Improving the Gender Climate at Sea

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The Committee

MIT/WHOI Joint Program Gender Equity ad hoc Committee for Research Cruise and Field Program Activities was formed at the request of WHOI’s President/Director and MIT’s Provost.

Charge of Committee:

1. Investigate gender-related issues on research vessels and in field programs

2. Review current policies for addressing gender issues at sea and in the field

3. Make recommendations based on findings

E. Caporelli, April 2006
The Survey

Strategies of MIT/WHOI Joint Program Student Survey:

1. Open forum meetings
2. Anonymous on-line survey
3. Personal meetings

Questions:

• Tailored to sea-going or field-going students
• Focused on unwanted sexual or gender-related conduct
• Anonymity assured
• Asked to describe incident not divulge names
• Questions explored how respondents reacted to incident
• Requested recommendations for improvement

E. Caporelli, April 2006
Survey Response

On-line survey:

- 130 students received the survey
- 48% response rate
- 60 total responders (34 women, 26 men)
  (all but 4 responders had been to sea or in the field)

Open forum meetings:

- 8 students
  (Although low attendance at forums, discussions were revealing.)
Survey Results

- Over 50% reported experiencing inappropriate gender or sex-related behavior at sea
- Over 20% reported instances of unwanted sexual advances
- Committee found evidence of unprofessional behavior onboard WHOI, UNOLS, international, and U.S. government vessels
- Students observed unprofessional behavior by crew members, technicians, and other members of the science party
- Women reported more incidences than men
- Range of responses to behavior (ignore behavior, avoid person, ask person to stop, tell co-worker/friend/family member)
- Most chose not to report incidents for various reasons
Overview of Recommendations

1. Provide education for science party at start of every cruise about acceptable sex- and gender-related behavior.

2. Implement procedures to better educate shipboard crew about acceptable behavior.

3. The Joint Program to provide education for students to recognize unprofessional behavior at sea and respond appropriately.
Overview of Recommendations cont.

4. Improve system for reporting inappropriate behavior and sexual attention that could constitute sexual harassment.

5. Publish information on sexual harassment written specifically for the seagoing environment.

6. Bring document to attention of UNOLS Office and Council and recommend that these, or similar, recommendations be implemented for all research vessels of the UNOLS fleet.

Website: http://www.whoi.edu/education/committees/committees.html
Committee Membership

• Dr. Lauren Mullineaux, Chair (Sr. Scientist, Biology Dept., WHOI)
• Dr. Steven J. Lentz (Sr. Scientist, Physical Oceanography Dept., WHOI)
• Dr. Edward Boyle (Prof., Earth, Atmosphere, & Planetary Sci. Dept., MIT)
• Dr. Alexandra Techet (Assist. Prof., Mechanical Engineering Dept., MIT)
• Ms. Cara Santelli (MIT/WHOI Joint Program graduate student)
• Mr. David Sutherland (MIT/WHOI Joint Program graduate student)
• Ms. Elizabeth Caporelli (Marine Ops Coordinator, Marine Ops, WHOI)
• Ms. Kathleen LaBernz (WHOI’s HR Mgr. & Equal Employment Opportunity/Affirmative Action official)

Staff for Committee
  Ms. Marsha Gomes (Associate Registrar, WHOI)
  Ms. Ronni Schwartz (Administrator, MIT/WHOI Joint Program at MIT)