Building an “I” for Inclusion in IS

TREO Talk Paper

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Despite decades of declining enrollments in IS and computing majors in general, particularly among women and other minorities, it seems that little is being done to understand the lived experiences of these potential students, much less how to resolve the problem (Kvasny, 2006). Some attempts to recruit women and minorities have the opposite effect, because they highlight differences rather than accepting them as part of the status quo. Some interventions fail because they start from the majority viewpoint; they expect women and minorities to become more like them and to “fit in” rather than admit the “boys’ club” might be broken or that technology might be about more than tinkering with a computer (Adam et al., 2006; Stout, Dasgupta, Hunsinger, & McManus, 2011). In the workplace, women downplay their technical abilities and their gender identity, fulfilling gender stereotypes to fit in with the boys, even when men and women do the same work (Faulkner, 2000). It is also well known that black men and women have to work twice as hard as whites in the same job to get ahead, in addition to cultural labor such as mentoring and sitting on diversity committees.

This idea paper is intended as a starting point in a larger study to begin addressing issues of inclusion in information systems curricula. We propose to gather data by interviewing undergraduate business students as to their lived experiences, in their own words, at school and at home, and how these experiences have shaped their choice of major. We will recruit current and former IS students from a mid-sized public university and an HBCU to see whether the universities impact their decision to study Information Systems. In particular, we will identify the extent to which students experience stereotype threat, microaggressions, and social support both at school and at home, how these have shaped their relationship with IT, and what could be done to improve their experience. This study will contribute to social inclusion research, reduce the diversity gap, and help IS faculty build more inclusive learning environments for all students.

The end goal of this research study is to better understand what IS faculty can do in their classrooms to make all students feel engaged and welcomed, whether their students are diverse or not. For example, in the IT workforce, women experience different barriers, most of which come from supervisors of all genders; therefore, “supervisor training should target all genders” (Annabi & Lebovitz, 2018). By extension, to increase students’ tolerance and understanding of diverse opinions, IS education should target all students, not just those affected. But in order to begin building such interventions, it is vital to better understand the issues involved.

References


