

ESSAY

ESSAY SERIES: EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Diversity as the fuel of my scientific career

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A flight of 6 h changed my life completely. I can certify that leaving my family, friends, food, language and culture was one of the most difficult decisions I have had to make. But I can also certify how my life, personal and academic, has been positively impacted since I work in a department with an environment full of diversity.

My first approach to diversity – the path that confirmed to me that I wanted to become a scientist

My first experience of working in an international laboratory was part of a short stay in the laboratory of Dr Bertil Hille. I was a PhD student at the Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico at that time. Every Tuesday, postdocs from China, South Korea, Germany, the UK, Colombia, and the USA rounded a table to discuss their science data. When I thought that the discussion about the results was over, a new point of view challenged the idea, and a new discussion started (Fig. 1). These meetings were long and tiring, but more importantly, these meetings were inspiring. Before this academic stay, I had to convince myself frequently that my efforts to follow a science career made sense. Swimming against the tide was overwhelming sometimes, but that academic stay, the opportunity to see many international scholars fighting for their dreams, reinforced my dream – I wanted to become a scientist. I want to clarify that those postdocs were not perfect. Some of them did not speak English fluently, and sometimes their experiments failed, but they always had something interesting to contribute. Every member was important because each one had their own perspective, enriching in many ways the same data. They did not look like me, but I identified myself with them. I understood that there is not a scientist prototype. Understanding that fact is essential for people like me who frequently hear from family and friends, “you should come back down to the earth and face reality”. The reality of each person should not be limited by religion, nationality, gender or any other condition.

Diversity shows the importance of equity and inclusion

I am part of an underrepresented group in science, but I didn't realize the meaning of that until some years ago. Science is a very competitive career, and only the best will have the opportunity to win awards, fellowships, grants, and finally, a faculty position. I used to see my CV and feel ashamed because it was not as great as others; it took time to learn that only I knew and understood my

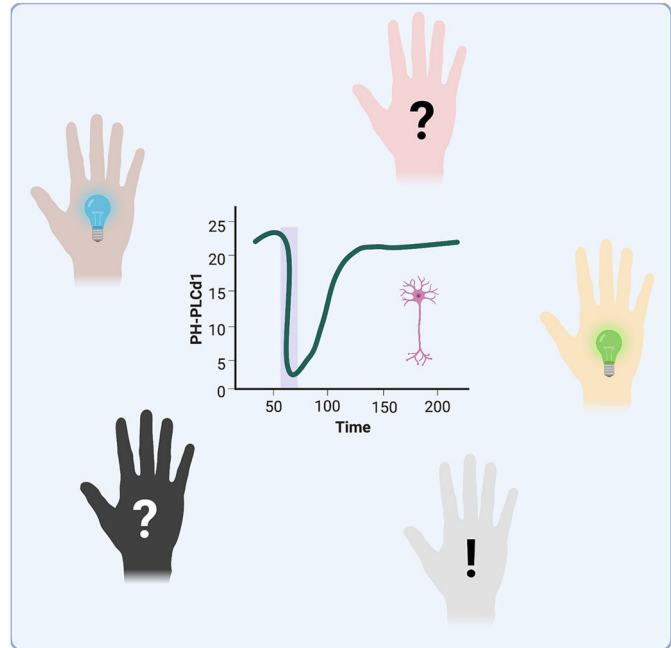


Fig. 1. Diversity brings perspectives and discussion to science. During my academic stay at Hille's lab, I met scientists passionate about science. They focused on understanding the metabolism of phosphatidylinositol 4,5-bisphosphate.

fight. Today, I can recognize myself as a great scientist with the potential to create novel and fascinating ideas. I am more than just a number of articles, grants or awards.

Diversity reminds me that one cannot judge someone until having walked a mile in their shoes, as my grandpa used to tell me. I have learned to see the person behind a scientist, to smile and cry together. Most importantly, I have learned to share experiences and knowledge because dreaming and working side by side is the best way for us to develop as scientists.

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