

Site Visits: Assessing and Improving the Climate for Women in Physics

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Site Visits: Assessing and Improving the Climate for Women in Physics

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Abstract. The Site Visits: Assessing and Improving the Climate for Women in Physics workshop of the Third IUPAP International Conference on Women in Physics covered the strategies and experiences of the American Physical Society and the UK Institute of Physics in running site visit programs. A site visit typically consists of on-site interviews conducted by a small team of volunteers with a range of stakeholders, followed by feedback to the management committee. Presented herein are the recommendations resulting from the findings of the workshop participants for the IUPAP Working Group on Women in Physics and individual country women in physics groups for establishing site visit programs. Workshop participants discussed the similarities and differences between the UK and the USA experience and concluded that site visit programs are quite useful but must be adapted to the local academic structure.

Keywords: site visits, women in physics

PACS: 01.40.-d, 01.78.+p, 01.85.+f

Site visits—visits to places where physicists work—can be an important tool for improving the workplace environment for women. The Site Visits: Assessing and Improving the Climate for Women in Physics workshop of the Third IUPAP International Conference on Women in Physics consisted of presentations and plenary discussions about site visit programs in the United States and the UK.

The workshop sessions and their leaders were:

1. Report on the Site Visits Program of the United Kingdom—Helen Heath, University of Bristol, UK
2. Report on the Site Visits Program of the American Physical Society—Herman B. White, Fermilab, USA
3. The Changing Role of Women in Physics—Raynien Kwo, National Tsing Hua University, China-Taipei
4. Other Aspects of the Site Visits Program of the United Kingdom—Saher Ahmed, Institute of Physics, UK
5. Why Use Only Half The Brain?—Nutan Chandra, Jamshedpur Women's College, India
6. Baseline Study of Women in South Africa with Postgraduate Physics Degrees—Diane Grayson, University of Pretoria, South Africa

Only the American Physical Society and the UK's Institute of Physics have an established system of site visits. Setting up a structure and a procedure for site visits requires a host organization, human resources, and funds. In the model for site visits adopted by the USA and the UK, a team of women and men senior and junior physicists visits a physics department or research laboratory and interviews a variety of stakeholders, both women and men, including management, senior and junior academics, and students. Questionnaires are administered and analyzed by the team prior to the visit. Feedback is given to a management committee.

Two possible incentives for departments and laboratories to participate are: (1) requirements to comply with gender equity legislation and (2) status that might be accorded to workplaces with a positive working environment. For example, in the UK legal requirements for gender equity mean that it is in a physics department's interests to subscribe to the Institute of Physics's Juno Code of Conduct, which spells out aspects of a female-friendly workplace environment (which are also of benefit to males).

Workshop participants discussed the similarities and differences between the USA and UK experiences and concluded that site visit programs are quite useful but must be adapted to the local academic structure. In countries where the government conducts audits of higher education, the government should be requested by IUPAP country members' representatives to include aspects related to gender equity in audits of physics departments. IUPAP country members may be able to access government funding for starting up the site visits. Another important strategy is to include panel members at different career stages in the site visits program, e.g., senior academics and graduate students.

As a consequence of the Site Visits workshop we plan to make available a collection of international examples of best practices and recommendations for improving the number of women who become physicists, remain in physics, and are able to advance their physics careers, through the website of the IUPAP Working group on Women in Physics (<http://wgiwip.df.uba.ar/>).

Workshop participants identified the need to improve the working climate for women and men in physics, improve the participation of women in physics at all levels, and improve access to career information for women and men in physics. In order to address these needs the recommendations listed below were addressed to the International Union of Pure and Applied Physics General Assembly, held in Tokyo in October 2008.

Recommendation 1: IUPAP should recommend to country members the establishment of a site visit program, or to include in existing government evaluation visits to physics departments or research laboratories the issues of climate in the workplace and gender equity.

Recommendation 2: The IUPAP Working Group on Women in Physics should establish a Women in Physics wiki to enable easy access to resources, such as reports, surveys, programs, and job announcements.

Recommendation 3: Regional working groups or country working groups should compile and make data available on women in physics by department on a regular basis.

Recommendation 4: The IUPAP Working Group on Women in Physics should establish a place where women in physics can post information about themselves. This information can be used by conference organizers to invite speakers, for example, or by search committees to identify possible job applicants.

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