

Dr. Virginia Valian on Equity within the Academy (2010 Presentation)



In the spring of 2010, WiSE invited Dr. Virginia Valian on campus. Dr. Valian is a leading expert on gender equity in the academy. She spoke to faculty and students at various seminars, informal discussions and lectures. During the day each audience learned about gender schemas and how they impact gender equity on campus.

Valian began the day with breakfast with male STEM faculty to discuss male engagement in facilitating an equitable and inclusive environment in academia. The breakfast was followed with a lecture by Dr. Valian on how power and status are influenced by gender. A lunch was held with the Chancellor, Deans, and STEM faculty. After lunch, Valian met with graduate students to discuss the key behaviors and experiences that will help facilitate their academic and career success. Dr. Valian's final session for the day was a public lecture titled "Why So Slow? The Advancement of Women in the Academy." During this lecture she discussed why so few women occupy positions of power and prestige.



Using an interdisciplinary approach, Dr. Valian exposed many of the often invisible factors that hinder women's success. The audience learned about gender schemas and how they impact gender equity on campus. Gender schemas are assumptions about each gender that we hold and utilize, consciously and unconsciously, to form opinions and guide our actions. Dr. Valian proposes that gender schemas skew our perceptions often causing both men and women to view women in ways that give them an accumulation of disadvantages and gives men the advantage. It is often not an issue of overt discrimination, but one of many mole hills of disadvantage that create a mountain of unfavorable treatment. Because women also hold these gender schemas, women are willing to work harder and more efficiently than men for less pay, resulting in a lower sense of entitlement for women.