

# Building a university climate of inclusive excellence for women and minorities in the fields of STEM

Dr Suzanna M. Rose from the Office to Advance Women, Equity & Diversity, Academic Affairs shares her views on working towards a university climate of inclusive excellence when it comes to the representation of women and minorities in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM)

The representation of women and minorities in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) has not kept up with the dramatic growth in the STEM fields over the past few decades. This is true both in the workforce and in academia.

The Office to Advance Women, Equity & Diversity (AWED) at Florida International University (FIU) was established to address this issue by achieving and sustaining faculty equity and diversity in STEM, as well as other fields. With the award of a National Science Foundation Institutional Transformation grant, AWED set out to combat the issue by launching FIU ADVANCE, a five-year, \$3.2 million dollar programme to develop innovative organisational strategies that would produce comprehensive change across STEM and other disciplines.

FIU is both a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) and a Minority-Serving Institution (MSI) that is designated as a Very High Research University within the Carnegie classification. FIU is among the ten largest universities in the U.S. with 57,000 students. Its students are 61% Hispanic and 20% from other underrepresented groups

(URGs). FIU is one of the top schools in the country in the number of bachelor's and master's degrees awarded to Hispanic students, as well as in awarding STEM degrees. However, like many academic institutions across the country, the same levels of diversity are not seen at the faculty level. In 2016, the percentage of women in tenure-line, research faculty positions in STEM was just 18%, and only four of the 255 combined STEM faculty members were women of colour.

The goals of FIU ADVANCE were influenced partly by previous research completed by Rose and colleagues showing that foreign-born STEM men faculty demonstrated strong preferences for hiring from within their own cultural group (Rose & Farhangi, 2016). This led the team to explore the intersectional identities of foreign-born men STEM faculty to see if their cultural beliefs also might pose an unaddressed barrier to attracting and hiring Hispanic-American and African-American women in STEM. For instance, findings based on interviews and focus groups indicated that some international faculty members tended to have beliefs about women and gender from their home cultures that were at odds with the more egalitarian ideas

common in the U. S. Others considered racial issues as being a "U.S. thing" and believed themselves to be immune from it, even while expressing U.S.-based racial stereotypes and prejudices.

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**"A diverse faculty has positive effects on our diverse student body. More perspectives are taken into account and increased diversity gives us access to talent currently not represented among faculty and students."**

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The team, thus, determined that, in order to create a truly diverse community, an atmosphere of inclusion and openness must be fashioned and underlying biases of both U.S. and international faculty must be addressed in order to succeed at hiring more women and members of underrepresented groups.

## **Building an inclusive culture at FIU**

In response, several programmes have created that focus on building an inclusive culture at FIU. Even before search committees begin their work to recruit candidates for a particular faculty position, committee members are required to attend a STRIDE Workshop (Strategies and Tactics for Recruiting to Improve Diversity and



Prof. Svetlana Roudenko, Mathematician and Diversity Mentor Professor, and Suzanna Rose, Associate Provost, AWED

Excellence). The faculty-led workshops provide participants with background information and concrete advice about practices that make searches more effective at producing diverse candidate pools and more successful at hiring the candidates that departments want to attract.

Faculty also may participate in the Bystander Leadership Program, a workshop that is intended to raise awareness of implicit bias and provides experience with using a variety of diplomatic responses to both subtle and obvious situations involving gender or race bias. A crucial component of the programme is AWED theater, that presents skits tailored to the academic setting using professional actors to encourage attendees to interact with each other and the curriculum. Attendees discuss a toolkit of response options available to them and then take part in simulations in which they practice the techniques. Participants attest that the practice sessions are especially important for increasing their confidence in using intervention skills and strategies.

### FIU's Diversity Mentor Professorships programme

Another initiative aimed at increasing diversity is FIU's new Diversity Mentor Professorships, a programme launched in 2017-2018 to recruit excellent research scientists and engineers with a history and commitment to the mentorship of women students and students from traditionally underrepresented groups. Research has shown that having a female role model has a powerful positive effect on women's performance in maths and science classes.

Suzanna Rose, associate provost, AWED, says that: "A diverse faculty has positive effects on our diverse student body. More perspectives are taken into account and increased diversity gives us access to talent currently not represented among faculty and students."

### Helping create female role models and leaders

A further programme run by AWED and designed to help create female role models and leaders on campus is

the Women Faculty Leadership Institute (WFLI). This annual symposium is designed to promote women's leadership and strategic career planning. WFLI focuses on enhancing skills and thinking broadly about women's issues.

As of fall 2018, the STRIDE workshops were institutionalised (with a three-year phase-in) to be required of faculty search committee members in all colleges and departments, and more than a hundred faculty members have taken part in a Bystander Leadership workshop. Additionally, the development of university-wide faculty diversity and inclusion plans was launched during the same semester.

The number of women in STEM is now at 20%. FIU ADVANCE, therefore, can already claim positive results in its goal to create a faculty-based social system that proactively enhances a culture of inclusion for all faculty at FIU.

Rose, S. M. & Farhangi, S. (2016). The intersectionalities of men STEM faculty: An unexplored barrier for recruiting women of color? Association for Women in Science, 48, 16-19.



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