

### *Applying Title IX to STEM Disciplines*

The Association for Women in Science (AWIS), a national nonprofit organization that advocates for the interests of women in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), strongly affirms the need for government enforcement of and university compliance with the propositions of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. Under the law, "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance."

As stated, Title IX requires all educational programs that receive federal funding to provide equal opportunities for males and females; however, many believe it only applies to athletic programs, where it has made the highest profile impact by reducing gender discrimination practices that have traditionally limited the participation of women in intercollegiate and interscholastic sports. But Title IX, which applies to gender inequities in all aspects of academics, not just sports, has not yet realized its full promise. The playing field is not yet level even in athletics, and there remain clear inequities in such critical areas as the STEM disciplines.

#### **Academic Institution Compliance with Title IX**

Although nearly 60 percent of all undergraduate students and almost half of all masters, doctoral, law and medical students are now women, the number of women earning bachelor's and advanced degrees in many STEM disciplines remains disproportionately small compared to their male counterparts. This is in large part due to numerous barriers, including the paucity of female faculty, and therefore female role models in these STEM fields. In 2004, a report released by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) stressed the need for applying Title IX to STEM fields to address the continuing disparity. The report indicated that academic institutions typically meet only one of the requirements under Title IX, which is providing assurance to federal granting agencies that their programs and activities comply with Title IX. Furthermore, the report revealed that a large proportion of students and faculty do not know that Title IX applies to academic programs beyond athletics, while those who do know fear retaliation for filing complaints.

Academic institutions can establish a climate that ensures that the representation of women in STEM disciplines is purely a result of the personal interests of women and not due to environmental factors discouraging them from entering or remaining in these fields. In order to achieve this goal, federal, state, and local government enforcement and academic institution compliance with Title IX is vital. *AWIS strongly recommends that academic institutions fulfill all their obligations under Title IX by:*

- Appointing at least one employee to coordinate Title IX compliance efforts by examining institutional policies, procedures and practices for violations of Title IX, including gender bias, and remedying any violations that are found.
- Establishing a Title IX grievance procedure and assuring that constituencies, including faculty and students, are made aware of the procedure and that the procedure is consistently and effectively implemented.
- Disseminating information regarding the institution's Title IX nondiscrimination policy to the public.

- 
- Eliminating or modifying policies, practices or decisions that limit educational opportunities for women.
  - Preventing harassment and other forms of discrimination by individuals, addressing accusations and acting to remedy the problem immediately and effectively.
  - Implementing programs designed to educate students and faculty about their rights and obligations under Title IX, and how to enforce those rights.

#### **Federal Agency Enforcement of Title IX**

The GAO Report also revealed that federal funding agencies that financially support STEM research in higher education do not routinely verify whether recipient institutions are fulfilling their monitoring and enforcement obligations under Title IX. *AWIS urges federal funding agencies to make sure that academic institutions are in fact fulfilling their obligations under Title IX by:*

- Ensuring that agencies take the steps necessary to proactively enforce Title IX and that their enforcement policies are consistently implemented in all states.
- Requiring academic institutions to compile and report annual evidence of their compliance with Title IX within their academic programs and activities; this includes any modifications to policies and practices that do not or may not meet the requirements of the Title IX regulations plus any remedial steps taken; these data must be available to federal granting agencies and the public.
- Providing resources, upon request, to support institutional compliance efforts.

#### **References**

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. 20 U.S.C. 1681-1688 (2000).

U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Women's Participation in the Sciences Has Increased, but Agencies Need to Do More to Ensure Compliance with Title IX*, GAO-04-639 (Washington, DC: Government Accountability Office, 2004).