FROM THE CLARK SCIENCE CENTER DIRECTORS’ OFFICE

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The Critical Role of Role Models

Inside Higher Ed announced an unusual collaboration as part of National Engineers Week. The website Funny or Die teamed with the National Academy of Engineering and the University of Southern California Viterbi School of Engineering to create a video wondering, What if we covered engineers like celebrities? The video features diverse engineers working on a range of contemporary issues, from cybersecurity to driverless cars, while paparazzi shout questions and a breathless fan asks to take a selfie with her (engineering) idol. With its humorous bent, the video is trying to change public perceptions of the relevance of engineering to society while expanding notions of who belongs in the field.

Efforts to improve the diversity of media and other representations of scientists, mathematicians, and engineers are gaining momentum. These efforts go beyond STEM. In The Washington Post this week, Smith’s own Kim Yi Dionne and seven female colleagues published an op-ed piece called Here is a list of smart women political scientists. They know stuff, too. In it, they note research finding female underrepresentation in scholarly citations in their field. The same problems abound in STEM. One 2013 Nature paper found global gender disparities using bibliometric analyses of citation rates for women versus men in prominent authorship positions (sole, first, or last).

Smith’s strategic plan in the sciences imagines a future where “our graduates will change the face of science.” To make that happen, we must take seriously the importance of providing visible, successful, and inspiring role models for our students. And we do. At a raucous Rally Day ceremony, President McCartney announced that Megan Smith, the United States Chief Technology Officer for the Obama White House, will be this year’s commencement speaker and local astronaut, Stephanie Wilson, will receive an honorary degree. Later this spring, Smith will welcome Dr. Maria Klawe, President of Harvey Mudd College and a fierce champion of women in STEM.

To create the next generation of role models, we must also invest in our own students’ learning and leadership. As such, we are delighted to announce good news about SURF (see sidebar). We will also continue talking about our Smith College Science Collaborators or (SC)^2 grant to HHMI (see next page).

We do not need celebrity. But we do need more just treatment and representation for diverse STEM workers and academics now and into the future. Solutions to today’s global challenges depends on all this talent.

--Patty DiBartolo
More on Curricular Innovation

Throughout the fall, the Sherrerd Center sponsored a Teaching Circle once a month on Building capacity for fostering student learning and persistence in the sciences. These conversations informed our HHMI grant submission, proposing the development of the Smith College Science Collaborators or (SC)², using two interlocking and empirically-informed interventions (course-based research experiences and student learning assistants) aimed to achieve inclusion of diverse women in sciences. As we wait to hear back from HHMI about the status of our pre-proposal this May, we will continue conversations focused on this topic this semester. The first meeting is listed down in the Announcements section below.

We hope these conversations will help: 1)-to catalogue where we are doing inquiry-based work with students as our partner in our curriculum currently; 2)-to articulate principles and models of success for these kinds of innovations; and 3)-to discuss what kinds of faculty development opportunities could foster more pilots consistent with our pre-proposal, given a plan to offer a sustained workshop for faculty on this topic over the summer. So please come grab lunch and share your ideas!

A New Look!

Over the January break, contractors were hard at work creating a new suite of administrative offices in Burton. The administrative team previously scattered across McConnell and Burton is now in one place—Burton 115. You can find the Directors (Patty DiBartolo & Margaret Lamb) as well as the following administrative assistant team members in this new space: Amy Avard, Donna Kortes, Kristin Morse, and Heather McQueen.

Margaret’s former office in McConnell (SR-214) is now a conference space, available for Science Center use (and appropriate for groups of 8 to 10). You can reserve this room through any member of the Science Center Administrative Assistant team.