Spotlight on STEM Women:

Dr. Heidi Ries

Congratulations to Dr. Heidi Ries on her appointment as Interim Dean of the Graduate School of Engineering and Management at AFIT! Dr. Ries, Professor of Physics at AFIT, received her Ph.D. in Applied Physics from Old Dominion University in 1987. Before joining AFIT, she was on the faculty at Norfolk State University, where she was promoted to Professor in 1999. Dr. Ries is an accomplished scientist with expertise in materials science, spectroscopy, and radiation effects. An active academic leader, she previously held Director/Associate Director positions at the Applied Research Center (Newport News, VA) and the Center for Materials Research (Norfolk, VA), in addition to leadership roles in numerous professional societies. At AFIT, she has served as the Dean for Research since 2005, and led the way for gender equity as Co-PI for the LEADER Consortium from 2008 - 2013, stepping down from her Co-PI role to accept her new role as Interim Dean.

In response to her selection as the Interim Dean, we invited Dr. Ries to comment on her professional experiences and advancement:

Can you tell us more about your current role at AFIT?

“My current role is to facilitate the work of others by effectively navigating the bureaucracy, promoting appropriate academic standards, and communicating the value of the school’s educational and research contributions to the U.S. Air Force, sister services, Department of Defense, intelligence community, and the national STEM community.”

What do you like most about being a scientist?

“I enjoy encouraging other faculty members and identifying options to address the challenges they face; then seeing their professional growth and subsequent success.”

What advice would you give to women considering careers in your field?

“Two of my father’s female cousins were STEM faculty in Mathematics and Biology. Thanks to these wonderful women, I believed it was perfectly normal for women to have Ph.D.s and be university faculty members in STEM. Significant progress has been made toward providing a level playing field in the scientific community for women since I started my career. So, don’t let stories about the ‘bad old days’ deter you from pursuing your goals now!”

What are the most important steps you’ve taken to prepare yourself for a leadership role?

“The first, and most important, step was accepting an invitation from a senior faculty member to join a team pursuing an audacious goal (starting a research center)...planning a major initiative, and interfacing with administrative personnel gave me a broader perspective. I also joined key committees (e.g., assessment and strategic planning) and served on the Faculty Senate. These experiences allowed me to meet faculty from other departments and to develop administrative skills while serving the university.”

Any advice to other women interested in seeking leadership roles?

“Regardless of your religious preference, you should take a lesson from the Serenity Prayer: ‘God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, Courage to change the things I can change, And wisdom to know the difference.’ The lesson here is relevant to people in all walks of life. However, it is even more important for leaders, since on a daily basis they may be faced with choosing among courses of action from the available – but often less than ideal – options.”
**Slow Your Mind, Accelerate Your Achievement**

I imagine this title is somewhat perplexing. How can slowing down accelerate achievement? Today speed and the ability to multitask are veritably worshiped as attributes that everyone must have in order to succeed professionally and personally. As academics, the art of multitasking is ever more demanded. It’s not enough to be an amazing lecturer, you are expected to mentor students, support your department through service positions, bring in grants, hopefully discover something groundbreaking in your research and publish it in the most prestigious journals. The list does not stop there. You don’t escape being a human, having relationships and perhaps a family that also demand your energy. And let’s not forget that you come in a physical body that needs good nutrition, exercise and rest. And then there are pets, aging parents, etc. etc. You get the picture.

You are expected to attend to all these areas of your life and to do so with efficiency and grace. Very possibly you have expectations of yourself that are even more stringent than those others have of you.

These demands have characterized the lives of academics for many years now. However, like all professions, the pressures have become greater with the advancement of information technology. Our ability to access endless quantities of information at the touch of a button has increased the expectations of what we should be able to produce.

In a 2009 report by the University of California, San Diego titled “How Much Information? 2009 Report on American Consumers”, it was found that the average American sees 34 gigabytes of information per day plus 100,000 words.

How many times per day are we distracted by emails, texts, or search results that, while interesting, are not pertinent to the task at hand? Disturbingly, a 2005 British study found that these distractions can quickly lead to hours of unproductive time and diminished achievement.

**The Solution?**

Luckily, there are solutions to relieve the pressured situation described above. Try some or all of the suggestions below to begin slowing the demands on your brain and increasing your productivity.

- **Begin by clearing your work spaces.** This includes your office, your desktop and what you see on your computer screen when you are at work. A minimally cluttered work space minimizes distractions.

- **Turn off all alerts on your computer, laptop, telephone, ipad, etc.** Basically turn off anything that beeps or pops up! Instead, plan a couple of times per day when you will check for necessary communications. This allows you to be in charge of when you attend to communications, not your gadgets.

- **Create one place at work and one place at home where you will collect all incoming paper information.** If you’re a person to keep an inbox, throw mail onto your desktop, and papers on the passenger seat of the car, you are complicating your systems and wasting your own time. One place only will raise your efficiency.

- **Clear all email from your inbox!** Yes, you read correctly. This may seem impossible, especially if you have 3000 emails in it right now, but it is possible and will reduce the burden in your mental space tremendously. This can be done by creating a good filing system for storing needed email and deleting the rest. If you’d like more detail, read, “Getting Things Done” by David Allen.

- **Do the same with your paper filing system.** Minimize the amount of time spent looking for things. A good system will do this.

- **Create a 10 minute block each day and a 20 minute block each week to review your tasks and maintain your systems.**

Guest contributor Carmen Bolanos, Ph.D., CMC is a professional coach working within the LEADER Consortium to provide professional coaching to STEM women. E-mail: leader@wright.edu for more information on the Coaching Program, e-mail.
Keys to Academics’ Success: Diversity and Leadership

Register Now
Friday, April 5th, 2013
Wright State University, Nutter Center

More details & registration available at: http://events.signup4.net/diversity_leadership

The conference is open to all STEM & SBS Faculty, Dept Chairs & Administrators at AFIT, CSU, UD, and WSU.

Pamela McCauley Bush, Ph.D., C.P.E.
Associate Professor
Director of the Ergonomics Laboratory Industrial Engineering & Management Systems Department
University of Central Florida

Women in Leadership
12:00 PM - 1:30 PM

Using statistics and historical examples Dr. Bush will address the criticality of women seeking, accepting and excelling in leadership roles in the academy.

Dr. Pamela McCauley Bush, a nationally recognized speaker, entrepreneur, and tenured Professor of Industrial Engineering & Management Systems, is the author of Transforming Your STEM Career Through Leadership and Innovation.

Followed by a Panel Discussion on Pathways to Academic Leadership

More details & registration available at: http://events.signup4.net/diversity_leadership/
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March 2013

The Daily Grind in February

Spring Break Schedules
Feb 25 – Mar 1  WSU Spring Break
Feb 27 – Mar 4  UD Spring Mid-Term Break
Mar 18 – Mar 24  CSU Spring Break
Mar 27 – Apr 1  UD Easter Recess

The Daily Grind will take a coffee break in March while faculty at our partner institutions enjoy their spring and holiday breaks. Look for the coffee and conversation to flow again on your campus in April when we will be discussing paths to academic leadership.

April 2013

The Daily Grind in April

Pathways to Diversity in Academic Leadership
16  WSU—10-11am, Dixon Hearth Lounge, Student Union.
17  AFIT—2:30-3:30, Einstein’s Bagels, WPAFB.
18  CSU—10-11am, CENS Atrium
    UD—noon-1pm, Alumni Hall, Women’s Center Conference Room.

What does it mean to be an “academic leader?” In this final meeting of the year, we’ll consider how academics find their way to both formal and informal leadership roles in their institutions, their disciplines, and even their labs. Join the conversation about successful strategies for leading others in the academy this month at The Daily Grind.

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