Ritvik Teegavarapu

Diversity Statement

rteegava@brown.edu
ritvik-teegavarapu.com
BROWN

As a first-year undergraduate student, I joined our Academics and Research Committee and have spent the last three years strengthening student–faculty relationships through lunches, forums, and intramural activities. I also served on working groups that challenged coverage-over-comprehension norms, advocating policies that prioritize mastery and flexible pacing. As a teaching assistant in many applied mathematics courses, I have seen how clear structure and inclusive practices can transform confidence in a field as intimidating as mathematics. In graduate school, I will would like to build on this work: partnering with faculty and peers to reduce barriers to participation, designing courses that center understanding over speed, and demonstrating that learning is equitable and personal, not a race against others' trajectories.

A recurring barrier in STEM courses is "coverage over comprehension," where in instructors move past fundamentals before many students can securely master them. This pace disproportionately discourages students with uneven preparation, who could succeed with more scaffolding and time. As a TA, I countered this by running judgment-free recitations focused on essentials. For example, in an introduction to computational science class, I hosted guided MATLAB syntax sessions with small prompts and illustrative examples and by using a simple "neighbor check" so students compared outputs before asking questions. These practices slowed the room to a learnable tempo, normalized help-seeking even in my regular office hours, and improved code clarity and debugging. Several students who began the term uncertain finished with some of the strongest grades in the class. I hope to integrate these same techniques in graduate school by hosting review sessions in undergrad-facing classes to make sure everyone has a solid foundation in the pre-requisites.

One initiative that consistently helped our students, especially those from less traditional or less connected backgrounds, was organizing structured student–faculty connection events. Many students are hesitant to cold-email professors when seeking research, so we created low-stakes, opt-in lunches where students briefly noted their interests in advance and were matched with faculty accordingly. We provided funded the meals and ensured accessibility (dietary options, time-slot flexibility). The format broke the ice, gave faculty a clearer sense of undergraduate talent beyond grades, and opened doors to labs students might not have considered. After each lunch, we followed up with "next steps" emails (office hours, lab open houses, application timelines) and short workshops on crafting research outreach. Over multiple terms, I saw students who once felt intimidated initiate sustained mentorships and secure RA roles; faculty also reported that they enjoyed these conversations and felt more prepared to take on more undergraduates. I plan to bring this model to the department in order to engage students.