

There is no better teacher than asking for advice, gaining experience, and putting ourselves in others' shoes on the subjects that society still fails to get a passing grade. We were raised in an environment that subtle messages engraved our unconscious minds, because of that awareness of one's own biases are crucial for promoting diversity. I have been committed to promoting diversity, fairness, and inclusion in all the personal and professional spaces. I describe below my current and proposed efforts in advancing diversity in my research group, classroom, and academic community.

While an undergraduate at ITU, Turkey's well-known engineering school, our department have a significant gender imbalance. Our efforts in student branches improved inclusion of our female classmates significantly. As a member of OTOKON student branch, I was teaching C programming and data structures for two years. We created a project group to build IT system for the robotics olympics that we were hosting at ITU. As a team of voluntary students, we have much better gender balance than our department and most of this team are now working as software engineers in the industry. One of our female colleague right now leading NodeGirls Australia chapter and mentoring future generation of female engineers. It was clear that voluntary groups activities composed of like-minded individuals are the best way to promote diversity.

Since I move to the US for my graduate school, I noticed diversity issues for minorities and their problem more clearly. Although Turkey has different cultural motifs, there are still divided by beliefs, race, and gender. One can expect the gender gap will be the largest in a 3rd world country, however, I see that the gender gap is more systematic and concerning in the US. That's why it is really important to address these issues early for STEM fields. Having a wife doing an academic career in a STEM field, I am aware of her daily struggles. To improve and fix those problems, I will build a research group having better gender balance and think more broadly on inclusivity in group meetings, outside activities, and workplace.

I am a strong believer of inclusion and know that without an honest attempt by everyone change will be limited. During my internships, I learned about courses designed to overcome unconscious biases and followed similar materials prepared by different companies. I think lectures in this nature will greatly improve awareness for the deepest unconscious biases and bring awareness to the issues caused by them. We should be able to think more broadly on diversity because it lies along various dimensions including personal traits. Introverts and extroverts enjoy different activities and to achieve a healthy group culture I will pay attention needs of all group members. The simplest and the most sincere attempt one can do is talking with people, asking about their culture, leisure time activities, and family values. Communication is very important especially when we are in contact with individuals having English as their second language or coming from different disciplines.

I would like to close this statement with a great quote from Martin Luther King, Jr.: *"I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream today."*

Sincerely,
Onur Varol

