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Increasing the Depth of the Recruitment Pool for Future Women Academic Leaders: Should We Begin with Medical School Electives?

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Purpose

A 2002 report from the AAMC Project Implementation Committee indicated, "The pool from which to recruit women academic leaders remains shallow" (Bickel, et al., 2002). Since then, much attention has been focused on improving conditions for women at the faculty level. Yet, few studies address the possibility that the medical school experience could impact the initial depth in this recruitment pool. Is there a trend in medical school that may be negatively impacting women's success in pursuing a career in academia?

"The comparatively low number of women being 'groomed' for leadership by powerful mentors is a major contributor to the present difficulties institutions face in recruiting women leaders." (Bickel et al., 2002)

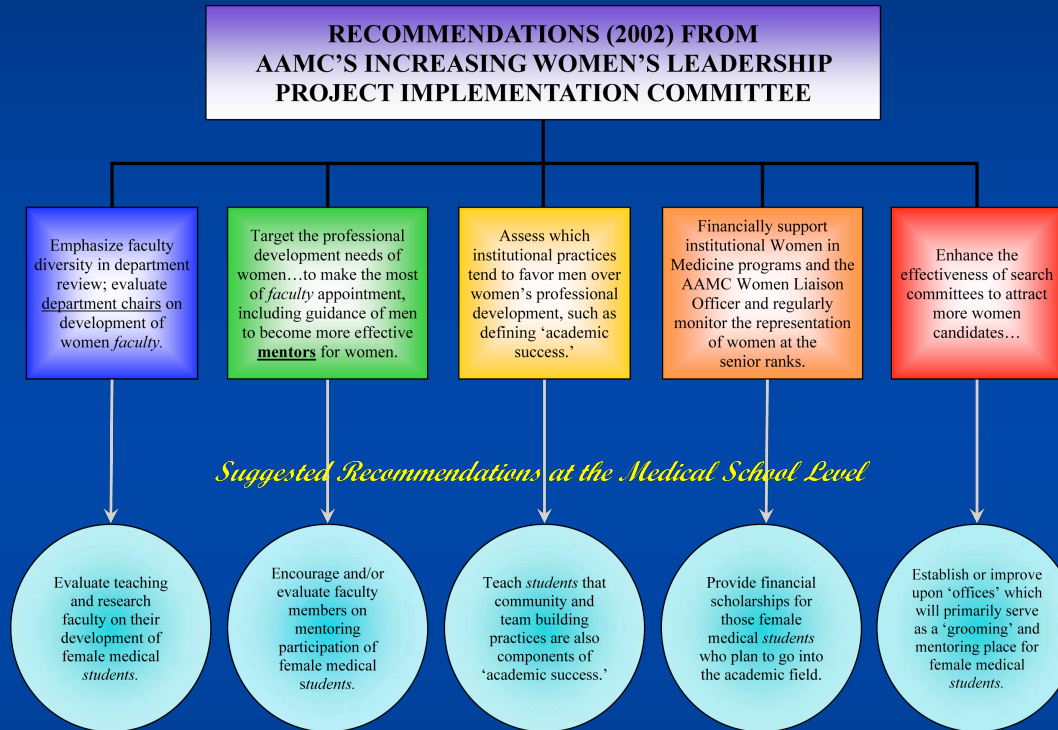
Method

Electives are one of the few times within the uniform medical school curriculum that allows for variation. Using data from the 2005 AAMC Graduation Questionnaire (GQ), differences in participation rate by gender were examined using Chi-square tests for each of the 15 activities (elective/volunteer-based) listed. The sample consisted of a cohort of 91 students (46% male and 54% female).

Bickel, J. M. A., Wara, D. M. D., Atkinson, B. F. M. D., Cohen, L. S. M. D., Dunn, M. M. D., Hostler, S. M. D., et al. (2002). Increasing Women's Leadership in Academic Medicine: Report of the AAMC Project Implementation Committee. *Academic Medicine*, 77(10), 1043-10

Limacher, M. C., Zaher, C. A., Walsh, M. N., Wolf, W. J., Douglas, P. S., Schwartz, J. B., et al. (1998). The ACC professional life survey: Career decisions of women and men in cardiology. A report of the committee on women in cardiology. *Journal of the American College of Cardiology*, 32(3), 827-61

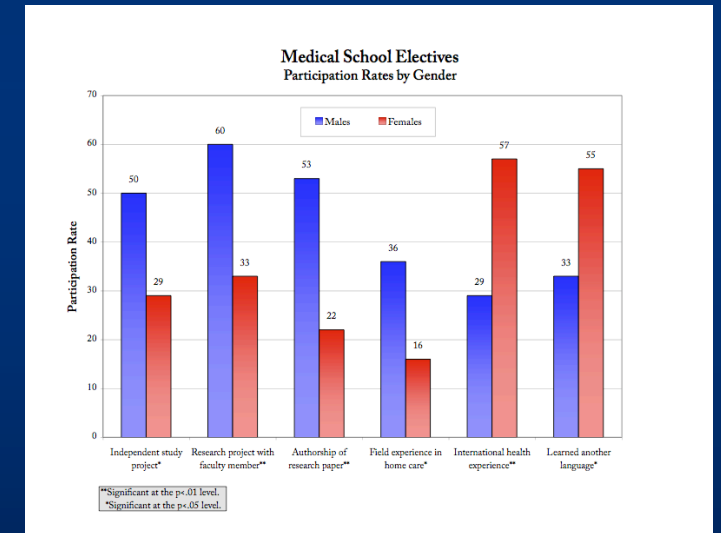
Recommendations



*"Compared to men, women found their mentors to be less helpful with career planning and a higher proportion of women than men in academic settings reported that they have achieved a lower level of advancement than their peers."
(Limacher et al., 1998)*

Results

Six of the fifteen activities showed statistically significant ($p < .05$) differences in gender participation rates. The participation rates of males were significantly higher in independent study projects (50% vs. 29%); research project with faculty (60% vs. 33%); authorship of research paper (53% vs. 22%); and in-home care (36% vs. 16%). Female participation rates were significantly higher in the areas of international health experience (57% vs. 29%); and learned another language (55% vs. 33%).



Conclusion

Men are disproportionately choosing electives where the pathway to a career in academia is more direct. Why women are not choosing this same pathway is unknown. More detailed and multi-institutional studies appear necessary.