

AGRED PRE-CONFERENCE EVALUATION WORKSHOP

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Over the past several years evaluation of Women in Engineering Program (hereafter, WIE) activities has become increasingly important. Program directors and those to whom they report want to be able to make informed decisions about their efforts based on answers to the question: "Which kinds of initiatives work best to increase recruitment and retention of women in engineering?" Furthermore, the organizational need for evaluation goes beyond interests of program directors and personnel. Increasingly, funding agencies require that funds be set aside for evaluation. In response to these imperatives, WEPAN has incorporated evaluation into regional training seminars, added this workshop to the conference program, and supported compilation of an Evaluation Resource Book.

Since the 1960s, social scientists have been involved in evaluating many different kinds of social programs, ranging from poverty relief (such as "Head Start") to efforts that attempt to address race and gender equity issues. The methodologies of evaluation are standard social science research practices with an emphasis on special problems faced by applied researchers who must work in the "real" world rather than the "ivory tower" world of academia. As money for various initiatives has become more scarce, funding agencies are interested in verifying that interventions they support accomplish intended goals (e.g. summative evaluation). However, evaluation can also be an important tool for people who are involved in the day-to-day operation of social interventions such as WIE Programs. In this regard, formative evaluation strategies can be built into activities and used to continuously monitor and improve initiatives.

Although there are a few graduate level programs focussed on program evaluation in the U.S., most evaluation experts are drawn from the ranks of the social sciences or from education and business schools. There are several professional journals dedicated to program evaluation as well as a professional society. Program evaluation as a discipline is still comparatively young, program evaluators have recently turned their attention to dwelling on program evaluation theory.

This paper summarizes the WEPAN AGRED Pre-Conference Evaluation Workshop. The workshop consisted of three general segments dealing with evaluation: Background, Process, and Reporting Results. In addition to broad outlines of material covered in each of these segments, we have also included a brief, annotated bibliography of program evaluation and methodology sources for WIE personnel.