Science Societies

Diversity and inclusion

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Diversity and inclusion go hand in hand, and yet they are not the same. Diversity refers to differences within a group of people in terms of cultural backgrounds, ethnicities, gender, age, education, working style and experience, and way of thinking. Inclusion is the act of making a person part and entitled to all rights and conditions of a social unit. Achieving inclusion in a workplace is more complicated because it requires change in perceptions and negative attitudes in both majority and minority groups.

Why does this matter? Why is diversity valuable? And why should we be more inclusive in science and other disciplines? Below I share my perspective on the importance of diversity and some ideas on how to be more inclusive.

Importance of Diversity

- **Diversity is morally correct**: Advocating for diversity and inclusion is the right thing to do. This is highlighted by the U.S. Civil Rights Act of 1964, the American with Disabilities Act of 1990, among others.
- **Diverse societal problems need diverse scientists**: Our society is currently facing a vast array of environmental, social, and economic problems. Because these problems are diverse, we need a diverse group of scientists to help provide solutions to diverse communities around the world.
- **Diversity leads to greater innovation and creative potential**: Diverse groups of scientists develop more innovative products and services to provide solutions to problems that affect diverse communities. It is not a surprise that diverse scientific teams tend to generate greater research output as well as more citations and thus have a greater competitive advantage (Powell, **2018**; Adams, **2013**).
- **Diversity fosters a culture of mutual respect**: The experience of working with diverse groups can train individuals to better interact with people of different cultures, create intercultural understanding, and change their perception about

them.

How Can We Be More Inclusive?

1. **Practice empathy**: This is especially important when working with diverse groups because people with empathy can place themselves in the position of others in order to understand the experiences/perspectives and feelings of people with different backgrounds, values, and beliefs.
2. **Be an ally**: While minorities can support each other, non-minorities have an innate advantage that they can use to empower minorities, influence change, and ensure equal access to opportunities.
3. **Be a mentor**: A mentor can have a huge impact in the professional career of people from diverse groups by giving them advice, guidance, and encouragement.
4. **Develop workshops, trainings, or coursework**: As we strive to create a more diverse scientific community, it would be beneficial to create trainings or coursework highlighting the importance of diversity and inclusion.
5. **Celebrate together**: The simple act of having a non-work-related gathering to celebrate special occasions and cultural festivities can promote inclusion, strengthen relationships, and reduce cultural biases.

As we move forward, we must continue to change perceptions and cultivate the diversity of backgrounds within graduate education and scientific teams to help us be better individuals and make more meaningful contributions to science and communities worldwide.

This article is part of a series written by members of the Women in Science Committee, for all Society members, and has been shortened for space here. For

the full-length version, visit: **www.agronomy.org/membership/women-in-science**, **www.crops.org/membership/women-in-science**, and **www.soils.org/membership/women-in-science**

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Back to issue

Back to home

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