



9th annual FIU Women Faculty Leadership Institute
Friday, May 3, 2019

Institute Highlights

#MeToo in Academe: From Moments to a Movement*

WELCOME

The 2019 Institute opened with a welcome by FIU professors and cosponsors Yesim Darici, Ph.D., Ana Viamonte Ros, M.D., and Suzanna Rose, Ph.D., to the nearly eighty women faculty attendees.

A TRIBUTE TO BERNICE SANDLER, GODMOTHER OF TITLE IX

Kerri Stone, J.D., presented a tribute to Bernice Sandler, the “Godmother of Title IX,” who passed away earlier this year. Sandler’s accomplishments and the history and importance of Title IX were highlighted. Professor Stone pointed out the incredible resilience and humility of Dr. Sandler that propelled a historical change. In a short video, Sandler herself remarked that Title IX resulted in a “social revolution” and represent the most significant legislation affecting women since gaining the right to vote. The 1972 Title IX law simply states: “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.”

Title IX applies to every aspect of education, including enrollment, courses, financial assistance, housing and student services. The genesis of this remarkable law began when, after receiving her doctorate, Sandler was passed over for a faculty position. A male faculty member explained that she was qualified for the position, but that she came on “too strong for a woman.” At the time, there was no legal protection from sex discrimination. In her subsequent research of sex discrimination laws, Sandler came across an executive order that prohibited federal contractors from discrimination in employment on the basis of race, color, and sex. After this “eureka moment” of recognizing that the executive order would enable her to file a suit based on sex discrimination, she filed charges of sex discrimination against more than 250 universities and colleges and drafted the legislation that would eventually become Title IX.

Title IX is now perhaps most famous within the context of athletics, where women’s participation in college basketball, volleyball, swimming and other sports exploded in the decades after Title IX. Then, in the 1990s, the United States Supreme Court established that sexual harassment of students qualified as discrimination in violation of Title IX. Thereafter, schools that received federal funding were required to take steps to prevent sexual misconduct on their campuses.

During the discussion moderated by Prof. Stone, participants spoke of the “legal” discrimination they experienced before Title IX was law, including quotas restricting admission to only a few slots for women at law or graduate schools or higher admissions requirements for women in order to be accepted

*[The complete program with titles and affiliations of presenters is available here.](#)

as undergraduates. Others expressed gratitude for the opportunity to learn more specifically about the protections this law provided to women in academe.

#METOO MOMENTS #1: PANEL DISCUSSION

The #MeToo Moments panel focused on panelists' experiences with specific instances of gender bias. Prof. Darici discussed responses to and concerns about sexual assault and harassment, gender discrimination, and consensual relationship issues at FIU. Sonja Montas-Hunter, Ph.D., presented her experience working with Latina students and their challenges in entering STEM fields in college. For women in less-than-ideal academic environments, finding additional role models is important. Monique Ross, Ph.D., described a case that revealed the complexities of dealing with knowledge of a sexual assault of a student that could not be reported due to research confidentiality rules. This encouraged other faculty to share their stories about harassment in their lines of work outside campus and how these issues should be treated as part of learning the methods and ethics of research.

Vicki Burns, Ph.D., described the course she offers on preventing sexual assault among undergraduate students that deals with foundational knowledge of consent and rape culture. Two activist projects led by her students are changing campus life. One project was the development of a new course about sexual harassment that is gender-inclusive; entering students can opt to take this version. The other project was an ongoing radio program where people with different gender and sexual identities can safely voice their experiences with sexual harassment. Sanaz Farhangi, Ph.D., explained two cases that dealt with problematic consequences of conflicts of interest in consensual amorous relationships at FIU. The current procedure does not clearly spell out what steps a faculty member should take if romantically involved with a student to ensure objectivity in grading or supervision -- or what penalties might apply.

In the discussion, attendees expressed strong support for the Institute providing valuable information about these issues, admiration for the program and the excellent turnout of nearly eighty women faculty, and having an "action item" concerning a 'real time' issue such as changing the consensual relationship policy. Sharon "Sherry" Aaron, Director of the [Victim Empowerment Program](#) (VEP) within FIU Counseling and Psychological Services, spoke urgently about the need for anonymity and trained professionals in dealing safely with issues of sexual harassment and assault, both with students and faculty. Counselors at the VEP are able to provide confidential support concerning cases of sexual assault or harassment that come to their attention. Additionally, there were comments from attendees about fearing retaliation if they reported sexual harassment or served as a witness in a case because anonymity is often difficult to maintain in a report. The conference packet included [a list of campus resources concerning sexual assault and harassment](#) (including the VEP).

#METOO MOMENTS #2: INTERACTIVE WORKSHOP

Kirsten Wood, Ph.D., facilitated an interactive workshop where participants anonymously shared information about personal experiences with gender discrimination and sexual harassment in the workplace. The exercise revealed the majority of participants had suffered from verbal harassment and unwanted sexual attention and remarks during their time at FIU. The discussion on the prevalence of the

incidents clarified the experience of daily life for women and raised the question as to how many survivors of just harassment or assault might have left FIU or scholarly work entirely.

#METOO MOVEMENT KEYNOTE: SEXUAL HARASSMENT: CHANGING THE SYSTEM

Caroline Simpson, Ph.D., introduced the keynote speaker Joan Schmelz, Ph.D., Director, NASA Postdoctoral Program, Universities Space Research Association, who was honored in 2015 as one of *Nature's* top ten people who made a difference in science for her work fighting sexual harassment. In her talk, Schmelz advocated shifting the burden of addressing sexual harassment from young women in the most vulnerable stages of their careers to senior men. Describing a concept called the “advocacy axis,” Schmelz explained how to change bystanders into allies and allies into advocates. Schmelz also discussed ways to approach department chairs, university administrators, and presidents and executive officers about creating a community free from sexual harassment so that everyone can do their best research.

CLOSING: ACTION ITEM

In closing, Suzanna Rose proposed creating a new consensual relationship policy between faculty and students at FIU. Attendees were given [copies of FIU's current consensual relationship procedure, MIT's more detailed consensual relationship policy, and a list of components commonly found in consensual relationship policies at other universities](#). Participants were asked to indicate which components they endorse for inclusion at FIU. A majority of attendees endorsed 7 of the 8 components and signed their name to indicate their support for such a new and formal policy. (The only component that was not endorsed by most was an absolute and complete ban on any faculty-undergraduate student consensual relationships.) Rose will present these to the Faculty Advocacy Board and the Provost and initiate the procedures to adopt a new policy.

PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

Post-event evaluations indicated that participants were very favorable towards the Institute.

- This conference is an incredible opportunity for women faculty across the university to have important discussions and to hear from each other. Thank you for holding this annual conference!
- ... it's so important to keep bringing the issues to the forefront. The FIU policy, for starters, is weak and needs to be strengthened. Plus more periodic workshops [on sexual harassment] for departments- attendance as mandatory.
- Excellent Information! Bring this info into our department meetings (faculty including all of the men) and classrooms, more dissemination to students.