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Study Cites Lack of Female Professors

Women have a difficult time getting faculty jobs in science-related fields, the report finds.

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Women are severely underrepresented on university faculties in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics, according to a study released Thursday.

The trend holds true even in disciplines where **female** doctorate recipients outnumber males.

The findings are of particular concern because they come on the heels of President Bush's initiative to expand the nation's space program, said the authors of the study, who were joined at a news conference Thursday by Mae Jemison, the first African American **female** astronaut.

Jemison said that the advancement of women and minorities and the development of science curriculum for students in grades K-12 have not been made priorities.

The underrepresentation of women and minorities can be blamed on universities' infrastructures, she said, and tenured faculty should be held accountable for the advancement and inclusion of women and minorities as **professors**.

"Their research money should be tied to it," Jemison said.

She also recommended incentives to aid science education, including participatory scientific research at all levels of schooling. This, Jemison said, includes laboratories for grade schools and comprehensive training for teachers.

"Science is best done through hands-on work," she said.

While women often represent the majority of undergraduates in science and math studies -- filling more than 70% of classroom seats in some fields -- this does not translate to equivalent representation in university faculties. Instead, men are more often given faculty positions and tenure, often filling 80% to 90% of such spots, the study found.

The study described the lack of women on scientific and math faculties as a nationwide failure to meet the requirements of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. Title IX, perhaps better known for its promotion of women's collegiate sports, prohibits any educational program that receives federal funds from discriminating on the basis of gender.

"There is a high representation of **females** in these studies but a low representation in faculty," said Donna Nelson of the University of Oklahoma, who wrote the report with Oklahoma student Diana Rogers. "This does not create an optimum environment for women to attain degrees and join the workforce."

The report analyzed statistics collected from what were identified as the nation's top 50 departments in 14 fields of math and science. The department rankings were derived from reports collected by the National Science Foundation and the National Research Council.

The study, in which Nelson was aided by students from Oklahoma and UC Berkeley, showed that **female** students who had earned doctorates were hired less often as assistant **professors** than white males with the same credentials. This, panelists said, represents a disparity indicative of preferential treatment.

Kim Gandy, president of the National Organization for Women, attacked what she called "pervasive discrimination" in some of the nation's largest and most respected universities.

"When women aren't encouraged by their universities, it is understandable that they will seek success elsewhere," Gandy said. "This leaves us with fewer role models and mentors for women studying in universities today. We cannot afford to lose another generation of bright, talented women and people of color."

Nelson also offered remedies to universities' failure to equally promote women since the passing of Title IX 32 years ago. As senior faculty -- typically white males -- retire, women and minorities should be given consideration for their posts, she said.

Other panelists called for institutions to restructure departments and for lawmakers to intervene.

Sen. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.) has initiated a review of universities' compliance with Title IX. His press secretary, Carol Guthrie, said Thursday that Wyden has not determined how to act on the findings.

Nelson said that Title IX "has been accepted with regard to sports but not for science."

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