Amber Vlasnik, Chair of the LEADER Consortium’s Coaching Committee, is pleased to announce the LEADER Consortium Coaching Initiative. Ms. Vlasnik and members of the committee—Dr. Tamera Schneider, WSU; Dr. Jayne Robinson, UD; and Dr. Karen Townsend, CSU—have developed a program to provide professional, confidential academic and career coaching at no cost to eligible participants.

The goal of the coaching initiative is to facilitate the professional growth of post-tenure STEM women across the Consortium’s institutions. Eligible post-tenure STEM women can receive up to 10 sessions of professional coaching over a 6-month period. Importantly, the LEADER Consortium supports the full cost of coaching for this period (max. $2,000).

To receive an electronic brochure providing more details about the program, e-mail: Dr. Stephanie Goodwin, Program Director for the LEADER Consortium at: leader_coaching@wright.edu. Please include the phrase “Request Coaching Brochure” in the subject line of your message.

Dr. Julie Jackson, Asst. Prof., Electrical & Computer Engineering, AFIT

What do you like most about being an engineer?

“I enjoy developing new methods and ideas. I enjoy being able to tease out important information from complicated signals...for analysts who need to make decisions.”

What would you say to women considering a career in your field?

“A strong mathematical background, basic computer programming skills, and technical writing skills are important for success. Designing algorithms to form images and extract information is very satisfying because you can generate visual results.”
Importantly, job satisfaction and intentions to quit were predicted by department climate for women, but not for men. That is, women who worked in departments where the climate was perceived to be unsupportive—i.e., climates in which they felt excluded, denied access to important resources, or experienced diminished autonomy in their roles—were most unsatisfied and willing to leave.

So, what can our STEM departments do? The first step toward improving the workplace climate is to understand the climate in your department. Do women and men feel equally welcomed, valued and supported? What are women’s concerns at your institution? Understanding where there are problems is necessary to identifying solutions. The LEADER Consortium collected data on workplace climate in STEM departments in 2009-10. Data on your institution’s climate can be found on the LEADER website (www.leader.edu) under the Research tab. Look for solutions to the chilly climate phenomenon in forthcoming issues of this newsletter.

Workplace climate is an important predictor of whether women leave science and engineering careers, evidenced once again by data from a University of Milwaukee survey of 3,700 women who received undergraduate degrees in engineering (Fouad & Singh, 2011). Overall, more than one-third of women surveyed either chose not to enter engineering or left the profession in less than 5 years. A third of those who left cited the workplace climate, their bosses or the workplace culture as reasons for leaving. These findings are consistent with gender differences in attrition in science and engineering departments; female faculty members leave their positions at significantly higher rates than do men (NSF, 2004). Attrition rates have been linked to workplace climate issues in empirical studies of STEM departments. STEM women often report feeling alienated, excluded and unwelcome in the academic workplace. For example, Callister (2006) found that the workplace climate was equally important to men and women in academic STEM departments, but STEM women were less satisfied with their jobs and reported stronger intentions to quit.

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