

# All-male physics departments are not proof of bias against hiring women, study suggests

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Many U.S. universities have no women at all among their physics faculty, and when people talk about gender equity in physics, this fact is often cited as evidence of a hiring bias. But a new analysis by the American Institute of Physics (AIP) Statistical Research Center challenges this argument, finding that the existence of all-male departments is not necessarily evidence of a hiring bias.

By comparing the actual distribution of women in physics with simulated results, the report shows, if anything, that today there are more departments than expected with at least one female faculty member. It concludes that the real reason for the lack of women in many departments is the small number of women in physics overall—currently only 13 percent of all physics faculty nationwide.

"We do not mean to imply that there is no discrimination against women, that hostile environments do not exist, or that issues of gender representation do not need to be continually addressed in American universities," said Catherine O'Riordan, AIP vice president of Physics Resources. "But we should no longer point to the absence of a woman in a physics department as evidence of bias."

## Investigating Why Some Departments have no Female Faculty

"We wanted to evaluate whether the absence of female faculty members

in physics departments is an appropriate measure of women's progress in physics," said Susan White, research manager in the Statistical Research Center (SRC) at AIP, who conducted the study with Rachel Ivie, associate director of the SRC.

If a hiring bias did exist, White said, one would find women in fewer physics departments than would be expected if all women in the field were distributed randomly across the academic landscape. White and Ivie found, however, that more departments than expected have at least one woman. It follows that many female faculty members will be the only woman in their department.

While it is true that over one-third of physics departments have no women among their faculty, White points out that this is the result of the low number of women among physics faculty and the fact that many departments have fewer than five faculty members. Even if half of all faculty members were [women](#), she notes, we would still expect to find over 100 departments with either all-male or all-female faculty.

"We believe the issue of gender equity in physics is complex and nuanced," said Ivie, "It is unwise to try to simplify it by examining whether or not a department has a woman among its faculty."

**More information:** "Number of Women in Physics Departments: A Simulation Analysis": [www.aip.org/statistics/trends/facultytrends.html](http://www.aip.org/statistics/trends/facultytrends.html)

Provided by American Institute of Physics

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