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UNH President Leads Effort To Support Women Faculty In The Sciences

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UNH President Leads Effort To Support Women Faculty In The Sciences
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September 14, 2009

DURHAM, N.H. – The University of New Hampshire recently received a three-year $1.3 million grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF) to support the advancement and leadership of women faculty in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) disciplines. This ADVANCE grant makes UNH part of a larger national effort to transform institutions of higher education in areas where women are traditionally underrepresented.

“Expanding opportunities for women in the sciences and engineering is a critical national need, as well as a major institutional priority for UNH,” said President Mark W. Huddleston, who is serving as the lead investigator on the grant. “And as the father of a daughter keenly pursuing mathematics and science courses in college, I have to say that ensuring that there are no barriers to young women entering these fields—and excelling in them—is a personal commitment as well. The technological challenges we face in the 21st century are so daunting that we must enlist all of our talent and creative energy—from men AND women—in finding appropriate solutions.”

Since 2001, the National Science Foundation has invested more than $135 million to support ADVANCE projects at more than 100 institutions of higher education. UNH was one of 10 selected from 55 proposals submitted in this round and received the largest of the awards. While nationally women now earn 45 percent of all doctoral degrees and make up 30 percent of the faculty among all higher education institutions, they continue to be underrepresented in the majority of STEM disciplines.

The overarching goal of UNH’s ADVANCE program is to support the recruitment, retention, and advancement of women faculty in the STEM disciplines. Specific implementation strategies include professional development programs, incentives for participation in national leadership positions and grants to build partnerships that advance STEM teaching and scholarship. This program is part of larger UNH efforts housed in the Joan and James Leitzel Center for Mathematics, Science and Engineering Education that bring cutting edge knowledge into public school classrooms, focus on the recruitment and retention of undergraduate students into STEM disciplines, build partnerships with community colleges, and support graduate students in STEM areas who seek to partner with middle and high school teachers and students.

The goals of UNH’s NSF proposal were developed as a direct result of a survey given to all faculty at UNH in 2008. “The results of the survey gave us specific areas to focus on,” said ADVANCE program director Ruth Varner, a research faculty member in the university’s Institute for the Study of Earth, Oceans and Space (EOS), who also coordinates the environmental science program.

“It’s so important to our success that we not only have a commitment from the highest level of the institution but that we listened – and are responding – to what the faculty want and need,” said Karen Graham, director of the Leitzel Center and chair of the UNH ADVANCE leadership team. “Women represent approximately 50 percent of the world’s population and...
ensuring their science literacy begins at an early age, and is supported through all stages of academic development, is crucial.”

UNH’s ADVANCE proposal, submitted in February of this year, is the result of a collaboration led by President Huddleston and a team of faculty and administrators from across the university: Karen Graham (College of Engineering and Physical Sciences and the Leitzel Center), Julie Bryce (CEPS), Ruth Varner (CEPS and EOS), Julie Williams and Wanda Mitchell (Provost’s Office), Anita Klein (College of Life Sciences and Agriculture), Christine Shea (Whittemore School of Business and Economics), Janet Campbell (Research Office and EOS), Diane Foster (CEPS), Gale Carey (COLSA), Rebecca Glauber (College of Liberal Arts), Jennifer Jacobs (CEPS), and Tom Brady (COLSA).

Managed out of UNH’s Leitzel Center for Mathematics, Science and Engineering Education, the grant is one in a series of ongoing efforts to get – and keep – women of all ages, interested and involved in the sciences.

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling 11,800 undergraduate and 2,400 graduate students.

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