

Study: Women's degrees changing: The Strand, nation see more females in science, engineering ; Jessica Foster The Sun News, Myrtle Beach, S.C.; ; Knight-Ridder/Tribune Business News ; 03-26-2007 ;

Study: Women's degrees changing: The Strand, nation see more females in science, engineering
Byline: Jessica Foster The Sun News, Myrtle Beach, S.C.

Mar. 26--Female students on the Grand Strand and across the country are bucking the stereotype of male domination in college- level science and engineering programs, a new national report and local colleges have found.

More women than men are earning bachelor's degrees in science and engineering fields nationwide, according to a new report from the National Science Foundation. Officials at local colleges say their data mirrors that trend.

The number of women who earned bachelor's degrees in science and engineering continues to rise every year, the report states, and some professors in Horry County attribute that to changing social views of women and a stronger focus on science early in education.

The 2007 report, "Women, Minorities and Persons with Disabilities in Science and Engineering," charts data from 1966 through 2004, the most up-to-date information available.

It says the number of women earning bachelor's degrees in science and engineering increased every year except one since 1966, reaching 227,813 in 2004 compared with 224,525 earned by men.

Locally, Coastal Carolina University and Horry-Georgetown Technical College are seeing similar increases.

Last year, 67 more women graduated from CCU with bachelor's degrees in science and engineering than a decade ago. HGTC doubled its female graduates earning associates degrees in science since 1998, while the number of male graduates stayed the same.

Joan Piroch, dean of CCU's college of natural and applied sciences, said that could be because stereotypes about gender roles have changed since she went to college in 1968.

At that time, sciences and engineering "were male-oriented disciplines and occupations," Piroch said. "I think that just changed as a function of changing roles and models in society."

Plus, she thinks there's a greater focus on science education early on, which sparks their interest.

Since 2003, students as young as third-graders have had to show their science skills on the Palmetto Achievement Challenge Test, a statewide standardized test that also measures math, English and social studies skills.

Several groups nationwide encourage women to enter science and engineering fields through mentorships, seminars, scholarships, lectures and career days for high school students:

Schools -- including the University of Michigan, Iowa State University and Stony Brook University in New York -- have Women in Science and Engineering programs.

The Association for Women in Science, based in Washington, D.C., awards about 25 fellowships annually, totaling about \$15,000 to \$20,000.

Despite these efforts, more should be done to make sure women continue in those fields once they graduate, said Jonathan Heath, an HGTC chemistry professor. He still sees a disproportionate number of men teaching science and engineering in colleges, he said.

"For many women, that traditional role kind of has an influence on what they do once they have that degree," he said.

CCU biology student Genevieve Evans said it's not necessary to push women to enter or stay involved in those areas. "The opportunity is there," she said. "Whoever is interested, regardless of sex, they should just do it."

Fast fact

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