

Local event in Göttingen on November 10th 2009

## **Exchanging Experiences and Mentoring to Enhance Gender Diversity**

The aim of this event was to raise awareness about gender related issues among students and scientists at the physics department of Georg-August-University Göttingen, to offer a platform for open discussion about these topics and exchange of experiences especially between young scientists and tenured professors and to start networking between the different “generations” of scientist as well as between the students themselves. To increase the motivation of students to join the event, free breakfast was offered.

All female Professors of the department were invited personally. All other scientist and students were informed by email and flyers about the event. More than 20 participants of all academic grades attended the meeting (3 of them were male). Unfortunately, no female professor could attend the meeting.

Professor Samwer opened the discussion with some introductory remarks. The following topics were discussed:

### **Family and Career**

It turned out that for many students, one of the most important issues is compatibility of family and career. Those students who have children reported about their experiences. They all agreed that it is difficult to raise children as a student, but it is possible and worth it. They all got lots of support from university, professors and fellow students. However, the lack of flexible child care facilities is a problem. The number of students who stopped studying because they have children is much lower than that of students who don't have children because they want to finish studying first. It is noted that it is important to involve men into the discussion about family and career and to point out that this is not only a female issue.

### **Pregnancy**

Especially for experimentalists, pregnancy can be a problem because potentially dangerous experiments can not be performed. To help these students, the department can pay for a student assistant who performs these experiments on behalf of the pregnant woman. There are many other ways of financial and other support for students with children, but most students do not know about them.

### **Low number of women**

The number of women in physics is low (about 20%) throughout all academic grades, starting from school up to full professors. There is a lack of female role models in science, and in general public, it is not considered important for a girl or woman to succeed in science. At university,

women receive extraordinary treatment and support up to a point that might suggest (or might make them feel) they would not be able to succeed without this support. Fixed quotas for women are not considered helpful because it is often suggested that a woman only got a position to fulfill the quota.

### **Dual Career**

Manly the same objections apply as to quotas for women. On the other hand, dual career options are helpful for scientists with working partners. It should be pointed out that, again, this applies to male and female scientists.

The meeting was held in a very friendly atmosphere, the discussion was open and lively. It was suggested to repeat a similar event in the future. It was also suggested to organize an information session for all students about support available for students with children.

Göttingen, November 19th

Iris Kock