

UW-Madison: Geographer leads initiative against sexual harassment

Posted on Monday, Aug 7, 2017

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MADISON – A University of Wisconsin-Madison associate professor of geography is partnering with scientific societies and geoscience faculty colleagues from institutions across the country to develop sexual harassment bystander intervention training for the earth, space and environmental sciences.

“Sexual and other types of harassment create a hostile working and learning environment for the targets but also for the rest of the community,” says Erika Marin-Spiotta, lead principal investigator of the project. “The University of Wisconsin-Madison has recently implemented mandatory sexual harassment training for all employees, but many universities do not offer appropriate, or any type of, such training. By working with university and professional society leadership, we aim to empower people to step in, speak up, prevent and stop harassment.”

Marin-Spiotta, who is also a member of the leadership board of the Earth Science Women’s Network, says the project was motivated by the overall lack of representation of women in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) and the increasing recognition of the hostile environment many women face in their studies and jobs. Women receive 39 percent of undergraduate degrees in the earth, atmospheric and oceanic sciences, yet make up only 20 percent of geoscience faculty, and even fewer at the full professor level.

In addition to Marin-Spiotta, the partnership team includes geoscientists, STEM education experts and key leaders from scientific societies that are leading efforts to stop sexual harassment. Team members include: Billy Williams, American

Geophysical Union; Blair Schneider, Association for Women Geoscientists; Allison Mattheis, California State University, Los Angeles; and leaders from the Earth Science Women's Network: Rebecca Barnes, Colorado College; Asmeret Berhe, University of California, Merced; and Meredith Hastings, Brown University.

The team has received a four-year, \$1.1 million grant from the National Science Foundation ADVANCE program to increase the participation and advancement of women in academic science and engineering careers.

A primary goal of the project is to improve work climate conditions and increase gender equity in the geosciences by developing bystander intervention workshops for department heads, chairs and faculty to appropriately respond to, prevent and eliminate sexual harassment. In addition, goals include sexual harassment awareness and prevention training in the teaching of ethical conduct in research guidelines; developing and incorporating geoscience-relevant scenarios in training and teaching materials, including field research and educational settings; incorporating experiences of community members with intersectional identities who may face sexual, racial and gender harassment; and collaborating with professional society partners for national dissemination, implementation and sustainability.

"As educators and science professionals, it is our responsibility to provide learning and working spaces where people are treated with dignity. It is time for our community to realize harassment is a problem and to not continue to overlook and condone this behavior," Marin-Spiotta says.