

Building Networks for Women in Science

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In 2011 the University of Wisconsin System Women & Science Program was awarded an ADVANCE PAID grant (#1106646) to connect women in STEM departments at the eleven comprehensive (primarily undergraduate) institutions in the UW System.

Advancing Senior Faculty: Horizontal / Peer Mentoring Program

BACKGROUND: STEM departments at primarily undergraduate institutions (PUIs) are often small and may have only one female professor. Studies have shown that senior, tenured women who are trailblazers for women in their departments may lack an effective network of people who could provide information, advice and resources to help them advance in their careers.

The **Horizontal / Peer Mentoring program** invites women at associate and full professor ranks who lack female mentors or peers in their own departments to connect with disciplinary colleagues on the other campuses.

INITIAL PROCESS

- 49 isolated senior women were identified on 11 campuses and invited to participate (37 accepted)
- CVs were shared with each other electronically
- Disciplinary groups (e.g., Chemistry) met via email and videoconference. Participants were asked to share information about their courses, research projects, and service activities, and to develop short and long term career goals for themselves and for their groups.
- All invited to a kickoff event at resort, featuring COACH workshops: *"Effective Negotiating Techniques"* & *"Balancing Your Career Portfolio"*

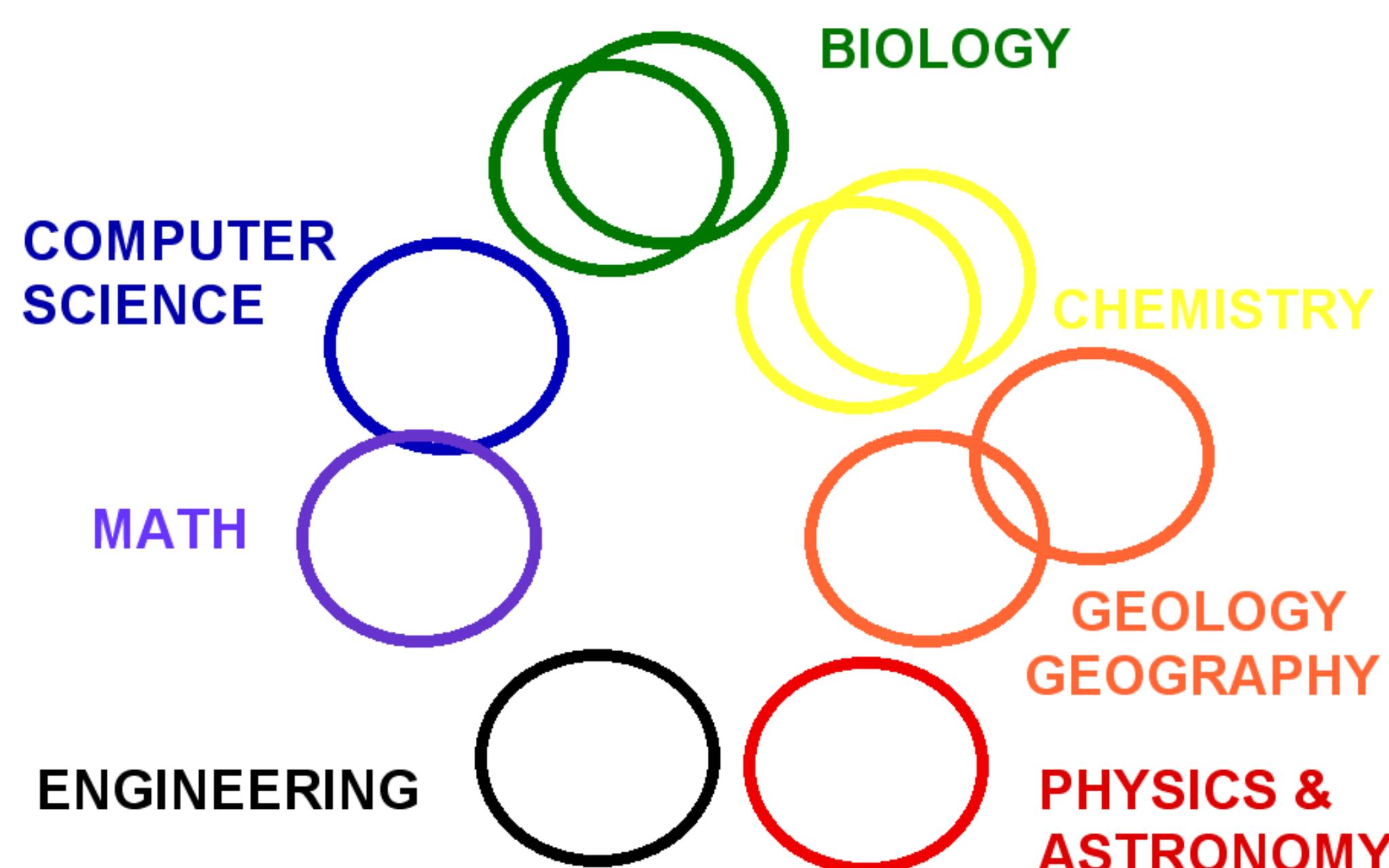


Figure 1: Disciplines represented in the Horizontal/Peer-Mentoring Program

CONTINUING PROGRAMMING

- Newly eligible faculty identified each September (now 41 participants)
- Cross-disciplinary group formed to discuss issues facing department chairs
- Disciplinary groups met on their own in year 2
- Book discussion, *Whistling Vivaldi* by Claude Steele
- COACH workshop "Effective Leadership Skills for Women" planned for all in year 3

COLLECTION OF BASELINE DATA FOR PROGRAM EVALUATION: MIXED-METHODS

- ❖ Each year, participants complete a **preliminary survey** assessing workplace experiences and identifying professional goals and mentors.
- ❖ A subset of 10 participants was randomly selected to participate in **one-on-one interviews** regarding career experiences, goals, mentors, and expectations. They will be interviewed again at years 3 and 5.

SUMMARY OF INITIAL FINDINGS: Horizontal mentoring is seen as an effective way to both reduce isolation and build networks. Women note the importance of normalizing negative experiences, sharing positive experiences, and creating deadlines.

Themes Constructed from Participant Experiences:

EXPLICIT SEXISM AND ISOLATION: One woman described experiences with sexism prior to being hired at her current academic institution:

"...it was the only department that did not ask me any questions about my husband or if I was married...He's not applying for the job, I am."

Faculty struggle with **gender discrimination**

within their fields and **lack mentors** to assist them in advancement in their careers. 8 of 14 (57%) respondents claimed that they feel at least **somewhat isolated** within their department (Fig 2).

"I'm the only tenured woman there"

"I am the only female in my department. I usually end up talking to women in other departments."

LACK OF RESPECT FROM STUDENTS & ADMINISTRATION:

Isolated faculty also described a **lack of respect from students** and colleagues. 6 of 14 (43%) disagreed/strongly disagreed that they are treated with respect by their students. When asked why she agreed to participate in the program, one woman claimed her class evaluations tend to be a little lower and was wondering if it is because she is female.

More surprisingly, 10 of the 14 participants (71%) indicated they at least **slightly disagree that they are treated with respect by their department chair**. When facing discrimination regarding promotion to Chair from the Dean, one participant described needing to advocate for herself and her equivalent lack of experience:

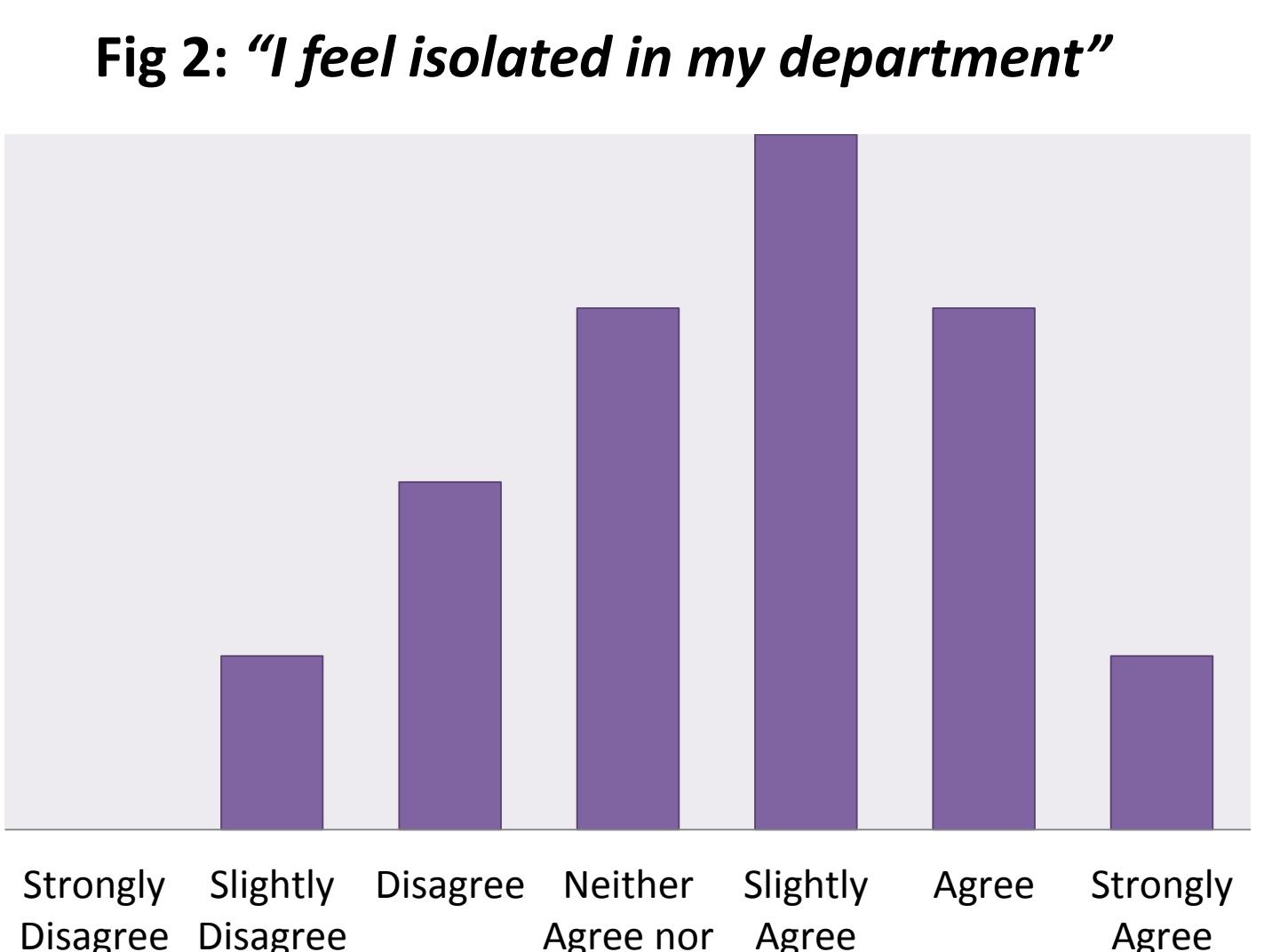
"How about the other department chairs that you have that are all men? Did they have any experience before you appointed them as department chair?"

BURN OUT AND RESISTING BURN OUT: Experiences of burn out were frequent, as were attempts to resist burn out and create a positive environment for others.

"By the time I had tenure, I felt burned out, and I don't have kids, so I can't imagine what it would be like in my department to be a woman with kids."

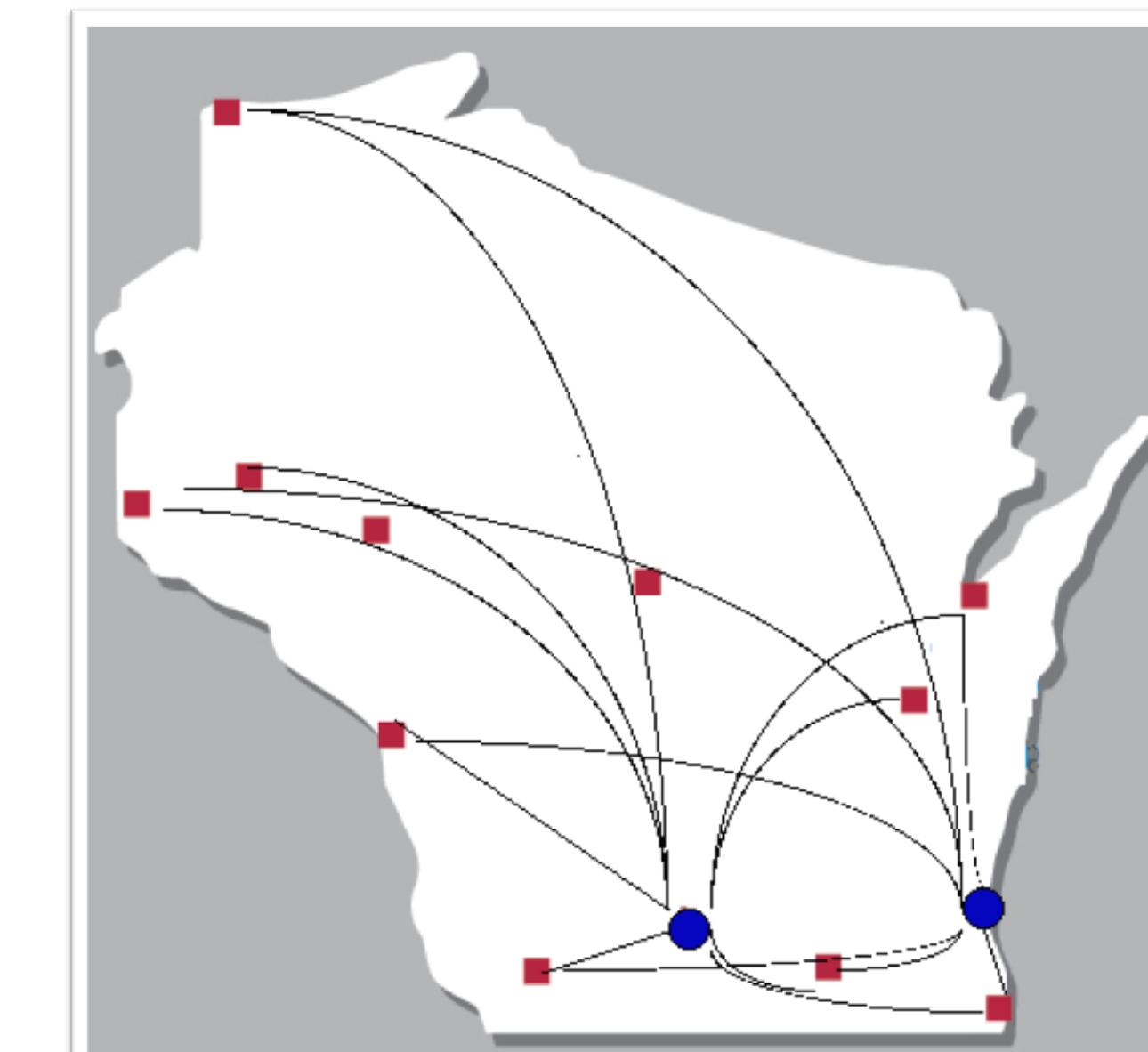
"We have a women faculty and staff potluck and you can either bring a bottle of wine or a dish to pass and the place is jam packed and they walk in about 5 and at about 9:30, you know, the last leave."

SATISFACTION: Though many women revealed negative experiences, half of the women indicated they were satisfied with career progression. Further, half the participants felt they were usually satisfied with the way they balance their professional and personal lives.



Increasing Participation: Postdoctoral Seminar Program

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION: Female postdoctoral scholars from UW Madison and UW Milwaukee give seminars at the comprehensive universities. Travel costs are paid by the grant.



During campus visits scholars:

- meet with faculty to learn about careers at primarily undergraduate institutions
- interact with undergraduates to share information about academic careers
- share current research with audience members
- act as female scientist role models for students and faculty members

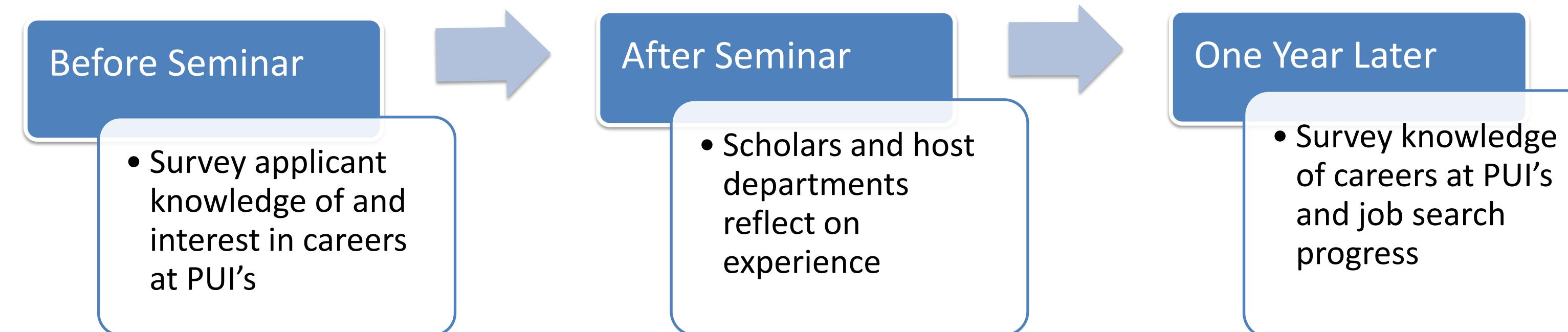
SELECTION PROCESS:

- Scholars submit online application with seminar title and abstract
- Research advisers fill out online recommendation
- Women & Science Advisory Board members choose speakers
- Host departments work with speaker to schedule spring seminar

COHORTS:

1 st cohort	2011-2012	12 participants
2 nd cohort	2012-2013	9 participants
3 rd cohort	2013-2014	17 participants

PROGRAM EVALUATION PLAN:



SUMMARY OF FINDINGS FROM 1ST COHORT (2011-2012)

Pre-survey results (n = 10)

- Most (60%) had a parent or female mentor in STEM fields
- Most (80%) believed they were knowledgeable about academic careers at PUIs and were interested in a career at a PUI
- Perceived disadvantages of PUI? *Lack of funds for research*
- Perceived advantage of a PUI? *More time to teach and work with students*

"The primary advantage for choosing academic career was to teach, convey and apply what I had learned and still learning as a scholar to the students."

Post-survey Results (n = 9)

On average, participants found the seminar experience provided "a lot of help" including: **increasing knowledge of faculty careers, clarifying career goals, and improving understanding of differences between careers at PUIs and research institutions.** **Of the 8 who entered the job market, 7 applied to positions at PUIs.**