

Reading seminar on *An Inclusive Academy*

Notes from Week 3

Topics/Questions to Keep in Mind

- Facts or ideas you found Surprising, Interesting, or Troubling (SIT)
- Anything you didn't get to bring up last week.
- Have you ever been part of a research project with a diverse set of group members? How did you benefit from more diverse perspectives on the problem? What worked well and what didn't work well?
- In the reading there was a lot of information about how the NIH has addressed (or failed to address) issues of diversity in grants and medical studies. Math is largely funded by the NSF; what ways does the NSF address or fail to address these issues?
- In the last paragraph of page 51, the authors talk about problems that arise by not paying attention to subfields where women (or other groups) are more numerous. Do you know of any such areas of math? How can we encourage these subfields?
- On pages 53 and 54 the authors discuss how the effects of (diverse) role models can be debilitating as well as inspiring. What can we do to help ensure that role models inspire?
- On pages 56 and 57 the authors discuss how researchers at institutes in top 5% of citation rates (presumably MIT) tend to collaborate mostly with people at other 'top 5%' institutions. What are some ways we can make our collaborations more institutionally diverse?

Recap from Discussion

Key topics/points discussed

- How even though fairness might seem like enough of a reason to want diversity there are some other points to consider:
 - Not everyone values fairness.
 - Fairness might not be particularly applicable in all situations.
 - When making decisions we often prioritize other things over fairness.
 - Even though many people would say they believe in fairness, we still have many problems, so it seems that fairness alone is not enough.
 - There is value in internalizing other aspects of diversity; they're not in opposition to fairness.
- What makes (diverse) groups successful, and some concrete actions we can take in our classes and research groups to help facilitate groups that are successful, happy, and in which everyone feels valued and empowered.

Notes on what people shared before moving to Breakout Rooms

- Some expressed a bit of frustration with the chapter as a justification for diversity (in particular in relation to fairness).
 - Fairness should be enough of a reason; it seems more fundamental than the reasons for diversity presented.
 - Some found the data presented fairly unconvincing.
 - It is important to recognize that some people actually don't care about fairness, and need an argument for them
 - It is important to note that it is hard to measure actual benefits, and part of that might be because we don't actually have a precedent. We haven't been including diverse groups in academia for a very long time, so it is difficult to do long-term studies a long-term thing.
- Having more diverse groups working on a problem might lead to better exposition.
 - We spend a lot of time deciding which paper to read, and tend to read papers with better explanations.
 - Maybe this is related to why papers from more diverse are more highly cited.
- Some points related to last week's discussion:
 - Even though we can all sometimes say things that might seem a bit antagonistic to what the department is currently doing, we're all here to learn and understand what's happening. There are many challenges/difficulties in the present situation that we need to remember to be aware of.
 - During the first week many people said they wanted to learn/see what the book can give us to help make the department better. Last week we tended to circle around what people already knew. This is a great first step, but in order to actually learn we need to go beyond that and talk about what we don't know.
 - One thing to try: say something concrete that the reading inspires us to do.
- The data explaining the value of diversity was interesting. We talk about this in communication intensive classes. Susan Ruff has been using the data on the role of women in the 18.821 teamwork workshop for a long time.
 - Cited reason why teams with women did better: women tend to rank higher on higher social awareness. But this is a gender norm we have in society; we see this in how students act with female staff members.
 - This seemed to put some responsibility on only particular team members.
 - Once we have more diverse people, do they get pigeonholed into being the diversity representative?
- On successful groups:
 - It is important to make sure that the groups know from the beginning the competence of each person.
 - When each member has solid ideas of what others can contribute, groups function better.
 - Even though we might think we're good at judging this, people might not have the same feeling about themselves and we can also miss things.

- Why in a team/group in areas other than math, why do I feel confident that I can contribute? Why does it feel like in math the opposite is the case? What can we do to empower students to feel like they can contribute to groups?
- Most important math contributions are when people link fields that seem unrelated.
- Everyone needs to feel each individual contributes the same.
- Never really read about what groups are successful; interesting to read from a practical point of view.
- Psychological safety is very important. It is particularly relevant for us esp. if we're trying to ameliorate the situation at MIT by having more classes do group work. Just making groups is not going to solve our problems.
- It is important to note that everyone has something to contribute, even in the presence of experts. For example, many people in polymath projects can do at least one thing better than Terry Tao and contribute to the project.
- Other points people found interesting or wanted to discuss:
 - Many of us think that we're making a choice, but we're being pushed toward something from our surroundings.
 - More citations on patents/articles from diverse groups
 - How certain subfields may be more diverse.
 - Sarah G. has seen this in earth science: because more diverse faculty members were in certain areas, more diverse students would study in those areas.
 - How to encourage more diverse subfields.
 - Widespread elitism in the department and how this relates to funding.

Recap from Discussion in Breakout Room 1

Key topics/points discussed

- Why there are many other reasons to value diversity beyond fairness, and that these are not in opposition to fairness.
- What makes (diverse) groups successful, and specific things leaders can do to facilitate groups that are successful, happy, and in which everyone feels valued and empowered.

More detailed notes from the discussion

- Are we at an okay point with diversity so we can sacrifice unfairness?
 - Fairness is a justification for diversity, rather than opposed to diversity.
 - Some people don't think fairness is a good enough reason for diversity.
- What if studies don't reproduce and some people argue that we don't need diversity?
- Why is there even a debate about fairness? Various groups were actively suppressed from entering academia, etc. and we are still suffering from our unfair history.
- What is the value for people who are already convinced diversity is necessary?
- Many have a threshold where if the stakes are high enough, we'll prioritize some other metric over fairness.
- There is a lot of value in internalizing other aspects of diversity; they're not in opposition with fairness.
 - In any case, there seems to be a disconnect between most people believing in fairness and the lack of diversity that we see.
- In group meetings it is important for the leader to make sure everyone speaks before calling on someone who has already spoken. Often this doesn't happen because the group leader might want to continue hearing the ideas of someone who already spoke or is more assertive, but this makes it hard for others to share their ideas.
- A similar thing applies to inviting speakers to seminars: it is equitable to invite a diverse group, but people might only invite people who they already know well, or who they're most excited to hear from because they're already familiar with that person's work, etc.
- In a group where you have a leadership position you may have to designate people's different tasks. It is easy to fall into a trap where you think you "know" what people are good at doing.
 - We need to avoid doing this.
 - We should try to have people volunteer what they are good at.
 - This can help create a feeling of belonging or empower group members.
 - Can this work in a peer setting (where there might not be a clear "leader")?

Recap from Discussion in Breakout Room 2

Key topics/points discussed

- Understand that for some of us the situation is very difficult (even though the department tries hard).
- We need to make the department more inclusive for the current people (not in the abstract, but concretely).
- For marginalized people, questions of diversity, equity, and inclusion are part of the fabric of our lives. When things go wrong, it can ruin our lives. These are not just philosophical points as they might be for people who do not come from marginalized groups.

Notes from Discussion after Returning from Breakout Rooms

- Saying what you're good at can be uncomfortable/terrifying.
 - Even though people find it uncomfortable to do this, it can be very productive.
- Don't have to claim you're an expert, maybe you are more comfortable with analysis because you took two classes and did well rather than algebra if you didn't feel like you understood it as well.
- In a different subject with group work, students had to give people positive feedback at the beginning of every week.
 - Really helped to create a happier environment.
- How much time are we going to spend thinking of concrete steps after we're done with reading Part I on August 5?
 - Need to work around the situation we're in/with people we have.
 - We can continue to meet after August 5 to discuss more concrete steps.

Concrete actions that we can start taking

- For classes with groups:
 - Have students provide weekly positive feedback to their group members.
 - Make sure that group leaders get to know group members' strengths and what they feel comfortable with.
 - It would be helpful to encourage people to say what they want to learn/work on in addition to what they are good at.
- It is helpful when instructors ask students to write introductory letter/paragraph with background and what they want to get out of the class
 - Note that some people might need some support while writing such a letter
- Gigliola and Jen French are already coming up with a list of suggestions for instructors to take in these directions.
 - One is that instructors should use the first day of class to introduce each other, etc. rather than rushing to the most advanced theorem possible.