

Diversity Statement of Md. Abed Rahman

As a kid who grew up in Dhaka, the word diversity had a different context in my mind than it is generally thought of. My primary understanding of diversity was how people are different from each other in their behavior and mannerisms. The neighborhood I grew up in was densely populated, this gave me a unique opportunity to see people of different walks of life. From my family, I learned to recognize how everyone is distinct but astonishingly all the same deep down. My kindergarten school was secular in nature and I had some classmates who belonged to minority tribal and religious groups. My teachers from my kindergarten days taught me the necessity of respecting everyone regardless of their religious or racial backgrounds. I believe my family members and my teachers enabled me to recognize diversity in human beings and appreciate the beauty in diversity.

The values I grew up with have been my constant companion throughout. My High School was very adherent to religious practices, but the idea of recognizing diversity and respecting individuality prevailed just like my kindergarten days. Then I received my higher secondary education from a Catholic institution, which added to my lifelong learning of tolerance and coexistence. It was in my undergraduate university where I experienced racial diversity to a greater extent firsthand.

My university is an international university, the first of its kind in Bangladesh. Students from all over the globe come here to learn. Though our priority was to become engineers, we learned a great deal about a multicultural environment and how diversity strengthens an institution. I grew up with students who spoke French, Arabic, Bangla, Urdu and many different languages. In the cultural nights that were arranged every year, we enjoyed learning about each others cultures. We shared our visions of the future as we believed, we will make it together. We enjoyed diversity in music and also in food. As it was a residential university, we would cook together and appreciate delicacies from around the globe. I watched, I listened, and I learned to be accepting of their beliefs. These varieties of experiences led to me to learn how to respect the cultures and values of others.

Since that time, I have sought situations that involve people of different characteristics. This is marked by my joining in Samsung R&D Institute Bangladesh. Telling the story of how Samsung has taught me about professionalism and industry trends will be accurate, but I would be deliberately avoiding the other side of the story. Samsung is a prime example of a diverse workforce working in perfect harmony. It can easily be regarded as one of the few companies that cherish the diversity of their workforce. During my short time there, I had to constantly communicate with officials from various countries, mostly from Korea. They would not only bring their technical knowledge, but also their diverse culture with them. Learning which is polite and which is not polite in different cultures was a part of office etiquette. When I quit the Job of Samsung, I wasn't particularly sad as I was going back to my own university where I was going to teach students from diverse backgrounds.

I support diversity in the classroom by incorporating collaborative learning and teamwork as part of the courses I conduct. One collaborative learning technique I incorporate in lecture is “turn to a partner”, where students work in pairs to discuss and solve a problem. I will request students to find different partners so they work with as many different people as possible during the course. This particular practice results in better communication and interactive learning of the highest degree. Self-confidence of students, especially foreign students, improves when they are able to exchange ideas with their peers and learn how to work through challenges as a team. Teaching a variety of students in a collaborative environment go beyond typical class teaching of delivering lectures, rather it becomes an opportunity of sharing ideas, learning and growing up to be better individuals and professionals.

I believe the research I am interested in has diversity written all over it. I am mostly interested with Human Computer Interaction, Artificial Intelligence and mostly a combination of the aforementioned. Making a system in a way everyone can use it is part of what I opt to make. Again, It has been seen that changing an interface for a specific set of users ends up in modifying the system for all users. This might seem counterintuitive, but is closely related.

Overall, my understanding of diversity is twofold. First, it is important to watch, listen, and learn: these three actions ultimately lead to respect. Listening is especially important because diversity is not always apparent at first glance: it is much deeper than that. Second, it is important to do what you can to support everyone, regardless their racial or ethnic background.