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Date:8/3/2012 **UTPA plans to address women faculty issue**

EDINBURG, September 12 - University of Texas-Pan American officials acknowledged Tuesday that the university has a dismal record when it comes to recruiting and retaining women professors in the STEM fields.

Currently, women represent only 18 percent of all faculty in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics at UTPA. The national average is 28 percent. Women represent only 14 percent of UTPA's tenured and tenure-track positions. And, at the senior faculty level, only two of 33 full professors in the STEM fields are women.

"In terms of leadership, the share of STEM women in chair, associate dean or dean positions is zero percent with no women being placed at those levels," said Dr. Ala Qubbaj, vice provost for faculty affairs.

"We have a long way to go (towards attracting more women professors in the STEM fields)," Havidan Rodriguez, provost and vice president for academic affairs at UTPA, told the Guardian.

Rodriguez and Qubbaj spoke with reporters on Tuesday as UTPA held a news conference to announce a \$3.1 million grant from the National Science Foundation's ADVANCE Program. With the money, UTPA will be able to recruit and retain more women faculty members, especially Latinas, in the STEM fields.



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The representation of all Hispanic faculty in STEM at UTPA is only 11 percent. The hope is new faculty members, recruited with the NSF funding, will become role models so that more Latina students take STEM courses at UTPA and launch a career in STEM-related industries.

“Research has shown that female representation and advancement in academic STEM positions are affected by many external factors that are unrelated to their ability, interest and technical skills,” said Rodriguez, at the news conference.

“This project will address faculty recruitment and advancement, policy and climate, education and empowerment and social science research that is intended to broaden and deepen the knowledge base related to issues that hinder the success of women, particularly Latinas in the STEM fields.”

Rodriguez said the five year plan is to double to current number of STEM women faculty. This will be done by increasing the number of assistant professors by 50 percent, doubling the number of female associate professors and tripling the number of female full professors. UTPA also plans to double the number of Hispanic STEM faculty and place female faculty members in leadership positions, such as chair and/or associate dean.

Rodriguez was asked by a reporter how UTPA achieved such a dismal record in recruiting and retaining women faculty members in the first place. He danced around the question.

Dr. Cristina Villalobos is an associate professor department of mathematics and director of the Center for Excellence in STEM at UTPA. She said the NSF’s ADVANCE grant is a highly coveted award. “I am glad UTPA took the initial steps to try to remedy this problem of the lack of women representation in the STEM academic disciplines,” she said.

Villalobos said that in UTPA’s department of mathematics, only five of the 35 faculty members are women. Only two of the 35 are Latinos and they both happen to be women, she said. “I can certainly speak to the numbers of under-representation in the STEM fields,” Villalobos said.

Villalobos said that with the NSF grant, UTPA would be promoting a “positive workplace climate” and helping to “institutionalize policies and practices to attract more women, especially women, in the STEM fields.” This will be done, in part, by revising the maternity/paternity leave, sick leave, tenure and workload practices.

To promote campus awareness of the new plans, and to encourage faculty and administrators to address gender and work-life issues, an ADVANCE Distinguished Speaker Series will be instituted. At the same time, UTPA President Robert S. Nelsen will chair an external advisory committee to provide feedback and direction on the project. This committee will include national experts.

“Increasing the number of Hispanic women who will serve as role models for our students is critical for the nation’s future,” Nelsen said, in a news release announcing the NSF ADVANCE grant. “I am incredibly proud of the team at Pan Am that is turning this necessity into reality. Pan Am is doing the right thing.”

For more information on the NSF ADVANCE program, go to: www.nsf.gov/advance

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