

Resisting Microaggressions in Computing Disciplines

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Abstract

The purpose of this session for interaction and engagement is to raise awareness of microaggressive behaviors in our academic environments, and to provide staff, students and faculty with strategies to recognize and resist these negative behaviors.

Keywords: microaggression; unconscious bias; diversity; inclusion

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1 Purpose and Intended Audience

The audience for this session includes doctoral students, staff, fixed-term and tenure-track faculty interested in improving the climate at their institution. This session may be of particular interest to participants from under-represented groups and their allies, as well as those engaged in diversity and multicultural affairs, outreach and recruiting, graduate programs, and mentoring programs for junior faculty. The goals include raising awareness of how conscious and unconscious biases manifest themselves in academic environments, how these microaggressions negatively impact people, and what we can do as a community to address these issues. The expected outcomes are strategies for resisting microaggressions, and a website with follow-up resources including videos, books, presentations, and articles.

2 Proposed Activities including Agenda, Ramp-Up(Development), and Follow-Through

Our session will be organized in two 60 minute sessions.

2.1 Session 1

In the first session, the organizers will introduce themselves, provide background information to explain microaggressions and how they impact under-representation in computing, and motivate the purpose of the session. Next, participants will organize into small discussion groups. Each group will be tasked with adding examples of microaggressions on each of the 5 Bingo cards (graduate students, staff, faculty, women, under-represented minorities) that will be displayed on the wall. Content for the Bingo game will take the form of sticky notes in 3 colors (red, yellow, and green) where the color indicates the strength of their experience coping with or observing the microaggression. Participants will write short statements on each sticky note and attach to the appropriate Bingo card. Organizers will walk around the room to facilitate communication, mediate disagreements to build consensus, and keep the groups on task.

2.2 Session 2

In the second session, the organizers will present a preliminary thematic analysis of the content on the Bingo cards. The analysis will take the form of a table listing the themes, examples, and message. For example, the "myth of meritocracy" would include statements that assert that identity characteristics do not play a role in life success. A statement from the Bingo card might be "I believe the most qualified person should get the job" or "everyone can succeed as a tenure-track professor if they work hard enough". The message resulting from this theme is that individuals are measured simply on the basis of their intellectual contributions, divorced from social status, gender, race, religion, or other distinguishing characteristics that bring very real benefits to certain groups over others.

The session will close with a discussion on how to combat microaggressions and tips for being an effective ally. The organizers will disseminate the resulting analysis of themes from the Bingo cards, and additional resources on a website. Participants will also be invited to continue the discussion on Twitter using the hashtags: #microaggression #computing.

3 Relevance to the Conference/Significance to the Field

The focus of our topic is to give under-represented and marginalized groups tools to cope with the everyday slights, indignities, and putdowns that they may experience in their academic settings. Our contention is that these survival skills are critical for improving the retention and career trajectories of people from under-represented and marginalized groups.

Perhaps more importantly, this topic is important and relevant to the broader iSchool community. If our collective goal is to diversify the field, we need to raise the visibility and awareness of microaggressions, and cultivate colleagues to serve as allies. This event will appeal to the audience both with respect to content and format because it offers a safe space to explore sensitive topics.