

“Startled as the only one”

By Brianna Malcolm

Hi Readers! My short essay is about my startling experience of when I realized that I was only black female mechanical engineer in my class at our convocation. Despite my initial shock, I did not let it deter me from my studies and from pursuing a career as a mechanical engineer.

Ever since the 7th grade, I knew I wanted to become a mechanical engineer. I have always loved putting things together and tearing them apart. My inquisitive mind led me deeper and deeper into the STEM field until I found that mechanical engineering was the path for me. I found it intriguing since it is essentially applied science and mathematics. It was going to be a challenge, but in an insanely fun kind of way. A part of the challenge I did not foresee was lack of diversity though.

I grew up in south Florida, so I had become accustomed to diversity. I was told that the field of mechanical engineering was not that diverse, but I did not think much of it since I was used to interacting with different types of people. If anything, it would be easier to interact with people since there is not as many variables. However, I did not anticipate how unsettling it would be.

I got my rude awakening at the engineering convocation for first year students. Everyone was separated by major, and I realized that I was the only black female in the incoming class. That experience made me feel small and like I had something to prove. However, I eventually was able to keep pursuing my degree for the love of the material and not because I was solely responsible to add more diversity to the department.

Although I still find the lack of diversity shocking every now and then, I am now better prepared for it because of the numerous resources at the University of Florida and the friendly faculty. This past spring I had a co-op where, once again, I was the only black female out of all the incoming group. Even though the situation was familiar, I was not intimidated. This time I was ready to make my mark unabashed. Yes, there are not many black female engineers, let alone black or women engineers. Nevertheless, that should not be a warning sign. Instead, it should be a welcome sign.