Overstaying our Welcome: On the Rise of Women’s Seniority in the Academy

Tricia Stadnyk¹

¹University of Calgary Schulich School of Engineering

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Abstract

Issues surrounding gender equality are – and should be - front and centre in the water resources community, and other STEM fields. Very necessarily, the focus tends to remain on recruitment and inclusivity offering support for students and early career academics. The leaky pipeline concept used to describe the incremental loss of women from STEM fields with career duration results in a disproportionate loss of women, creating a parallel problem where highly qualified, top tier academics are disproportionately lost from the system after significant financial and personnel investment by institutions is made. Ultimately, the leaky pipeline undermines the extensive investment of the hydrology and other STEM communities in equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility (EDIA) recruitment and retention programs by cutting short career ambitions and the trajectories of diverse top performing individuals, resulting in no net benefit of EDIA policy investments. Addressing this critical gender gap requires the attention and support of the hydrology community of practice with specific focus on generating opportunities for advancement, confronting systemic and structural biases, and improving education around allyship. Institutions and professional organizations need to consciously grow diversity in leadership and recognize and outwardly manage the perception of academic excellence around slow research and education that attracts increased diversity. Supporting allyship, reducing competitiveness among community members, and reinforcing collaboration will not only attract, but retain, a higher proportion of diversity in the hydrology community, academia, and STEM professions in general. It is time for the water resources (and other STEM) communities to demand broader accountability and recognition of the barriers to women, implement and reward more diverse definitions of research excellence, and offer allyship training to the community of practice at large.

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