

## Leadership in Action Mid-Semester Reflection Paper

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Throughout this semester, I have been able to learn more about leadership through the readings and discussion in this class, but most importantly through the leadership examples all through campus. I have been lucky enough to have been part of different groups, clubs and organizations which have allowed me to learn more about leadership, however for the purpose of this essay I attended a meeting for a group I was not a part of.

On February 22, I attended an ACM meeting. It was led by Dr. Sarah Van Wart, who is part of the computer science department here at the school. The meeting took place on the second floor of Rhoades Robinson at 5:30pm and there were snacks available. There were about seven other students, and two other faculty members present. I chose to attend this meeting because not only did it fit in my schedule (as I do find myself being very busy this semester), but it also looked interesting. I am aware of the qualifications that Dr. Van Wart has and although I have not known her for long, she does an excellent job of teaching, she is currently my CSCI 185 teacher, and she does a great job of explaining concepts. This intrigued me to attend the meeting, as computer science is a subject that I am unfamiliar with, and I was curious as to how racial and gender biases were shown in software programs.

The title of the talk was "Computing's Consequences: Examining Harms and Mitigating Societal Impact", the talk was mostly led by Dr. Van Wart, as she talked about the ethical dilemmas that arise in computer science. She began her talk by introducing herself, her education, and projects that she had been part of in the past and projects that she is currently part of; She communicated this through PowerPoint slides. Once the presentation and discussion started, Dr. Van Wart talked about the racial biases that can happen in computer science systems, such as how certain photo and video software do not detect darker skin colors and how many computer scientists have to deal with that. She brought up the example of Joy Buolamwini, who had to take leadership role when it came to uncovering and changing racial and gender biases within AI (artificial intelligence) services from companies such as Microsoft and IBM.

Throughout the talk, Dr. Van Wart encouraged others to make comments and ask questions,

she also made sure to take notes of the questions she was unsure about, or that could take a longer time to answer. This tied back to one of the discussions we had during class, about how it is important to take into account the constructive criticism from other members of the group and find use in it. At one point someone pointed out that one of the bullet points on one slide was incorrect and instead of getting mad or arguing about it, Dr. Van Wart took that into consideration and made the change to the slide. Dr. Van Wart also pointed and used examples of other leaders in computer science; as I mentioned before, during the discussion we talked about Joy Buolamwini who made and is still making changes in the way that face recognition and artificial intelligence software is used. This made me remember that during class we talked about how it is important to look at how other leaders act, and notice what works to then apply it ourselves. In my opinion, Dr. Van Wart made a fine example of what leadership looks like. In chapter three we talked about how the way in which we refer to people and the titles we give them are indicators of inclusive environments. During this meeting, Dr. Van Wart made sure to include everyone in the discussion and addressed people by their names instead of using words such as “student” this made the discussion feel more incisive and welcoming. She also made sure that everyone felt welcomed to ask questions and never put anyone down for asking what could be considered a “dumb” or “basic” question. The topic of the meeting itself was also a form of leadership as it focused on cultural competence.

As mentioned before, the talk focused on how biases negatively affect non-white individuals, and Dr. Van Wart was able to notice that and voice it to a wider audience who would have otherwise not known about these issues. Although I cannot speak for other people, as a Hispanic person I appreciate it when white people also notice problems that mostly affect people of color and decide to take action. I think that being a leader also means noticing how members of society who are different from oneself are negatively affected and to take change of those issues.

Aside from Dr. Van Wart, the other members of ACM made me feel welcomed. Some of them reached out to me after the meeting to introduce themselves and ask me about my name and major, they also made sure to invite me to future meetings, which is something that I am considering doing, even when I am not a computer science student myself. The students that

were part of this meeting also showed leadership skills; not only did they make me feel welcomed, and took my opinions into account, but they also participated in the meeting by asking questions, making comments and providing the professors who were present with advice on how to make the following meetings better. Some of the comments they made were about how by changing the time in which the meetings take place would allow for more students to attend, they proposed moving the time from 5:30pm to either 6:00pm or 6:30pm. They also proposed on different methods of advertising for future meetings, since they noticed that the only students that showed up (aside from me) were already part of the club. This tied into the reading we did on class, as we mentioned that it is important to notice when certain voices are not missing in the conversation and to come up with ways to bring people from different perspectives into the conversation. One of the ways in which they proposed to do this was by putting up posters around school, and by making sure they advertised meetings a week earlier, to allow people to put the meeting on their calendars. Overall, I would consider this meeting to have been a positive experience, as someone who has not had prior experience with computer science, the meeting felt incredibly welcoming and inviting, as everyone was willing to ask and answer questions.

One of the things that stood up to me from this meeting was that not only did the Dr. Van Wart, and the other faculty members who were present show exemplary leadership skills by interacting with students and facilitating the conversations that were taking place, but the students who were present also went on to participate and grow in their own leadership skills. Through this meeting, I was able to better understand how leadership works in other departments and even in other areas of study. I have also learned about different methods of leadership, that I now plan on implementing in the future. I think that planning meetings and making posters would be a great way to get more people who would otherwise not be interested involved in my own future plans within the groups that I am currently part of in school, and the ones that I am thinking about joining in the future. I think that leadership can take on many forms, and being able to analyze them through different contexts and places allows for personal growth and for my own leadership skills to be developed.