

# FIU Promotes and Supports Women in STEM

By Ashley Garcia

It's no secret that the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) have been dominated by men. It's also no secret that there has been a recent push to attract more women and girls to STEM occupations.

**Suzanna Rose**, founding associate provost of the Office to Advance Women, Equity & Diversity (AWED) at Florida International University (FIU), is doing her part to make that push successful.

## Recruiting Women

Specifically, Rose is focused on how to attract, recruit, promote and retain women faculty members at FIU. FIU has a diverse undergraduate student body. The school is one of the top schools in the nation in awarding bachelor's and master's degrees to Latinx students and in granting STEM degrees to underrepresented minorities. However, that diversity isn't reflected in the faculty. In 2011, just 12% of STEM faculty were women. Furthermore, the results of a 2010 faculty climate survey performed by Rose and her associates suggested a need for change. White women and women and men of color reported feeling as if they had less influence and respect in their departments than men. It was clear that something needed to be done to establish a more diverse and open atmosphere on campus.

With that in mind, and with the support of an NSF ADVANCE grant, Rose set out to develop strategies for increasing the number of professors from underrepresented groups in STEM fields and the social and behavioral sciences at the university.

## Working Toward Diversity and Inclusion

The first step was to educate faculty members about the importance of diversity and inclusion during the hiring process. FIU's STRIDE (Strategies and Tactics for Recruiting to Improve Diversity and Excellence) Committee was formed to discuss issues related to diversity in faculty hiring and promotion.

To date, more than 300 faculty have participated in STRIDE workshops. Rose says that faculty appreciated learning about how unconscious biases and subtle, unintentional behaviors can impact the ability to attract and hire diverse candidates. She notes, "It was very enlightening to hear a diverse group of faculty from different departments discuss how unique implicit biases may affect our ability to recruit and hire the best candidate."

Another one of the strategies was the creation of a symposium, geared toward women faculty at FIU and designed to promote leadership and strategic career planning. Over its eight-year history, the Women Faculty Leadership Institute (WFLI) has grown in scope and size, with over 100 people attending the 2018 conference, and has covered topics like assertive communication, networking and work-life balance.

The leadership skills taught at the WFLI already created

tangible results on campus. A few years ago, one of the activities was to sit down in small groups and create lists of what female faculty members wanted to see at the school. One common suggestion was an office dedicated to promoting women's issues.

The Council for Women and Minority Faculty proposed the idea of establishing such an office to Provost Kenneth G. Furton. The result was AWED, founded in 2016 to achieve and sustain faculty equity and diversity. Rose was named founding associate provost of the office. She was also one of the principal investigators on a second NSF ADVANCE Institutional Transformation grant awarded to the school in that same year, so Rose and AWED could continue building upon the positive work they had accomplished thus far.

## Training Bystanders

The signature program of AWED's new initiatives is the Bystander Leadership Project, an educational program for both women and men STEM faculty. The program not only raises awareness about the interplay between power, privilege, and bias often experienced by members of underrepresented groups, but also provides practice in using a toolkit of intervention responses and actions.

Rose thinks this type of experience is crucial to help in creating an atmosphere of inclusion and diversity. "In order

for people to intervene in situations where gender, racial or other biases may be occurring, they must have the skill set and experience," she says. "The Bystander Leadership Project places participants in different scenarios and experiments with different types of interventions so that they can be more effective at improving the climate in their department."

The program has been in development for much of last year, and after a trial run in the spring of 2018, the vast majority of participants—who completed evaluation surveys at the end of the program—found the workshop increased their confidence about using intervention strategies and said they were more likely to intervene in similar situations of bias because of the workshop.

## Early Results

AWED is also looking to collaborate with other local schools in order to achieve its goals. The ADVANCE Florida Network (AFN) provides mentoring and networking opportunities to STEM female faculty among the three urban public research universities of FIU, the University of Central Florida and the University of South Florida. Under the AFN program, women tenure-line STEM faculty and women postdoctoral associates can receive funding to offer research seminars at departments from either of the other two schools at which they are not teaching.

The program already made significant connections among female faculty. While giving a lecture on computer science at USF, UCF professor **Pamela Wisniewski** heard about the McKnight Junior Faculty Fellowship, designed to

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*Rose: "A diversity of perspectives enriches the sciences, mathematics and engineering, and it makes these professionals more responsive to global needs."*

AMNH's four partner schools four days a week from September to June, co-teaching with a mentor teacher. This includes special education teachers and bilingual educators.

"Our partner schools are high-need schools that teach very diverse populations of students," says Kinzler. "Our residents are being prepared in that context."

### **The Program's Impact**

AMNH MAT graduates have a 100 percent hiring rate. One of the projects in the MAT program is bringing a group of students to the AMNH for an investigative project. This provides the graduates with deep experience in informal learning and the way to leverage informal learning in their classroom as teachers.

"We've seen now after our graduates have left us and gone into schools, we have several examples where they have formed channels for students from their schools to come to the museum and participate in after-school programs," Kinzler says. This includes kids who never would have accessed a resource like the AMNH or another high-profile program without the encouragement of a teacher.

Kinzler co-teaches one of the courses in the MAT program, the Earth Science Literacy General Seminar.

"When I describe myself, I say I've made a journey from scientific research to science learning as my focus," says Kinzler, who says the scientific rigor that pervades all aspects of the museum fuels her. "I want all of our learning experiences around science to have that rigorous excitement.

"The opportunities to be challenged, creative and rigorous within the education domain at the museum in supporting science learning are so abundant, challenging and interesting that I feel challenged," she adds. "I feel I'm growing all the time." 

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### **A Proud Radical Librarian,**

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Today's zines have more of a focus on mental health and wellness. They are more open and have less shame about sex, online dating and mental health, says Freedman, who personally favors reading zines that examine the "every girl" story.

"Archives and special collections collect items from well-known and/or popular people," she notes. "If you want to see how people really lived, you'll want the 'every girl' type of zine."

### **Books, Cats, Quiet Time**

When asked about her off-work activities, Freedman admits she doesn't have the time "to do the things I want to do," although she makes quiet time a priority. Moving from Iona to Barnard may have shortened her daily commute by 90 minutes, but that time savings is taken up with work on her master's degree.

She continues to produce her own zine as a monthly newsletter and calls herself a "massively voracious reader." Her wife is a web developer.

The couple has two cats—Bad Bad Leroy Brown (a female cat) and Farfel, named for a type of pasta served during Passover. Freedman would love to have more cats, but "New York living doesn't permit having as many animals as one may like," she said. 

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promote excellence in teaching and research by underrepresented minorities and women. Not only was she one of the awardees, but another USF professor agreed to be her mentor for the William T. Grant Scholars Program, and she was recently named one of this year's Grant Scholars.

Why is it so important to have more women in STEM? Rose says: "A diversity of perspectives enriches the sciences, mathematics and engineering, and it makes these professionals more responsive to global needs. At a time when engineering and science are increasingly important to our economy and competitiveness, we need a diverse pool of science and engineering faculty ... to fuel our future." 

*Ashley Garcia is a graduate of the George Washington University Law School and has worked at Florida International University for the last six years in news and communications.*

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### **PROFILE: New Destinations Propelled Weldt-Basson's Career,**

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literature provides. Allende says it's impossible not to include political commentary within Latin American literature. Violence, poverty, inequality and suffering must be explored with writers' narratives. She further notes that textbooks often don't provide the comprehensive insights novels do.

Weldt-Basson concurs, saying that Latin American writers embrace historical reality in their work, something she shares with students.

"Despite their fictive nature, novels become a source of historical knowledge for their reading public, providing information that has often been filtered out of the news media," Weldt-Basson says. "In Latin America, many novels that on the surface appear to belong to genres such as the romance novel or detective fiction are in fact what I call disguised historical novels, so prevalent is the role of history in Latin American fiction." 

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### **PROFILE: Propelling Dialogue About the Catholic Church,**

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"He thought it meant to go rebuild a church that needed physical rebuilding," Reek explains. "Then he realized, no, I'm meant to rebuild the church as an institution."

She's encouraged by Sacred Heart's commitment to open dialogue. In early October, she took part in a panel discussion Sacred Heart held, "Sexual Abuse and the Church: A Conversation in the Wake of Recent Revelations." Moderated by **Dr. Daniel Rober**, professor of Catholic studies, they addressed the impact of the recent Pennsylvania grand jury report about sexual abuse in the church. Reek and the other panelists were somewhat surprised and really impressed by the turnout, which numbered over 100.

"What was important was to provide a space—much like my seminars—where people could listen to one another and talk openly," Reek says. "I heard from people how glad they were to have an opportunity to be together and express their concerns." 