



# Striking the gender balance

Since launching his blog a year and a half ago, **Professor Curt Rice** has become a cyber sensation – gaining followers globally. Here, he reflects on one of the most pertinent issues in research: gender



**MY STRONGEST PERSONAL** engagement is with the idea that improved equality yields improved quality – that is, the quality of our research is better when we have improved gender equality in our research teams. There are many elements in this equation, but one of the most important is that when we improve universities for women, we in fact improve them for everyone.

It is important to pursue the goal of getting more women into the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields.

Developing technological solutions to today's challenges requires an understanding of how the entire population sees the problems and how they will implement the proposed technological solutions. Thus we have to think about how to get more women into STEM workplaces. One important measure is the quality of workplaces themselves. They tend to be structured in ways that culturally favour men. For instance, there are many contexts in which self-promotion is crucial for success, and it seems that men and women approach this differently.

## ENTER THE MAINSTREAM

There are at least two important domains for mainstreaming: research and teaching. Regarding research, grant organisations have taken big steps to include a gender perspective as part of the evaluation criteria in all applications, regardless of field. In teaching, we need to help leaders and students recognise that gendered perspectives in curricula will ensure teaching materials are more accurate and suitable to the real world.

The EC has launched a new campaign entitled 'Science: It's a girl thing!' to promote STEM learning and careers to young women. The Commission has made a beautiful website for this campaign, including interviews with women scientists, fun information about science and profiles of different kinds of careers in science. It is targeted at teenage girls and aims to highlight STEM choices available at university.

## MIND THE GAP

The gender data gap tells us we do not know enough about how the activities of men and women differ. In some areas, this prevents us from moving forward. For instance, we do not know how social media is used – and used differently – by men and women, which keeps us from using datasets in ways that might otherwise be insightful in terms of understanding gender more deeply. At the other end of the needs scale, not enough is known about the movements and behaviours of men and women in refugee camps, eg. in identifying the most effective locations for sources of water or toilets. All of this came up during a talk by Hillary Clinton that I had the pleasure of attending in July last year, at an event co-hosted by the US State Department and research-based consulting company, Gallup.

## SALIENT SUMMIT

Held last November in the heart of the EU, the 2<sup>nd</sup> European Gender Summit was a huge event filled with engaged and creative minds. I was very pleased to see that research was so important to many of the sessions: story-telling is important for engaging interest and finding the human connection, but when we are making recommendations to policy makers, it is essential that we base ourselves on research findings, not anecdotes.

I am absolutely confident that the Gender Summit will influence policy makers and researchers, giving a boost to work on gender balance and gendered perspectives in science. It's just the kind of event that policy makers rely on – and I know they will!

*Professor Curt Rice is Vice President for Research and Development at the University of Tromsø, where he has recently initiated a programme to enhance gendered perspectives in research and education. He blogs about leadership issues at universities, and gender balance is one of his core issues of engagement. Rice is currently working on a book, pulling together research that indicates that improving gender balance in academia is a requisite for the advancement of research.*



Engage with Professor Rice via <http://curt-rice.com>