

Report: MIT makes strides with women scientists

March 21 2011, By MARK PRATT , Associated Press

The Massachusetts Institute of Technology has succeeded in boosting the number of women on its science and engineering faculties and in making the university a friendlier and more supportive place to work in the decade since a pair of scathing reports on the status of women at the school, yet more remains to be done, according to an internal report released Monday.

The school found that the number of [women](#) on the science and engineering faculties combined has increased from 46, or about 7 percent of the total in 1995, to 112, or about 17 percent in 2011. Pay and the distribution of other resources are more equitable and more women are serving in senior administrative positions.

"I chaired the study 10 years ago for engineering, and if you had asked me then how much better I thought it could get for women faculty, I never would have thought that we would get this far in 10 years," Lorna Gibson, professor of materials science and engineering and chair of the School of Engineering study, said in a statement.

The report was a compilation of two separate surveys conducted with female faculty in the engineering and science schools. Both surveys had about a 90 percent voluntary participation rate.

MIT has also better addressed the issue of women professors trying to balance their careers with parenthood by improving and better publicizing family leave policies.

"We learned a great deal about the commonality of experience, and new problems that have surfaced, including the increasing number of dual-career couples and the challenges they face," said biology professor Hazel Sive, who chaired the School of Science's study.

Two reports released in 1999 and 2002 found MIT to be an often unwelcoming place for women. Women in those surveys showed concern about being marginalized, left out of the decision making processes within their departments, and in some cases, discriminated against.

"I am pleased that MIT has taken the initiative to increase the number of female faculty in science and engineering in the last decade, and considers the underrepresentation of women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics a serious issue," said Janet Bandows Koster, executive director of the Virginia-based Association for Women in Science.

"However, as their most recent report points out, greater numbers of women faculty alone will not necessarily solve the underlying problems caused by implicit gender bias,"

The MIT report said that among women faculty, "there is a strong sense of excitement about the intellectual atmosphere at MIT."

There were problems, including concerns over the perception that standards for hiring and promotion of women faculty are lower than for men.

The report concluded with several recommendations, including eliminating biases in hiring by training search committees to detect subtle discrimination in reference letters and the interview process, and better mentoring of junior faculty.

"Recurring themes in both of these reports reinforce the importance of our efforts to strengthen MIT's culture of inclusion, so that everyone at MIT can do his or her best work," President Susan Hockfield said in a preface to the report.

More information:

<http://web.mit.edu/newsoffice/images/documents/women-report-2011.pdf>

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Citation: Report: MIT makes strides with women scientists (2011, March 21) retrieved 21 September 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-03-mit-women-scientists.html>

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