Everybody into the pool: Supporting career success for women in paleontology

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BGSU ALLIES: Building Inclusive Leadership Practices and Policies to Transform the Institution

Multi-year grant from National Science Foundation’s ADVANCE Program

Project Goal: To make allyship and inclusive leadership the expectation and norm at BGSU

NSF Award No. 1760389
9/2018-8/2022
Motivating questions

1. Barriers to career advancement for women have persisted despite decades of efforts to remove them—how can we do better?

2. How has “success” in paleontology been traditionally defined in a gendered way?

3. How can we redefine “success” to be more inclusive and supportive of a variety of career paths?

4. How can more senior paleontologists support the career success of women early in their careers?
The “successful” paleontologist...

- Holds a tenured faculty position at an elite high-research-activity (“R1”) university
- Prioritizes research over teaching
- Does minimal academic service work
- Is rewarded for quantity and citation counts of publications in high impact factor journals
- Lands large external grants
- Wins prestigious awards
- Works most nights and weekends
- Spends many weeks each year away from home doing field work and attending conferences

These are all strongly gendered!
The “successful” paleontologist is a man!

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- Women are less likely to be hired on the tenure track or be tenured and promoted, and are more likely to work at non-R1 institutions, maybe also non-academic jobs
- Women spend more hours on teaching activities and do more, and more unrewarded, service work than men
- Women are less likely to be published, cited, or awarded external funding
- Women are less likely to be nominated or selected for research awards
- Women spend more hours per week than men on household labor and specifically on child and eldercare

*COVID-19 made all of this worse!*
The leaky pipeline model

Problems:
Only one way in, starting in high school or earlier
Only one pathway through a career, with required steps along the way
Only one end goal, one way to be “successful”

Emphasis is on patching cracks, not on why those cracks formed in the first place (Grogan 2019) or whether we WANT a pipeline at all! (Grogan 2019)
The community swimming pool model

No mandatory, predefined start and end points
Ladders to help people enter and exit easily at many different places
Lifeguards on duty
Lots of different activities to do while in the pool, different ways of being “successful”
Easy to change activities
Still all one community!
“Life is a copiously branching bush...not a ladder of predictable progress.”
Stephen Jay Gould, *Wonderful Life*
Supporting the career success of women in paleontology

BGSU ALLIES tips on allyship, inclusive leadership, mentoring and sponsoring are available at https://bit.ly/ALLIES_Tips (case-sensitive)

Lists can be overwhelming! Choose 3-5 items to work on first

**Be a lifeguard in the paleontology pool!**
Bringing the community of paleontology together

Individual, interpersonal actions are not enough to change what we mean by “successful” and create the community pool!

How can we redefine “success” to be more inclusive and supportive of a variety of career paths?

How do we move from individual action to collective transformation?

What do we need to build the paleontology community pool and ensure all are welcome in it?