

Report: Women in Applied Mathematics: Research and Leadership (WAMRL) Follow-Up Activity.

Author: Lisette de Pillis
Department of Mathematics
Harvey Mudd College
Claremont, CA 91711

The proposed follow-up activity to the WAMRL meeting was to hold discussions for women mathematics faculty with the goal of presenting information gathered at WAMRL, discussing issues facing women faculty here at the Claremont Colleges, and approaches to addressing these issues.

The Claremont Colleges are a consortium of five undergraduate colleges and two graduate schools. In the Spring of 2004, there were a total of eleven women mathematicians (including visitors) in residence at all the campuses. Of the eleven women mathematics faculty at the Claremont Colleges, eight made time to attend discussions, in addition to two women computer scientists, for a total of ten attendees. Out of pocket funds were used to provide lunch for the women. An opening presentation was given that incorporated the introductory presentation by Tammy Kolda given on the first day of the WAMRL meeting.

During and after the presentation, there was time for open discussion and planning for future meetings. In addition, attendees took with them survey forms, and returned these with comments. There were two open-ended questions on the survey form. These were:

1. Please give brief feedback about today's discussion.
2. Please suggest other activities that would be useful in fostering the advancement and support of women scientists at the Claremont Colleges.

The main observations from discussions and from survey forms feedback may be summarized as follows:

1. Not all women were in agreement that there really were any significant issues being faced by women at all. Some women

in the group took issue with the sources of information and the methods that gave rise to the data presented in the Kolda report. These data highlighted the continued existence of an uneven playing-field for women mathematicians.

2. There was a sense on the part of some of the attendees that women in applied mathematics may still be facing gender-related career hurdles and challenges that women in other areas of mathematics may have managed to overcome to some degree. Here again, there was no unanimity of opinion.
3. There was a minority yet strong voice that asserted that it is not worthwhile to have discussions about women in mathematics, and that a mathematician is a mathematician no matter what the gender.
4. There was an alternate set of opinions that expressed deep gratitude that we organized a forum in which to discuss women's issues. There was a hope on the part of some participants that more action could be taken to allow for additional opportunities for open discussion, and more opportunities to brainstorm about actions and policies that could be implemented to provide support to women faculty in the mathematical sciences.

This participant found the WAMRL meeting to be informative and inspiring. It has become clear through this follow-up activity that taking action to develop a support network for women mathematicians at the Colleges will be a challenge that will involve significant time and resources. The first step toward creating a network that can be self-sustaining is for there to be recognition that such a network is needed. Additionally, there needs to be a critical mass of women who not only feel that a support network is necessary, but who are willing to invest time in creating and maintaining this network. It is hoped that with persistent efforts, this may come to pass.