RLA Capstone Project: Supporting Women in Geography

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Background

- Supporting Women in Geography (SWIG) is a national network that promotes participation, professional development, and empowerment of female graduate students and young professionals in the field of geography.

- A number of universities in the Northeast and several Big 10 universities have active SWIG chapters.

- Female graduate students expressed interest in the development of a Rutgers chapter.
Project Goals

◆ Develop an active and self-sustaining Rutgers chapter of Supporting Women in Geography (SWIG).

◆ Provide students with intellectual and personal support, including development of professional networks and connections.

◆ Foster a supportive and collaborative departmental culture for all students, post-docs and faculty members.
Why the need for SWIG?

- Rigg et al. (2010) study of publication productivity
  - Females under-represented in the flagship Geography journals as lead and collaborative authors
  - Sole author articles by males (M) more likely to be cited than sole (F) or collaborative articles by females (FF); collaborative articles by males (MM or MF) more likely to be cited than sole (F) or collaborative articles by females (FF)

- Other indicators:
  - 35% of geography undergraduates are F
  - M/F earning PhDs are close to 50/50 but M dominate at all levels of professoriate; many departments have few female professors
Activities and accomplishments

◆ Monthly meetings with themes selected by students who also identified readings (themes: mental health in the academy; race, ethnicity, and diversity in the academy; productivity; leadership)

◆ Keynote speaker on the topic of gender and geography

◆ SWIG brunches/meetings with invited speakers

◆ Practice session for conference presentations

◆ New course under development on geography of race and ethnicity in the United States
Challenges

✦ Who can join SWIG? F only? F and M?
  – Grad students only? Postdocs? Faculty?
  – Undergraduates?

(Creating an inclusive, safe space for some invariably excludes others)

✦ How to make the SWIG self-sustaining? (need for continued student and faculty leadership)
Lessons Learned for me

◆ Gender differences in the academy are perpetuated through our everyday interactions with students
◆ Gender differences are interconnected with race, ethnicity, and nationality
◆ Leadership means showing up, listening and learning