

Women in Engineering

Professor's research explores student perspectives

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DIANE SILVA PIMENTEL

Diane Silva Pimentel, assistant professor of education, is delving into questions about gender and the decision not only to study engineering but also to remain in the field.

Pimentel shared her data from interviews with 27 women who spoke about their experiences as undergraduate engineering majors at UNH in her recent brown bag lecture, "Gender Matters: Female Student Perspectives and Experiences Related to the Study of Engineering."

Speaking to a full house of attendees in Morrill Hall as part of the Educational Research and Practice Lecture Series, Pimentel explained how the data she gathered can be challenging to report out. There are many stories that illustrate the specific experiences of women in engineering, she explained, and in drawing conclusions, one of her goals is to honor those individual experiences.

Discussing the tensions that exist for women who are participating in male-dominated engineering fields, Pimentel also examined ideas to help increase female students' interest and persistence in these fields.

Pimentel's work will be presented at the American Educational Research Association Conference in the spring.

"I am also working on a manuscript for submission to one of the education journals," Pimentel said, adding she also plans to share her findings with other educators.

"A great deal of power is to be found in the way stories are told about things," she noted.

For example, in the College of Engineering and Physical Sciences, 20 percent of students are female, and that can prompt responses from faculty or fellow students

such as, “You’re awesome because you’re the minority.” However, Pimentel found indications in her research of how that perspective can actually put more pressure on women who are in the minority for engineering majors.

“There are all types of women in engineering,” she said, adding that if the dialogue around women in the field reflected that reality, “more girls would consider pursuing careers in engineering.”

- WRITTEN BY:

[Jennifer Saunders](#) | Communications and Public Affairs
| jennifer.saunders@unh.edu | 603-862-3585

RESEARCH



University of New Hampshire

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