CORPORATE STRATEGIES FOR INCREASING THE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN

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Presentations at this session focused on the strategies each company has implemented to insure a fully diverse and cultural workforce. Presenters were as follows: George Brewster, Manager, Recruiting and Temporary Employment, Corning Incorporated; Debra Fowler, Workforce Planner Manager, The Dow Chemical Company; and John Vergelli, Program Manager, College Relations and Recruiting, IBM. Suzanne Nagel, Director, Lucent Technologies Inc. presided as Moderator.

The presenters each discussed recruitment and retention strategies and possible funding sources for women in engineering programs. Key points mentioned by all companies represented on the panel include the following:

1) Maintain a recruitment program which creates a solid base of support systems for the people you hire;
2) Measure your results and continue to build on the retention (for example, Corning Inc. administers an annual climate survey and IBM surveys a different segment of their population every 12-18 months);
3) Make sure you have something unique to offer the individuals you are recruiting (for example, childcare, maternity leave, job-sharing, flex time etc.—the benefits must change to match the target populations needs);
4) Keep the strategies simple (For example, IBM helps undergraduate women gain visibility with their corporate recruiters by targeting Society of Women Engineers (SWE) and asking the members to “staff” their control tables at information sessions).

Panelists agreed that recruitment and retention need to be intertwined in order for a message of concern to be conveyed to the underrepresented groups; this concern being that not only are the companies recruiting, but they are also aware of special needs and/or circumstances of the special groups. Corning Inc. has conveyed this message beginning in the late 70s when they first began an aggressive recruiting campaign to address affirmative action concerns, and in 1977 they hired their first female engineer from a student SWE chapter. The next step for Corning was to learn from their female engineer the issues other women in engineering had; thus began their building of a core of female engineers.
Building a strong policy for recruitment and retention must be done in stages. Corning Inc. continues to use their female engineers as sounding boards for building support systems within the company. In 1983, Corning initiated a company policy based on the “quest for equality” which incorporated not only a company gain of financial independence and return value to shareholders, but also to creating and maintaining a diverse workforce. Corning recognizes that an integral part of a diverse workforce is the ability to empower the special groups within the company. For example, the Society of Black Professionals was started as well as a Professional Women’s Forum, for all women in the company.

Companies, like IBM, Dow and Corning have recognized that the viability of the company depends upon diversifying the workforce, therefore, recruitment begins early, at the college level. As IBM believes, giving undergraduate women exposure to companies early in their student-career is essential. IBM considers it part of their college relations to provide speakers and or monetary gifts to student clubs, even during their “dry years” of recruitment. Most companies select target schools for recruitment purposes. Dow recruits from some 60 key schools and IBM 58, with plans to increase to 82 schools in 1997.

Recruiters from each of three companies represented in this panel have access to discretionary funds to assist student clubs, like SWE. For example, Dow sees themselves as a “university partner” and builds into their recruiting policy interaction with the students, either in the form of classroom presentations and/or funding. Team captains from Dow are assigned to various regions. These are the individuals that should be contacted in regard to receiving monetary gifts from Dow for any special programs, such as women in engineering programs. These team captains can make recommendations to Dow for larger grants. Corning, on the other hand, will consider grant requests from two areas 1) the medical field and 2) engineering programs where Corning plants are located or to schools on their target list. IBM will only consider grant funding for K-12 programs.

In summary, those of us responsible for the implementation of women in engineering programs need to form a collaborative working relationship with corporate recruiters who visit our institutions. These relationships serve two purposes: 1) promoting our female undergraduates as viable candidates for engineering positions within the companies and 2) creating new sources of funding for women in engineering programs. Sometimes you can generate these relationships by way of your campus career center or contact your alumni currently working at the corporation you’re interested in pursuing. The panelists all agreed that if your school is not on a particular company target list, then you need to have someone inside that company to champion your cause.