

Diversity statement

Krzysztof Świącicki

I believe that it is of the utmost importance for academia to be open to members of historically underrepresented and economically disadvantaged groups. It follows not only from the simple argument of fairness but has also a very practical aspect to it. As a scientific community, and as humankind, we seriously hinder our pursuit of knowledge and a better future if we exclude from amidst plenty of talented individuals simply based on their gender & gender identity, sexual orientation, age, race, ethnicity, language, disabilities, economic or religious background. Additionally, as institutions devoted to teaching, we have a special responsibility to support pioneers among underrepresented groups since they can become important role models for future generations. Below I explain some ways in which I have tried supporting this cause, but I know that I can do better and I look forward to learning and implementing into both my professional and personal life those new ways.

As an organizer of working seminars at both Texas A&M University and the University of Warsaw, I had the privilege to host speakers from different backgrounds and enjoyed the ample opportunities that mathematics gave us to interact with each other. As an organizer, I have always made sure to make the space was open and welcoming to all and to especially to members with any sort of disability. I also have experience teaching students with a spectrum of physical and mental disorders. I always make sure to talk with them privately and to accommodate any special needs they might have - both those that were required by the University disability center and those that were asked as a favor by the affected student. For example, I would make sure that students with dyslexia who had trouble concentrating on the exam when surrounded by peers would be allowed to take them in private.

Many of the classes I taught had students from different racial and cultural backgrounds. I have learned that I need to take that under consideration to avoid part of the students dominating the conversation in the classroom. In this kind of situation, I would ask students to raise their hands before speaking and I would look for those students who typically remain silent. I would also encourage those students in private to speak up and ensure them that their voice matters. As English is not my first language I understand very well that comprehending some of the oral communication can be challenging at times even for students who are fluent. Because of that I frequently try to rephrase my points when teaching so that lack of particular vocabulary will not be an obstacle to learning. Based on the feedback that some of my international students provided me outside of the class, I have learned that they tend to follow the instruction better if I write down more of what I say. Thus I make a constant effort to write down at least bullet points of arguments that I make vocally. Some of the students who struggle with taking notes for a variety of reasons, use technology to help them with that. For example, some of them like taking pictures of what I write on boards and others to record the lecture. I am a big advocate of using technology in the classroom so I always encourage them to pursue those means as long as it is not distracting to them or their peers. Finally, I am aware that there might be some personal biases that I have and am not aware of, so whenever it is possible I chose to grade blindly.

Outreach has a particularly important place in my heart. I am the first member of my family to receive higher education and all the mathematical competitions and science fairs I have attended were a big reason for me to pursue that goal. Hence I try to repay my debt by volunteering as often as possible. During my time at Texas A&M University, I have helped with the science career fair, high school math contest, and PI day celebrations among others. Those events are held regularly and I think they are an important way to increase inclusion

as they attract a diverse group of students both close to the university and from further away from where students are economically less well-off. So far my activities were mostly limited to grading, helping to set up, and registering students. While all those activities are crucial for any event to be smooth, I look forward to being able to play a bigger role in similar events as my career develops. In particular, I would be very interested in giving a presentation to hopefully help further interest some students in science and mathematics. In my opinion, reaching out to a younger audience is the most important thing we can do as a mathematical community to achieve true diversity - too many talented people have already decided that math is not for them long before they enter University. When I was a Master's student I was part of the physics club at University of Warsaw and we did a series of science shows at different local fairs, culminating with the Science Picnic, which is the largest outdoor science-popularization event in Europe. By attracting a diverse cast of volunteers and allowing people to interact with science outside of the usual university/school setting these events to serve an important role in fighting the preexisting in our cultural image of a scientist as an older male who works in a lab.

In my scientific and personal life, I have collaborated with and befriended people from a variety of backgrounds. I am very grateful to the academic world that allowed me to form these connections. Personally, I find that relationships with people who had different histories and views tend to be the most interesting - as long as we approach each other with openness and kindness there is plenty we can learn from one another. As I continue my scientific career I hope to do my part in ensuring that the mathematical community lives up to those ideals.