

San Francisco State University
Department of Computer Science
Graduate Seminar Series

Title: Community-Engaged Technology for Social Good

Presenter: Aakash Gautam

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Abstract:

In technology design, the enduring questions to ask are "What is the right thing to do?" and "How do we know we have done it?" Designing technologies for and with communities towards meaningful social change is a complex process. It requires reflective examination of those two questions to arrive at justifiable approaches. In this presentation, I will talk about two projects that I did during my graduate program. The first project sought to create conditions for empowered digital literacy in middle schools by integrating computational thinking into existing science classrooms. The second project involved designing socio-technical approaches to support people who have survived sex-trafficking in achieving what they call "dignified reintegration." In the first part of the talk, I will discuss the two projects, highlighting some of the challenges and our solutions. In the second part, I will draw out three elements that I believe are critical in designing community-based technologies for social change: (1) focusing on the existing strengths, (2) emphasizing incremental steps in a long-term engagement, and (3) building reciprocity into the process. I will conclude by charting out paths for future research.

Bio:

Aakash Gautam is a Ph.D. candidate in Computer Science at Virginia Tech. He is interested in designing socio-technical approaches in supporting dignity, well-being, and collective capacity of marginalized communities. His research lies at the intersection of human-computer interaction (HCI), learning sciences, and community development. Aakash has authored publications in premier academic venues across HCI and learning sciences (e.g., CHI, CSCW, PDC, SIGCSE, and JOST journal). You can find out more about him at <https://aakash.xyz/>.