



News, Views and Careers for All of Higher Education

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## Fruitful Environment for Female Scientists

University-based research centers have exploded in number and prestige in the last decade or two, as institutions seek to develop specialties that set them apart from the crowd and to provide settings in which scientists can focus on work that may lead to technological and other innovations and, often, to products that can be brought to market.

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To the list of benefits that the research centers are thought to offer — promoting interdisciplinary work, increasing visibility, producing royalty revenue — two sociologists suggest that institutions might add another: the possibility of greater equality for female scientists.

In a paper prepared for delivery at a [session](#) of the American Sociological Association meeting in Philadelphia Tuesday — and which will appear in a forthcoming issue of the [Journal of Technology Transfer](#) — Elizabeth Corley of Arizona State University and Monica Gaughan of Georgia Institute of Technology conclude that university-based interdisciplinary research centers “could potentially serve as a leveling field for male and female academic researchers.”

The study finds, among other things, that women are just as likely as their male peers to be affiliated with such centers, and that those who are center-based appointments share equally in most of the “resources and recognition” that accrue to center-based scientists generally.

Corley, an assistant professor in Arizona State’s School of Public Affairs, and Gaughan, an assistant professor in Georgia Tech’s School of Public Policy, put their study forward in a context in which female scientists, while making some progress in terms of overall numbers, are still significantly underrepresented in the upper reaches of their fields numbers and sometimes face institutional, structural impediments to advancing through the ranks. Because the emergence of university-based centers creates what the authors call a “new institutional form for the execution of university-based research,” they aim to explore how women are faring in that new

environment.

In general, they say, the answers seem heartening. Using a mix of statistical data and survey responses, the authors find “no significant gender differences” in a long list of perceived benefits of affiliation with a research center: “government contracts, opportunity for journal or interdisciplinary publishing, commercialization opportunities, autonomy, proposal approval, access to students, collaboration opportunities, or equipment, teaching load, and prospects for tenure.”

The researchers do find a few significant differences: “Women perceive fewer opportunities for industry-supported grants and contracts, and fewer consulting opportunities.”

Over all, though, they conclude that university research centers provide a “source of academic resources and recognition that elevates the female scientists to a research work environment similar to that of their male peers.” What isn’t clear to the authors — and requires further research, they suggest — is whether female scientists have gained the benefits of being affiliated with a research center because they had previously had successful and productive careers, or whether affiliation with a center “exerts independent effects on career velocity and productivity.”

— [Doug Lederman](#)

## Comments

### Lack of bureaucracy — what a concept

“What isn’t clear to the authors — and requires further research, they suggest — is whether female scientists have gained ..”

The U.S. Marine Corps has a 70-70-70 rule. If a commander has 70% of available information, done 70% of decision-analysis, and has 70% decision-reliability, action is required.

Being away from the central bureaucracy can help a career? Sounds like a plan to me.

Also, note the Chinese proverb: “The farther you are from the emperor, the closer you are to Heaven.” Were truer words ever spoken?

**Art D**, at 7:39 am EDT on August 17, 2005

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