HARVARD
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School of Engineering
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Dear CRCS Community,

I am delighted to write to you as CRCS' new Faculty Director. I entered this position in August with the simultaneous goals of forging new connections between CRCS and the wider Harvard community, and developing a more specific research focus on the application domains of public health, conservation, and the challenges of fairness and equity embedded therein.

At CRCS, we believe strongly in the importance of using advancements in computational methodology to improve social welfare. My research experience has taught me several lessons about conducting computational work for social impact. The first is the importance of a data-to-deployment perspective — of selecting projects that are not only technically interesting, but that lead directly to real-world deployment in the near future. We need to be able to take every step, from gathering data to prototype deployment. The second is to go out into the field, as the best way to understand intractable problems is to consult users directly and gather knowledge that would not come to light in a laboratory setting. The third is how crucial it is to build interdisciplinary partnerships. If an organization like CRCS is to have a real-world positive impact, it is necessary to leverage expert perspectives from a range of domains. The fourth is that we can harness technological advances to address complex societal problems without sacrificing computational contributions to our fields. In fact, addressing these challenges unleashes novel technical problems for computer science research.

In the spirit of advancing and fostering computational research for social impact, we have launched several initiatives that we hope will become annual traditions here at CRCS. The first is a workshop on AI and Society, bringing together junior researchers — the rising stars in the field — and featuring talks and panel discussions by leaders engaged in the global deployment of interdisciplinary AI research. The second is a CRCS summer fellowship program for undergraduate and PhD students, aligned with the Center's new focus, to be convened this summer at our new home in Allston. The third is a series of workshops on conservation and public health. We kicked off the year with a workshop on SMART AI/PAWS integration, and partnered with HSPH and the India Research Center for a January workshop in Mumbai on the subject of tuberculosis. These new initiatives will join our postdoctoral fellowship program and our lunch seminar series as foundational pillars of CRCS.

This Fall, CRCS hosted professional development panels for postdocs and graduate students on the subjects of interviewing and putting together job applications, and continued our weekly lunch seminar series. The roster of speakers included David Kempe of USC, Eugene Vorobeychik of Washington University in St. Louis, and CRCS' own Hima Lakkaraju. This Spring we will host speakers in academia and industry, including those from Microsoft, Stanford, Yale, Warsaw Institute of Technology, and Harvard.

It has been an honor to take on the role of CRCS Faculty Director. I am energized by the commitment and passion of the CRCS community, and I am excited to expand and fortify our interdisciplinary partnerships at Harvard and beyond. I look forward to seeing you all at CRCS events in the year ahead!

Sincerely,

Milind Tambe

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