

DIVERSITY STATEMENT

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I strongly believe that social and scientific progress is made through the unconventional contributions of people who can see and think differently. This attribute may be something people are born with, but it can also be cultivated within a favorable environment that promotes diversity. Diversity is even more important in advancing scientific research. While one can obtain mastery in certain research areas with proper guidance and diligence, the core competence for innovation such as the ability to define new problems and propose creative solutions is not something that can only be gained with effort. It is rather a byproduct of interaction within a diverse environment.

I am not afraid of taking on new challenges and putting myself in previously unexplored settings. About 12 years ago, when I decided to end my career at IBM Korea and come to the U.S. for graduate study, many people were concerned about my choice. After spending two years in military service and five years in industry, I was a mainstream Korean male with a well-established career. I was newly married, and we were expecting a new baby, but I was excited about my choice and new challenges ahead in a diverse environment with people from many backgrounds. My choice to go to Columbia made me a more positive person with enthusiasm for new challenges. I realized that learning and growth go beyond a certain age of life. Instead of living in a comfortable environment where many people are encouraged to conform, I wanted to thrive in a diverse environment where new ideas could be explored and pursued.

To the core, I define myself as a person who is not afraid to be in unconventional positions and not intimidated by outspoken advocates of minority opinions. This characteristic is evident in my choice of interns as well. Out of four interns that I worked with in NEC Labs America (NECLA), two were female and two were from other cultures. One intern was from Thailand and another intern was from Palestine. During the internship, I not only enjoyed working and developing personal relationships, but I also enjoyed the unique experiences and backgrounds that they brought to the lab. I believe that collaboration with colleagues from diverse backgrounds can stimulate and advance my and my teams research and personal growth. I look forward to the collaboration that I am expecting to encounter at from your institution, with students and faculty members from diverse backgrounds. I would also like to add new diversity within the department and across campus.

Appreciating diversity goes beyond my professional work. For more than 10 years, I have volunteered as a program coordinator for a non-profit organization (<http://www.njmilal.org>) that supports people with special needs, and this is the identify that I am proud to be known for. I believe that it is the ability to empathize with others that eventually promotes diversity for everyone. If I can be part of the your institution's community, I will actively seek and participate in such programs.