

Women in Biomedical Careers



NIH **U**pdates on Women in Science News for Yo**U** to Use!

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NIH Updates on Women in Science is brought to you by the [NIH Working Group on Women in Biomedical Careers](#). We encourage you to forward this e-newsletter to colleagues who may find it of interest.

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NIH Working Group Pays Tribute to Outgoing NIH Director

The NIH Working Group on Women in Biomedical Careers acknowledged the leadership of outgoing NIH Director, Elias A. Zerhouni, M.D., in challenging the NIH to develop innovative strategies and tangible actions to promote the advancement of women in biomedical research careers. Dr. Zerhouni created the Working Group in January 2007 to respond to the National Academies report, *Beyond Bias and Barriers: Fulfilling the Potential of Women in Academic Science and Engineering*, and to give attention to the concerns of women scientists, consider the broader context of girls and women in science, and provide special attention to issues of barriers, minority women scientists, and mentoring. An interim report on the progress and tangible actions of the Subcommittees is available online.

[Read more](#)

[Letter of Tribute](#)

[Interim Report on Progress and Tangible Actions](#)

AAMC Projects Physician Supply and Demand, and Reports on Women in US Academic Medicine

The Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) Center for Workforce Studies released a comprehensive report projecting the supply and demand of physicians through 2025 under different scenarios. Taking into account the changing demographics of physicians, the report noted that the average number of patient care hours worked per physician per year in 2025 is likely to be 3.5% less than the current average, largely from the increased age of practicing physicians and the increasing number of female physicians who are more likely to work part-time, take extended leave, and value time for family and personal life than their male counterparts.

The expected increase in female physicians is supported by data from the recently released AAMC 2007-2008 Women in US Academic Medicine Statistics and Benchmarking Report, which showed that 49% of medical school enrollees and 45% of residents and fellows were women, an increase from 2002-2003 levels of 47% and 38%, respectively. Furthermore, the Statistics and Benchmarking Report analyzed demographics of medical school faculty, finding that 34% were women, and 42% of new hires were women. Over half of the women faculty were at the rank of assistant professor, and 40% of all assistant professors were women. At the senior levels, representation of women has increased in recent years. In 2007-2008, 12% of department chairs were women, and 10% of medical school deans were women (in contrast to 9% and 8% in 2002-2003, respectively). Women faculty have become more diverse since 1998 when 76% of women faculty identified themselves as white; in 2007-2008, 64% of women identified themselves as white, 14% as Asian, and 4% as African-American.

Finally, the AAMC also released an Analysis in Brief, "Differences in US Medical School Faculty Job Satisfaction by Gender," which found that women faculty are less satisfied than men faculty, by several measures. For example, women were less satisfied with the sense of belonging in their department (60% versus 68%), less apt to agree that their workplace culture cultivated a supportive

climate for balancing home with work responsibilities (33% versus 39%), and less likely to agree that their workplace cultivated collegiality (55% versus 60%). Regarding compensation, women were significantly less likely to be satisfied with their overall compensation, their compensation compared to other colleagues in the department, and their compensation compared to colleagues in other departments (at differences ranging from 6 to 12 percentage points). The Analysis in Brief suggested that medical school administrators and leaders use this data to understand factors that might contribute to retention of faculty.

[The Complexities of Physician Supply and Demand: Projections Through 2025](#)

[Women in US Academic Medicine: Statistics and Benchmarking Report, 2007-2008](#)

[Differences in US Medical School Faculty Job Satisfaction by Gender](#)

International Discussion on Being a Mother While Pursing a Scientific Research Career

Postdoctoral Fellow Amanda Goh, who was [educated in the United States](#), has been chronicling her postdoctoral experience in Singapore in *Nature's* "Postdoc Journal." In October, she announced that she was expecting a baby, and noted the tax breaks and additional days of childcare that are provided by the Singapore government to boost the country's declining birthrate. However, she commented on the work culture in scientific research, remarking that productivity is "inevitably affected by parenthood," and suggested that being successful as a researcher could "come at the cost of one's marriage." In response, researchers from the University of Sussex commented that providing more child-care facilities is not enough to make the career structure more family-friendly. They proposed cultural changes (such as part-time appointments, promoting quality over quantity, and appropriately considering career breaks when judging candidates for promotions) that would benefit men as well as women. In concluding their letter, they boldly remarked that "it could be regarded as unethical to encourage young women to embark on a career that they are unlikely to wish to continue beyond the age of 30." This letter prompted further correspondence on the issue, with a female researcher from Australia sharing her story of being successful in a male-dominated field, which she credits (in some part) to her ability to multitask that was honed by motherhood. In addition, she noted that a large part of her success was due to "the enduring support" of her partner.

[The Coming Challenge \(POSTDOC JOURNAL\)](#)

[Childcare Not Enough to Make a Science Career Family-Friendly \(CORRESPONDENCE\)](#)

[Research Rewards Are Worth the Effort for Multitasking Mothers \(CORRESPONDENCE\)](#)

Successful Senior Women Receive Spousal Support From Husbands

Qualitative research resulted published in the *Journal of Family Issues* found that 20 high-achieving women received spousal support, which buffers the stressor-strain relationship and alleviates work-

life conflict. The 28 supportive behaviors and attitudes that were exhibited by the husbands were organized into six categories: emotional support, help with household, help with family members, career support, esteem support, and husband's career/lifestyle choices. The researchers concluded that the women valued support that affirmed their autonomy and did not value support that was patriarchal and domineering. The 20 women in this study included three in higher education, two in technology, and two in government; six of the women held doctoral degrees. The researchers suggested that further research should be conducted on couples that differ from the sample used in this study, which was heterosexual, white, and had an average age of 50 years.

[The Man Behind the Woman: A Qualitative Study of the Spousal Support Received and Valued by Executive Women](#)

[News Article: Women Husbanding Career Help at Home](#)

The New York Times Highlights Decline of Women in Computer Science

A recent article in the *New York Times*, "What Has Driven Women Out of Computer Science?" highlighted the dearth of women in computer science, noting that the percentage of women earning undergraduate degrees in computer science declined from 28% in 2002 to 22% in 2005. The author noted that the lack of women in computer science has remained for several decades, even while the proportion of women in other science and engineering fields has been increasing. A possible reason for the decrease of women could be the "male subculture of action gaming," mentioned by two professors interviewed in the article. Another professor noted the important distinction that should be made between women choosing not to study computer science, and women being held back from studying computer science because of artificial barriers.

[Read more](#)

Oocyte Cryopreservation Thought by Some to be a Solution to the Dual Challenge of Motherhood and Academic Careers

In *Chronicle Careers*, Mary Ann Mason showcased the considerations faced by young women who are planning academic careers. She related the stories of women M.B.A. students, who seemed to agree that freezing their eggs was a viable way to plan for a family at a later point in time, when their careers were going well. Further, she highlighted data from the 2000 census, showing that women in academia have fewer children than women in all other professional fields, including those careers often pursued by M.B.A. recipients. These data showed that only 44% of the female tenured professors are married with children (compared to 70% for males), and that 26% of tenured women are single (compared to 11% of tenured men who are single). In another *Chronicle Careers* article, "[Do Babies Matter in Science?](#)", Mary Ann Mason presented similar data on academic science, showing that 50% of female tenured professors are married with children, compared to 72% for males. In such a culture, she concludes that "Freezing your eggs is not a happy outcome. It's a desperate personal effort to solve a problem that should be tackled by a university culture frozen in time."

Examples of Change in the Climate at Two Universities

The University of Texas at Austin (UT Austin) is one university that responded to national concerns about gender equity in academia, especially those outlined in the National Academies report, [Beyond Bias and Barriers: Fulfilling the Potential of Women in Academic Science and Engineering](#). In this case, a new provost, with the support of a new president, convened a Gender Equity Task Force to "assess the status of women faculty members" and identify "strategies to insure professional success of both men and women faculty members." On October 27, 2008, the [Task Force released an extensive report with findings and recommendations](#). Some of the significant findings of the report were (1) less female faculty at UT Austin compared to other doctoral institutions, (2) female faculty lagging significantly behind male faculty in promotion rates and time to promotion, and (3) female faculty members compensated less than male faculty members of the same rank and in the same field. The Task Force recommended that the provost "develop and enact a 5-10 year gender equity plan to reduce or eliminate faculty gender inequity - specifically with respect to hiring, promotion, salaries, and governance."

At Stanford University, the [Provost's Advisory Committee on the Status of Women Faculty](#) prepared a report with recommendations to ensure gender equity in May 2004. In 2005, Stanford introduced a policy to provide female graduate students with "an academic accommodation period" of up to two academic quarters, which was adopted two months after the Stanford Chemistry Department adopted a policy to provide 12 weeks of support for pregnant graduate students. According to the *Stanford Report*, the Chemistry Department Chair has taken several actions to ensure that the department is family-friendly, including providing an office (and later, a permanent "special-purpose space") for use as a lactation room. For postdoctoral scholars, [the university provides up to six weeks of maternity leave without pay](#). Yet, according to the [2008 Postdoc Survey Results of the Stanford University Postdoctoral Association](#), 41% of postdoctoral scholars have delayed having children because they cannot afford the financial cost.

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