

A Successful First Pattullo Conference

BY M. SUSAN LOZIER



INITIATED IN 2004, MPOWIR (Mentoring Physical Oceanography Women to Increase Retention) is a community-initiated and community-led program aimed at providing mentoring to junior women in physical oceanography in order to improve their retention in the field. MPOWIR activities, funded by federal agencies (National Science Foundation, Office of Naval Research, Department of Energy, and National Aeronautics and Space Administration) since the spring of 2007, are guided by the five program objectives outlined by the community during a fall 2005 planning workshop:

1. provide continuity of mentoring from a young woman's graduate career, through her postdoctoral years, to the first years of a permanent job
2. establish a collective responsibility within the physical oceanography community for the mentoring of junior women in the field
3. provide an assortment of mentoring resources and mentors on a

variety of issues

4. cast a wide net to avoid exclusiveness
5. open this mentoring program to all those who self-identify as physical oceanographers

The centerpiece of the MPOWIR effort, the Pattullo Conference¹, was held May 18–21, 2008, in Charleston, South Carolina. Twenty-four junior women scientists and 15 senior scientists, both men and women, participated in this conference, whose primary goal was to help junior women make connections, gain community support, and develop professional skills needed for a career in physical oceanography. Participation by the junior scientists at the Pattullo conference exceeded our estimates by 50%. Additionally, over 90% of the invitations issued to senior scientists in physical oceanography were accepted. Such participation is a strong indicator of community support.

A primary focus of the conference was on the junior women's research. On the first morning of the conference,

each junior participant gave a talk on her current research. Following the research talks, participants were divided into small groups consisting of four junior scientists and two to three senior scientists. In these groups, participants received personalized feedback and constructive criticism from their peers and senior scientists. The aim of these sessions was to give ideas and advice to the junior researchers on how to convert a research project into a research program, as they transition from PhD students and postdocs to principal investigators. Senior scientists offered advice on how to broaden the scope of the junior scientists' research, how to maximize the impact of their research, and how to seek funding opportunities.

A second focus of the Pattullo Conference was on professional development—junior women participated in panels and workshops that focused on negotiation skills, mentoring, balancing work and family, interviewing, and science writing and communication. Senior

¹ Named for June Pattullo, the first woman in the United States to receive a PhD in physical oceanography (Scripps Institution of Oceanography, 1957).



Photos show those gathered in Charleston in May 2008 for the first Pattullo Conference. Photos courtesy of Lisa Beal



scientists participated on these panels as well, and in evening sessions they had an opportunity to share their career paths, past projects, and current research interests. Additionally, federal agency representatives provided information on the type of research their agencies fund, how proposals are submitted to their agencies, and how to obtain further information on these agencies and funding opportunities.

Based on feedback gathered from the participants, the Pattullo Conference was an overwhelming success. In a follow-up survey administered online after the conference (with a response rate of 92%), all said that they would “definitely recommend this conference to another junior scientist.” Most importantly, we accomplished our conference goals. In evaluations and in conversation, many junior women spoke of increased confidence and were impressed by the networking opportunities with not only senior scientists but also their peers. One junior participant commented, “I am

leaving with more confidence in myself and a much better idea of where I want to go in my career and why I want to do it.” Another participant remarked that, “This was a very helpful experience for me as a junior scientist and has definitely increased the likelihood that I will stay in the field.” The accompanying article, written by three junior women who attended this first Pattullo Conference, succinctly describes the overall experience of the junior participants.

The MPOWIR steering committee² is currently planning the second Pattullo Conference, scheduled for the spring of 2010. Using the survey results as a guide, the balance between research and professional development will be maintained, but the next conference will incorporate more unstructured time for junior and senior scientists to interact informally. In the meantime, to continue to meet the MPOWIR objectives, several activities are ongoing: mentoring groups that meet monthly via teleconferences, blog postings for all MPOWIR events, listings of

all job postings and mentoring resources, and data gathering and surveying.

Finally, now that the physical oceanography community has achieved momentum with MPOWIR, our intent is to make this program exportable to other oceanographic or geoscience communities interested in building their own community mentoring programs. To that end, a complete report on the first Pattullo Conference, including an update on other MPOWIR activities, is available online at <http://www.mpowir.org>. Readers interested in learning more about MPOWIR and the Pattullo Conference are encouraged to contact a member of the MPOWIR steering committee. ☐

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² MPOWIR Steering Committee: Bob Beardsley (Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution), Paola Cessi (Scripps Institution of Oceanography), Victoria Coles (University of Maryland), Silvia Garzoli (AOML/NOAA), Sonya Legg (Princeton/GFDL), Susan Lozier (Duke University), Jeffrey Paduan (Naval Postgraduate School), Fiammetta Straneo (Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution), Geoff Vallis (Princeton University).