

My background and experiences

I grew up in a working-class family in a small town in Finland, and I am the first in my family to go to a university. Although growing up in Finland means that the beginning of my life was privileged in many ways due to overall safety, free healthcare, and free education, my life has been filled with experiences in a broad spectrum of countries and cultures. In high school, I was an exchange student in the U.K. and Germany. During my engineering studies, I worked as a trainee in research in South Korea, an assistant engineer in Thailand, a teaching assistant in Brazil, and a trainee biomedical engineer in Australia, where I also completed a study exchange. Now I live in the U.S.

These experiences have been valuable to me as I have found myself in situations where I was outside the dominant culture, was expected to follow unwritten cultural norms without anyone telling me what they were, or could not communicate with other people due to language barriers. I have also experienced what it feels like to be a woman engineer in environments where women engineers do not exist yet and how unconscious bias influenced how people reacted to me. I hope to use these experiences to guide students and trainees through challenging situations and foster a diverse and inclusive environment where everyone can feel safe and belong.

My long-standing commitment to advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)

During my engineering studies, I worked one summer in Florianópolis, Brazil, to teach English at a local school. In the afternoons and evenings, the school allowed me to organize lessons for students from low-income families that could not pay the school tuition. Teaching these two different groups—paying and non-paying students—was an eye-opening experience and taught me the challenges and opportunities of managing classrooms with different socio-economic and racial-ethnic backgrounds.

Currently, I am a mentor in the Action Potential Advising Program of Simply Neuroscience. In this program, I provide one-on-one mentoring for high school students interested in careers related to neuroscience. I am also a mentor in the Peer Review for Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity (PRIDE) program. This program aims to provide feedback in fellowship applications to LGBTQ+ students in STEM. Furthermore, I mentor students with disabilities via the Disabled in STEM program. Overall, these mentoring experiences have provided valuable insights into the individual struggles that students from various backgrounds may face and allowed me to support them in their individual needs.

It is important to me also to increase others' awareness and understanding of DEI. To do this, I have volunteered to share my career story for the Humans of Neuroscience outreach program, which showcases the broad diversity in the neuroscience community. I wanted to share my path as a first-generation woman student in engineering to inspire and encourage students about higher education.

Building an inclusive, equitable, diverse, and collaborative academia

My ongoing commitment to DEI is solid, and DEI will be the core value in all my teaching, mentoring, research, and service activities. In the classroom and laboratory, I will support diverse students and mentees by providing additional mentoring and resources, teaching study skills, and giving pre-reading materials to allow enough time for English as a second language speakers and neurodivergent individuals to familiarize themselves with the subject matter. I will especially focus on student and trainee retention and aim to find solutions for individual needs. I will also be an ally for all my colleagues, especially those underrepresented in the department. I will support DEI in the community via outreach activities, for example, by providing paid research experiences for high school students, undergraduates, and science teachers by applying for the NIH R25 funding. After receiving my first NIH research grant, I will apply for the Research Supplements to Promote Diversity in Health-Related Research to receive additional funding to support underrepresented trainees.

Further, I plan to improve the health of diverse populations through my research. By working in clinical trials in brain stimulation, I have seen the lack of diversity in the study participants. Many minority groups are thus, not benefitting from cutting-edge research as they are not part of the research. Furthermore, we cannot determine whether these brain stimulation methods are safe or efficient in diverse individuals with this lack of diversity. All my projects will consider diversity in recruitment and scientific questions.