industry by creating an industrial advisory board for the Department.
- 18.) Encourage faculty to buy out courses, nominate them for the Wethington awards, and facilitate faculty one-year sabbatical leaves to generate salary savings for the Department's general-purpose funding.
- 19.) Provide adequate support and start-up funding, and solid mentoring for untenured new faculty members, and encourage them to achieve their best and to the limit of their ability before their cases are considered for tenure. At the time of their tenure promotion, we should judge the person's ability and achievement, not his/her potential.

Help staff members:

- 20.) Create a comfortable work environment for the Department staff members. I will vigorously seek better salary, benefits, and recognition for their work. In addition, I will create an annual Department award for an outstanding staff member. A more satisfied staff will in turn create a more productive environment for the faculty and students.

Mirek has excellent ways to deal with the Departmental internal and external matters and these ways of business management have been appreciated by the faculty members and staff and should be preserved. If I were selected as the chair, I would first seek advice from Mirek on many Department business matters, and make sure that there is no transition and policy continuity problem in the Department management. I promise to make myself available as much as possible, respect everyone's opinions and rights, and lead the Department in a transparent and democratic way. Nothing will be too small to deserve my attention.

I believe that a leadership chair must himself/herself have strong records in every aspect in which he/she would like others to achieve, in order to lead other faculty members and the Department to a higher level of achievement. Our next chair should be a leader, a person with a clear vision and open mind, not just a care-taker of the Department.

I have been a faculty member of the CS Department for almost 9 years. I have set up an undisputable record of success in research, teaching, and services. I understand the Department's strength and know what needs to be done to build a better and stronger Department. I firmly believe that I can unite the department faculty and staff, and lead this Department to the next level of national recognition, based upon the solid foundation already created by the Department faculty and staff. With several years of effort, I have demonstrated that I can build the largest and strongest Ph.D. student group in the Department. Work together, I am confident and determined that we can build a strong Department at the national level.

Thank you for your support.

Jun Zhang, Professor of Computer Science