Nora Berrah speaks at a recent workshop she co-organized on gender equity in physics.

KEN COLE/APS

Bienenstock, rather than one of us. These things are very subtle and hard to uproot. One thing that helps is when the numbers are sufficient to reach a tipping point." Urry was a panelist at the "Gender Equity: Strengthening the Physics Enterprise in Universities and National Laboratories" workshop sponsored by the American Physical Society (APS) in May.

The workshop's goal was to kick-start a doubling of the number of women in physics over the next 15 years. Some 50 department chairs from leading US research universities, 14 division leaders from national laboratories, and administrators from NSF and the Department of Energy came together to examine the underlying causes for the scarcity of women in physics and to recommend ways to improve recruitment, retention, and promotion. With women making up only 13% of US physics faculty members, according to 2006 statistics from the American Institute of Physics, the field lags behind other sciences. The workshop audience, says MIT's Mildred Dresselhaus, consisted of "high-level people with the power to effect change."

"I think that for many, the biggest eye opener at the meeting was the discussion of implicit bias," says Urry, "and that unexamined decisions are likely to be biased against women in an arena that is currently dominated by men."

Inspired by a similar event in chemistry, the "workshop was the first of its kind" in physics, says Nora Berrah of Western Michigan University, who, with APS president-elect Bienenstock of Stanford University, organized the workshop. The idea, says Berrah, "is to make changes in the culture, policy, and funding to draw more women to physics." Such changes, she adds, will also benefit men.

Most of the recommendations formulated at the workshop are familiar: Invite more women to interviews, treat all faculty members equally, nominate women for awards, provide childcare for meetings and travel, and so on. One idea that was new to Natalie Roe, a senior scientist and chair of an advisory committee on hiring at Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, was the concept of a centralized university office to help a trailing spouse find a job at the same university, another school, or in industry.

"We have tried many things to improve the climate for women," says Jonathan Bagger, physics and astronomy chair at the Johns Hopkins University. "The workshop reminded us that we cannot relax." Adds David MacFarlane, SLAC's assistant director for elementary-particle physics, "For me, the main message was the need to continuously examine institutional progress and self-assess various practices—hiring, promotion, and family-friendly environment—that impact gender equity in the field."

"We asked all chairs and managers to take at least two recommendations for actions back to their institutions," says Berrah, "[and] to document their actions every six months for the next two years in a password-protected APS website."

In addition, Berrah says, "Funding agencies are willing to do what it takes to double the number of women in physics. I am convinced that they will do all they can to facilitate the implementation of our recommendations." It is not widely known, for example, that research grants can be put on hold when someone has a child or for other family reasons.

A follow-up meeting is planned for upper-level administrators in two years.

Toni Feder

New Orleans universities censured

University regulations and faculty rights were thrown to the wind in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Such are the conclusions of a blue-ribbon panel that investigated New Orleans universities for the American Association of University Professors (see PHYSICS TODAY, November 2006, page 28). As a result, on 9 June the AAUP censured Loyola University, Tulane University, Southern University at New Orleans, and the University of New Orleans.

Being placed on the censure list is "a statement to the academic community and the public at large that things are amiss at the institutions in question," says the AAUP's Robert Kreiser.

The specific transgressions vary from institution to institution, but a common feature "was that they abrogated or did not follow their own policies or AAUP recommendations with regard to dealing with financial exigency," Kreiser says. "They showed inadequate or no respect for tenure, undertook little or no meaningful consultation with faculty in decisions that were made, and denied the protection of academic due process." In short, professors were fired without regard to their tenure status.

The report notes concerns at the investigated institutions "that Katrina provided the occasion to single out faculty for separation who were disliked by those in authority for having previously opposed or criticized their actions or who were seen as expendable." The panel did not assess this charge but concluded that it "leaves all of the affected institutions under a cloud of suspicion that cannot be dispelled and that augurs ill for the future absent effective remedial action."

Because of the number of institutions involved and the seriousness of the issues, the New Orleans investigation was the AAUP's largest ever. The previous record holder was from the post-McCarthy era, Kreiser says, "and that one is dwarfed by this one." At present, 47 institutions nationwide are under AAUP censure.

In a statement, Tulane calls the AAUP report "deeply flawed," "factually inaccurate," and "riddled with erroneous information and contradictions that do not support its own conclusions or AAUP doctrine."

Toni Feder

news notes

Money for education. Citing the "call to action" in the 2005 National Academies *Gathering Storm* report to improve US math and science education (see PHYSICS TODAY, December 2005, page 25), the ExxonMobil Foundation has committed $125 million to expand two existing K–12 education programs. The pledge will establish the National Math and Science Initiative (NMSI), whose aim is to broaden the national Advanced Placement program and the UTeach program at the University of Texas at Austin.

The AP program includes training for teachers, "identification and cultivation of lead teachers," and financial incentives, according to an ExxonMobil statement. The UTeach program encourages math and science majors to become teachers by offering integrated degree plans and financial assistance to promising undergraduates in those fields. The NMSI will award grants in up to 10 states for AP training and incentive programs and up to 10 grants to colleges and universities that want to replicate the UTeach program.

The 14-member board of directors for the NMSI includes Norman Augustine, the retired chairman of Lockheed Martin Corp who chaired the *Gathering Storm* report; Bruce Alberts, former president of the National Academy of Sciences; Steven Chu, director of Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory; and Charles Vest, former president of MIT. **JLD**

Flemish physics is tops. A review of Flemish physics programs at the pre-PhD level found them to be internationally competitive. Requested by the semi-autonomous government of Flanders, the review assessed physics at the five Flemish universities; the counterpart French-language universities are overseen by a different government body. The results of the review are being used in accreditation decisions, a new requirement for Flemish universities.

In addition to high praise, the review also dished out recommendations for improvements. Chief among them was more regional and international exchange of students. This would be helped, the review says, by using English in master's degree programs.

The low number of incoming physics students—an average of 59 a year from 1999 through 2004—has been "a very serious problem," and the number of female faculty is "depressingly low," says Jan Sengers of the University of Maryland, College Park, who chaired the review. He notes that the recent switch by Flemish universities to the bachelor's–master's system, in accord with the Bologna Declaration (see PHYSICS TODAY, May 2001, page 21), is likely to attract more students, as occurred in both Denmark and the Netherlands. **TF**

Yerkes sale fails. Local opposition has scuttled the planned sale of Yerkes Observatory. The University of Chicago had arranged to sell the historic observatory and surrounding land to a developer, who was going to build a resort; room taxes would have been used to support science education programs at the observatory (see PHYSICS TODAY, July 2006, page 24). But the buyer, Mirbeau Co, withdrew early this year after it became clear that the Village of Williams Bay, Wisconsin, was unlikely to rezone lakefront property for commercial use or make other changes in its zoning and tax laws to facilitate the plan.

"We're starting from scratch," says University of Chicago astronomer Richard Kron, who chairs an official study group on the future of the observatory. The group includes representatives of Williams Bay and nearby educational institutions. "Everyone shares a vision that public outreach, teacher development, and summer camps is the direction we'd like to go, but it's a matter of getting our hands around this more specifically," says Kron. "You have to know what you are asking other institutions to buy into."

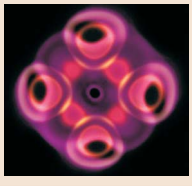
The aim is to find a way to fund the observatory for the long term while developing the area in a manner acceptable to Williams Bay. Kron hopes to present a proposal to the university this fall. **TF** ■

web watch

To suggest topics or sites for Web Watch, please visit http://www.physicstoday.org/suggestwebwatch.html. Compiled and edited by Charles Day

http://www.raiseproject.org

Boosting the status of women in engineering, mathematics, medicine, and science is the aim of the **RAISE project**. The project maintains a database of professional awards to attract what the founders hope will become successful applications and nominations.



http://www.nanohub.org

The NSF-funded Network for Computational Nanotechnology has created **nanoHUB**, an online resource center for software related to nanoscience. Tutorials and seminars are also available, including Supriyo Datta's four lectures "Concepts of Quantum Transport."

http://onebillionbulbs.com

Compact fluorescent bulbs cost 3–10 times more than incandescent bulbs, yet consume 65–75% less electricity and last 10 times longer. Visit **One Billion Bulbs**, if you need encouragement to make the cost-saving, environment-friendly switch to compact fluorescent bulbs.

http://paperplane.org

If you've ever folded a piece of paper into an airplane, launched it, and wondered how to improve its range and performance, visit **Ken Blackburn's Paper Airplanes**. Blackburn's site includes plane patterns, education resources, and a treatise on the aerodynamics of paper planes.