

Change BEGINS WITH Awareness

IN MID-OCTOBER, I attended a workshop whose purpose was to design a new mentoring program called Mentoring Physical Oceanography Women to Increase Retention (MPOWIR) (for background on this program, see *Oceanography* 18[1]:35–38). Although women have been attending graduate school and attaining their Ph.D.s in numbers roughly equal to men for many years, the number of women who occupy university tenure-track positions does not reflect this gender balance. This gender inequity is reflected in the lead principal investigator positions on proposals submitted to the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF). In the past ten years, only 12 percent of all the proposals submitted to the physical oceanography program area at NSF have had women as lead P.I. The challenge to workshop participants, women and men, was to devise a mentoring program to help women physical oceanographers successfully navigate through the sometimes difficult transition years—from graduate school to postdoc, then from postdoc to junior faculty—during which women exit academia more frequently than men. More and better mentoring is expected to increase the number of women who remain in faculty and research positions in physical oceanography.

When the final mentoring program particulars are available, I will share them with you. But, even without the final plans, whether we are physical oceanographers or not (and I am not), we can all participate in this community effort—first by becoming aware of existing subtle biases, and then changing our behavior. Based on workshop discussions, I suggest the following questions should be asked frequently:

1. If you are chairing a session at a meeting, are women well represented among the invited speakers?
2. If you are putting together a special issue of a journal, or a book, are women among the lead authors?
3. If you are organizing a seminar series at your institution, how many women are on the list of speakers? On the organizing committee?
4. Are any women among the people you may be considering to nominate for awards or to leadership positions?
5. Do young women scientists in your department or at your institution have easy access to good mentors?
6. Has your institution or department recently evaluated the distribution of resources among scientists?

Simply increasing the visibility of women in oceanography is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for retaining young scientists in the field. Interaction with good mentors (note the plural), whether they are at the young scientist's home institution or not, is critical to early career development leading to tenure-track positions. Our communities should carefully follow the progress of this proposed new mentoring activity in physical oceanography, with the goal of expanding this effort to include all of the ocean sciences.



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