



Linking Research & Innovation for
Gender Equality

Role Model Interview

Professor Asimina Kiourti, The Ohio State University

As part of the CALIPER project, we are conducting a series of interviews with inspirational women who work in STEM research and innovation. We explore what motivated them to choose their career, their experiences and the barriers that they faced.

Professor Asimina Kiourti completed her PhD at the National Technical University of Athens, Greece, and today is an Assistant Professor at The Ohio State University. She leads the Wearable and Implantable Technologies Research Group in the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering.

You can [watch the full video](#) of the interview on the CALIPER [website](#).



Professor Asimina Kiourti (left) and Dr Maria Flouri (right)

Asimina, your research sounds fascinating. Can you give us an overview of it?

“We design new medical devices which are either wearable - on our clothes – or implanted inside the body. They monitor several health parameters, ideally without interfering with our daily lives. For example, we design “smart” clothes, which monitor the way our body moves. For example a patient who’s had a stroke, and is in the recovery stage, could use such clothes. We also design brain implants which sense signals from the depths of the brain, without wires or batteries. We also work with the medicine school – we receive ideas from them and vice versa.”

Where did you grow up and study?

“I was born and raised in Patras. Ever since I was little, I wanted to be involved in technology and science. In 2003, I enrolled in the School of Electrical and Computer Engineering in Patras and graduated five years later. At that point, even though I was familiar with electromagnetics, I didn’t know exactly what I wanted to do, so I decided to continue studying and find a direction.

In 2008 I went to University College London where I graduated with a Master’s degree. During that time, I met a professor who was working on biomedical applications and I found a field of science that would have an impact on humanity. From then on, I started searching specifically for professors working in the fields of electromagnetics and biomedical applications. That’s how I found Professor Nikita at the National Technical University of Athens (NTUA).

After graduating in 2009, I went back to Greece to start my PhD at the NTUA. I finished it in 2013 and came to Ohio as a post-doctoral researcher that same year. I carried on until 2016, in various research roles. And from 2016 until now, I’ve been in the position of Assistant Professor.”



Would you like to share with us the factors that led you to this career path? Did you have an aptitude for science? Did you have any role models who inspired you?

“Everything started with my father, who was a physics teacher. At secondary school, during summer, he and I used to study the upcoming mathematics and physics courses for the year, so I would be prepared.

Even though I was interested in sciences, I also liked the humanities and foreign languages. Eventually they became more of a hobby, I ended up with a preference for science, and of course it’s something that I’ve loved through the years.”

What advice would you give to women at the beginning of their career who may be facing difficulties due to gender discrimination? Did you have such experiences?

“It’s important to know that no woman is alone. All of us have been there in one way or another, although our experiences are not the same, but at least for me I have encountered this many times. I recommend not to deal with difficult situations alone. It’s good to be part of a team.

I remember when I started in the position of Assistant Professor, there were thoughts of “We want diversity in the faculty, so we’ll have to hire some women just because they are women”. I concluded that I would have to work twice as hard as a man in the same position in order to prove who I am.

Sometimes, when I participate in University committees, they don’t know me and my work and they only see “a woman on the committee”. There’s the feeling of “Here is the woman on the committee, they only included her so the committee will be more diverse”.

I have a colleague who was at a committee meeting one day and all the other members there were men. They asked her to bring them coffee because they assumed she was the secretary. It didn’t even occur to them that there could be a female professor on the committee.

What I’m trying to say is that no matter your position, these discriminations exist. It’s good to share such experiences with others and receive support to move on.”

What would be your thoughts and hopes for the next generation of women in research and innovation?

“I definitely want to see more women in R&I. A large part of my work involves teaching. I have approximately 30 students, of whom 5 are women. We certainly don’t get the diversity of perspectives that we want in lectures.

I hope that from the early years in secondary education, there will be more activities that persuade girls and young women to follow this career. Then during their undergraduate studies, we need more activities to convince them to continue on this career path.

Unfortunately, I see young women completing their studies in engineering for example, and then working in something completely different.”



What's your advice to young women who are considering a career in science and technology?

“When I was younger it never crossed my mind to turn to a female professor and ask “How did you get here? What difficulties did you encounter?”. But now if I received such an email it would be a huge pleasure to share experiences and help in any way I can. They shouldn't hesitate to get in touch.

At an event I attended in 2016-17, one woman advised, “If you are thinking of starting a family, obviously there is no obligation to start a family, not everyone wants a family, but if you want to, if it is something that crosses your mind, don't think that there will be a “right time” to have a child - because you can always pursue your career.”

This made me think - I had thought that the right time would come. Family was something I wanted but I'd put so much effort into getting my position and setting up my laboratory, finding my students and moving on to the next stage. I thought I would never find the right moment. The combination of family and career is very difficult, but it's something that I'm now doing. I have a young child. However, if a woman wants to start a family, there will never be a “right time”. If someone had not actually said that to me, I would have waited for the right moment professionally and that time would never have come.”

To find out more, please visit the [CALIPER Project website](#).

