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Toward Diversity

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A national conference at the University of Dayton will focus on increasing diversity in philosophy, a field in which women and minorities continue to be underrepresented.

"Diversity in Philosophy" will be held Wednesday, May 29, through Friday, May 31, at the 1700 S. Patterson Building on the University of Dayton’s River Campus. Registration fees are $100 for employed philosophers and $50 for others.

Philosophy continues to be one of the last bastions in the humanities where women and minorities have not made inroads and sexual harassment and gender bias still characterize the culture of some departments, according to Peggy DesAutels, a University of Dayton philosophy professor and chair of the American Philosophical Association Committee on the Status of Women.

"Women only represent about 20 percent of tenure-line faculty in philosophy and some of the top departments have much less," said conference organizer DesAutels. "Most of the other disciplines in the humanities are at parity or close to parity."

DesAutels said many STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) disciplines traditionally dominated by men have made substantial progress — progress that continues to elude philosophy.

"There's a serious drop off in women from those who enroll in introductory philosophy classes to those who choose to major in philosophy," DesAutels said. "Something is happening in the classroom."

Increasing the number of women and other underrepresented groups in philosophy is important, she said, for a number of reasons. Philosophy provides excellent grounding for strong analytic and verbal skills, skills that are highly sought by many employers.

There are other reasons having a diverse pool of philosophers is important, she said. For example, philosophers often sit on medical or biomedical ethics committees of hospitals and research organizations — committees that set policies or make life-or-death decisions. Ethicists who come from diverse backgrounds bring different perspectives to those discussions – perspectives that have not historically been included in decision making.

The conference will explore how the climate can be improved for all underrepresented groups in philosophy and how recruitment, retention and advancement of those who are underrepresented can be improved. The conference will also look at initiatives that are resulting in improved representation in STEM fields.

For more information, visit the conference website at Diversity in Philosophy (url: http://www.udayton.edu/artssciences/diversity_pht_conference/index.php) or call 937-229-1344.