

RLA Capstone Project: Supporting Women in Geography

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Background

- ◆ Supporting Women in Geography (SWIG) is a national network that promotes participation, professional development, and empowerment of female graduate students and young professionals in the field of geography.
- ◆ A number of universities in the Northeast and several Big 10 universities have active SWIG chapters.
- ◆ Female graduate students expressed interest in the development of a Rutgers chapter.

Project Goals

- ◆ Develop an active and self-sustaining Rutgers chapter of Supporting Women in Geography (SWIG).
- ◆ Provide students with intellectual and personal support, including development of professional networks and connections.
- ◆ Foster a supportive and collaborative departmental culture for all students, post-docs and faculty members.

Why the need for SWIG?

- ◆ Rigg et al. (2010) study of publication productivity
 - Females under-represented in the flagship Geography journals as lead and collaborative authors
 - Sole author articles by males (M) more likely to be cited than sole (F) or collaborative articles by females (FF); collaborative articles by males (MM or MF) more likely to be cited than sole (F) or collaborative articles by females (FF)
- ◆ Other indicators:
 - 35% of geography undergraduates are F
 - M/F earning PhDs are close to 50/50 but M dominate at all levels of professoriate; many departments have few female

Activities and accomplishments

- ◆ Monthly meetings with themes selected by students who also identified readings (themes: mental health in the academy; race, ethnicity, and diversity in the academy; productivity; leadership)
- ◆ Keynote speaker on the topic of gender and geography
- ◆ SWIG brunches/meetings with invited speakers
- ◆ Practice session for conference presentations
- ◆ New course under development on geography of race and ethnicity in the United States

Challenges

- ◆ Who can join SWIG? F only? F and M?
 - Grad students only? Postdocs? Faculty?
 - Undergraduates?

(Creating an inclusive, safe space for some invariably excludes others)
- ◆ How to make the SWIG self-sustaining? (need for continued student and faculty leadership)

Lessons Learned for me

- ◆ Gender differences in the academy are perpetuated through our everyday interactions with students
- ◆ Gender differences are interconnected with race, ethnicity, and nationality
- ◆ Leadership means showing up, listening and learning