



**Report on Gender Awareness Component  
Fall, 2007**

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## Introduction and Overview

### Initial Research

The purpose of the Gender Awareness component of the ACES project is to introduce to students research that indicates gender discrepancies in the treatment of men and women in academia and the work world that lead to the devaluation of women's accomplishments and fewer benefits and rewards extended to professional women, especially in academia.

Our task was challenging, since there was no past experience at CWRU on bringing brief awareness training programs that touch upon controversial or sensitive student-faculty life issues to the classroom. Therefore we decided that our methodological approach would be an "action learning" method. We designed the training during each phase based on our understanding of situations as well as feedback/input from key stakeholders involved (ACES PI Team, faculty, students, student leaders, guest speakers, our team). We sought and reflected upon new shared learning and the feedback we got during and after each phase implementation. Modifications in design were based on these ongoing analyses. We did not mind "throwing off" modules or methods that seemed not to work, with particular attention to student responses.

We began this project with a thorough review of the literature, starting with the citations in Virginia Valien's *Why So Slow?* Then we worked to construct a curriculum for presenting this material that would take into account the culture at CWRU and the limited time that we would likely be given to introduce the material to any one group of students.

### Design Options

Since the initial NSF proposal suggested that the "gender awareness training" be introduced in classrooms, during class time, which is how we first proceeded. We considered a variety of methods for introducing the material, including skits by drama students followed by a discussion, a showing of "A Tale of O" by Rosebeth Moss Kanter, and the use of PowerPoint. We also spent considerable time considering the proportion of emphasis to be spent on reporting research study findings, gender schema theory, and examples for discussion.

Over time, we modified our approaches, moving from classroom presentations to presentations outside of class, mostly to graduate students, and linked to career-related speakers and information. We developed co-sponsorships with the CWRU Career Center, deans' offices, and various graduate student groups. This strategy has met with great success, as measured in student evaluations.

## Implementation

### **Phase I (pilot): Methods: classroom presentations, drama**

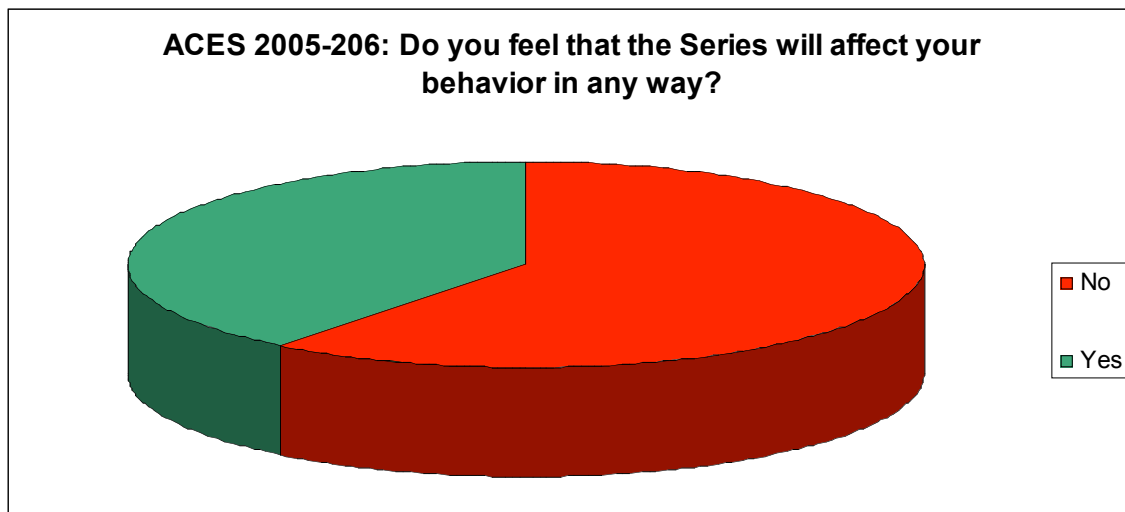
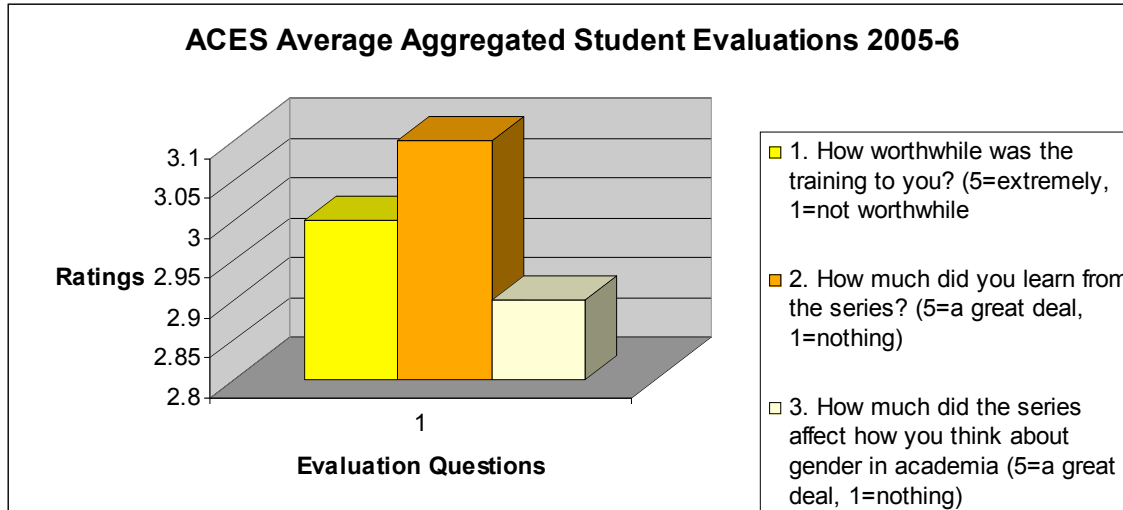
In the pilot semester, we began with dramatic presentations by students followed by discussion, a video showing with discussion and a PowerPoint. Our presentations were in both large and small undergraduate classes. The initial trials were disappointing. The science students were not inclined to respond to the dramatic presentations, were very skeptical of the research findings, and in general were not open to discussion. This attitudinal barrier was very often matched by that of their professors, who resented our taking up valuable class time, were openly hostile to the message and in general communicated these attitudes to students.

### **Phase II: Methods: Lectures on gender incorporating research on gender and focused on graduate student concerns – Evaluations**

In the second year we continued to visit classes, but with a streamlined curriculum. Available data from the period 2005-2006 come mainly from presentations given to four departments: Biomedical Engineering, Geology, Chemical Engineering and Political Science. In the three main evaluation questions, using a numerical Likert scale 1-5 (5 representing the highest and 1 the lowest pole of this scale), ratings were mediocre (reaching in average three from a five point Likert scale). This result was not satisfactory to us. Specifically, the evaluations are as follows:

- Question: “How worthwhile was the training?” For this question, the average rating given by all the compiled evaluations of all the students in the four departments from which we have available quantitative feedback was 3.
- Question: “How much did you learn from the series?” This question received an average rating of 3.1
- Question: “How much did the series affect how you think about gender in academia” This question received the lowest total average of 2.9.
- Question: “Do you think that the series will influence your behavior in the future in any way?” The majority responded in the negative to this question. Fifty-eight percent of the students answered “no” and 42 percent “yes.”

The following graphs summarize the aggregated evaluations from the period 2005-2006 from the four departments where quantitative data was available.



### **Phase III – New Direction - Campus Organizing and Collaboration**

Our experience of phases I and II led us to re-consider the degree of readiness and openness to the culture of the departments and the institution to the work we are doing. We changed strategies in three significant ways. We embedded the training into a variety of “series” designed to benefit student careers, took the training outside of the classroom and endeavored to recruit student associations as allies/co-sponsors of the training.

#### **Increased involvement and empowerment of students in carrying this forward – program became less of a “top-down” initiative**

- Focus on initiating early meetings for creating buy-in from representative student leaders and student organizations, by-passing department chairs
- “Entrepreneurial” approach, beginning with more “friendly” departments, or where we have faculty and students open to our ideas.

**Increased “customer service” to students and trust for career-related insights via the training** (especially in graduates). We accomplished this through our partnership with the Career Center and our development of several carefully constructed series of three sessions each. Each series included, in addition to one gender awareness lecture/discussion, a talk by a successful woman scientist from the corporate world discussing diversity and a panel of respected faculty and administrators.

**Change in Goals and Expectations** We cannot yet hope to have a large impact on action by students in STEM fields regarding gender equity issues. Although this is desirable, a more realistic goal is to focus primarily on change in student awareness and attitudes that allow gender equity issues to be “part of the conversation” among students.

- Presentations focus on building consensus regarding data that demonstrate that problems exist, prior to any focus on increasing insights as to why the problems are manifested. Our presentation is primarily focused on research evidence, since we learned that students at CASE actually value data and research driven presentations
- An experiential learning component, namely the panels and expert speakers, is holistically related to our presentations.

### **Phase III Evaluation Summary**

Overall, objectives of this phase of training have been met. There was clear and solid progress in terms of the reputation of our work among student groups in STEM fields and we have moved this ACES component forward, despite limitations in the budget, limited readiness in our audiences and other organizational challenges. The third phase of the program was accompanied by positive quantitative and qualitative evaluations from the groups that received training.

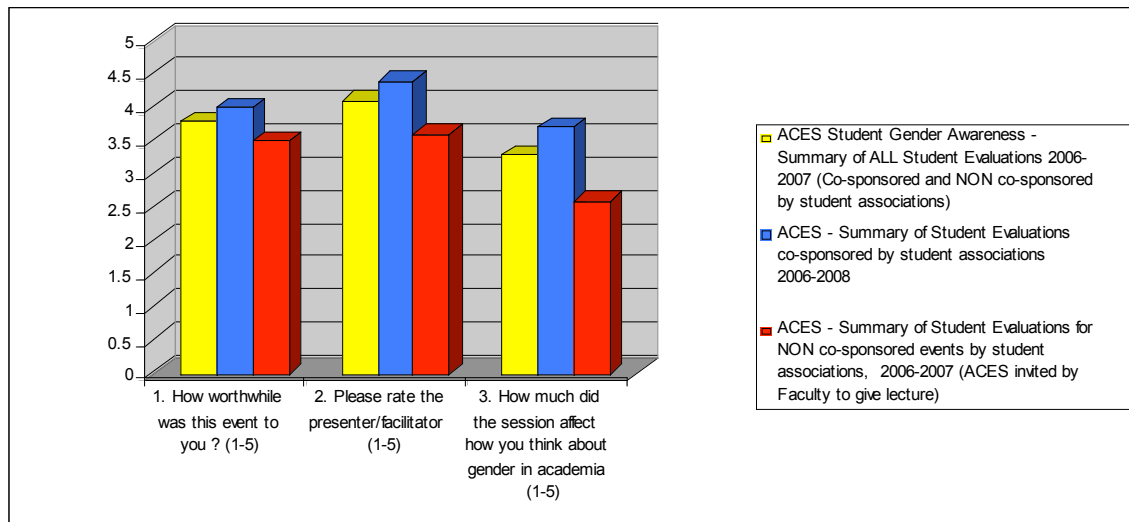
In the three main evaluation questions, using the same numerical Likert scale 1-5 used in Phase II (5 representing the highest and 1 the lowest pole of this scale), the following average ratings were reached:

- For the question on “how worthwhile the training is” the average rating given by all the compiled evaluations of all the student groups who attended the events was 3.8. It is worth noting that when we calculated the evaluations only for the ACES mini series for student groups where student associations – leaders co-sponsored our series, the average evaluation for this question was 4, while for the training that took place following an “opportunity” such as invitation by a faculty member to host our mini-series (but little or no student involvement) the rating drops to 3.5.
- Compiled average evaluation for all the presenters was 4.1. The compiled evaluations received from groups where student associations and leaders co-sponsored and co-led our effort received 4.4, while for the training that took place following an “opportunity” such as invitation by a faculty member to host our mini-

series (but little or no student involvement) the rating for this question drops to 3.6.

- Compiled average evaluation for “how much the ACES series affects how the students think about gender in academia” was the lowest evaluated question, with total average of 3.3. This finding supports our change in objectives for this phase of training, emphasizing a focus on increasing awareness. The compiled evaluations received from groups where student associations and leaders co-sponsored and co-led our effort received raises to 3.7, while for the training that took place following an “opportunity” such as invitation by a faculty member to host our mini-series (but little or no student involvement) the rating for this question drops to 2.6.

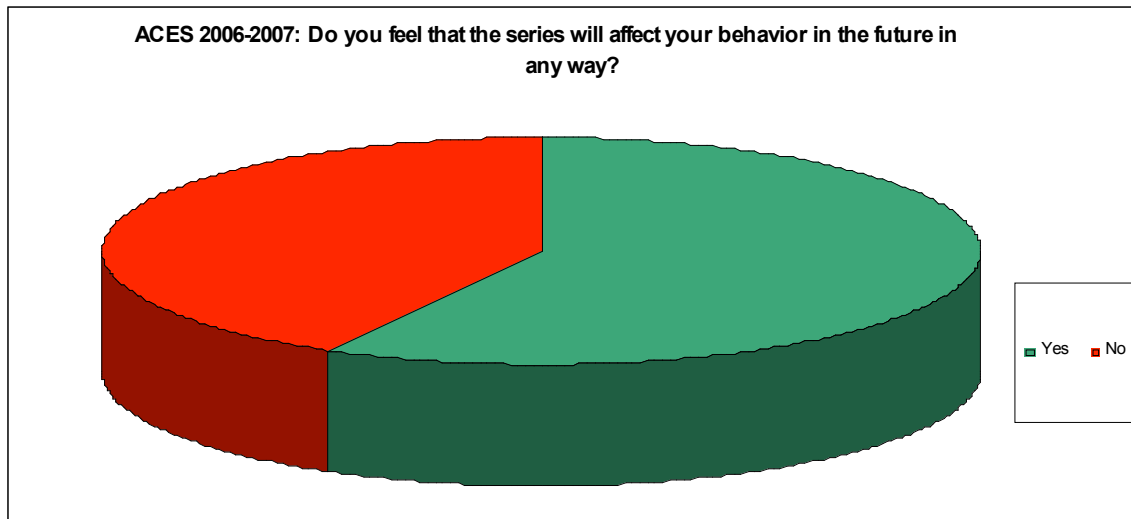
The above aggregated evaluations are presented in the following graphs (insert).



Our evaluation questions also contained two qualitative information questions. Students were asked if “they feel that the series will influence their future behavior in any way”. Compiled average evaluation for this question from all the student groups who received the ACES student training during the period 2006-2007, shows the majority of the students anticipated an impact in future behavior after having attended the series. Specifically, 58% of the students gave a positive response (Yes) to this question, while 42% of the students responded negatively (No). This information is summarized in the pie chart below.

As to qualitative comments on what was the specific impact of the series for each student (if any), students that had said that they anticipate that the series will affect future behavior mainly commented that it raised awareness as well as their ability to observe and identify gender-biased interactions in situations (in both the interactions with faculty and other students, as well in the work world) which previously would have been perceived as gender-neutral. Fewer students also shared readiness to

act in a way that promotes gender equity at CWRU towards female faculty and in interactions among students.



In contrast to the above positive evaluation of the third phase, there is also a critical aspect in it. Attendance at voluntary sessions cannot always be predicted. Results show higher attendance when we were organizing departmental wide programs, focusing exclusively in one department and student group, rather than trying to create a school-wide event. As mentioned, the attendance at the Case School of Engineering series was much lower than the series directed at particular departmental graduate student groups. This may be due to the fact that for school-wide events, there is no clear leadership and co-sponsorship by one or two student associations and some of these associations are not necessarily supportive of one another. For example, the ACES departmental mini-series for the departments of Physics and Macromolecular Science and Engineering each had an attendance of approximately 20 students at each of the events. In contrast, the ACES series for the entire School of Engineering attracted only 10 students and all of them female undergraduate students.

Our cooperative ventures with the Career Center and the Graduate Student Senate during the fall of 2006 had approximately 20 students attending each of the three events of the series.

## Conclusion

We have reached a point in our three-year efforts at which we are comfortable with the career-related series in schools, with co-sponsorships and presentations conducted outside of classes. The evaluations have improved and, considering the still-limited time we have to allot to this training for each group, it is possible that the ratings will not rise. Also, timing and co-sponsorships do not always guarantee good attendance. Many variables intervene, including time constraints for students, other commitments, and the

cohesiveness of particular student organizations. That said, even events with small groups were more highly rated by the participants this year than they have in the past. Overall, we are pleased with our progress.

### **Post Script**

Since this report was completed, we attempted to conduct a school-wide series in the Weatherhead School of Management, starting with a panel of women CEO's who are members of the school's visiting committee. In spite of extensive advertising, co-sponsorship by a variety of student organizations and Dean Reddy, the panel presentation was very poorly attended. The other two sessions were cancelled in anticipation of a repeat performance.

The WSOM outcome is congruent with our comments above about the relative success of department specific events versus those that are school-wide. As mentioned, for example, the school-wide event at the School of Engineering had fewer attendees than those coordinated with specific departments. We tried to prevent a similar outcome at WSOM via extensive organizational efforts with student constituencies. What we did not anticipate is the apparent reluctance of Weatherhead students to attend group events in general. We understand that during this past semester (fall, 2007) several Weatherhead events focused on issues intersecting business and society have met similar fates. Thus, we conclude that the Weatherhead School of Management provides different challenges to us in pursuing our goals.

### **Recommendations**

The gender awareness training was most successful when specifically combined with career planning topics and when department level graduate student groups and/or groups with a solid constituency, such as the graduate student senate, were integrally involved with the planning. We thus recommend that gender awareness training follow this model. It is not feasible for someone to be given this assignment full-time but instead that it be included among the programs promoted and offered in the Flora Stone Mather Center for Women. We recommend that the goals for this program be:

- Proactive work in enlisting graduate student groups to work on the development of a series that is particularly designed to serve their interests, with one series, consisting of two to three sessions, planned for each semester
- The development of promotional materials that can be circulated to STEM departments offering various options for a series.
- Programs offered in collaboration with the Career Center, Dean's offices, and department chairs.
- Programs "endorsed" by the Provost's office.