

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 in 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 my 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 Istanbul Technical University (ITU), the best engineering school in Turkey, our department had a significant gender imbalance. Our efforts in student branches improved inclusion of our female classmates significantly. As a member of the OTOKON student branch, I taught C programming and data structures for two years. We created a project group to build an IT system for the Robotics Olympics, which we were hosting at ITU. As a team of voluntary students, we had a much better gender balance than our department. The majority of my teammates are now working as software engineers in the industry. One of our female colleague is leading the NodeGirls Australia chapter and mentoring future generation of female engineers. It was clear that voluntary group activities composed of like-minded individuals are the best way to promote diversity.

Since I moved to the US for my graduate school, I noticed diversity issues for minorities and their problem more clearly. Although Turkey has different cultural motifs, society 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 significant in the US. That is why it is vital to address these issues early for STEM fields. Having a wife challenging herself every day to pursue 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 firm believer of inclusion and know that without an honest attempt by everyone the change will be limited. During my internships, I learned about courses designed to overcome unconscious biases and followed similar materials prepared by different companies in my own time. I think lectures in this nature will significantly improve awareness of the most profound 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 essential especially when we are in contact with individuals having English as their second language or coming from different disciplines.

I want 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