CSWA Climate Site Visits for Astronomy Departments - Policy

At the AAS meeting in Indianapolis, IN in June 2013, the AAS Council approved a proposal by CSWA to implement Climate Site Visits for astronomy departments. These site visits are modeled on the highly successful visits done by the Committee on the Status of Women in Physics (CSWP) for physics departments. The CSWP index, procedures, and summary web pages formed the basis for the CSWA proposal. Among the positive outcomes of the CSWP visits are:

- Increased efforts to recruit women faculty members;
- Increased efforts to recruit women graduate students;
- Improved communications between women and department chairs;
- Increased numbers of invitations to women speakers;
- Improved safety of the department;
- Improved facilities for students: lounges, computers;
- Improved advising and mentoring.

The goals of the CSWA’s visits are to: increase the committee’s knowledge about problems experienced nationally by women students, postdocs, and faculty in astronomy; work with departments to identify problems; suggest means by which the department might solve those problems; and improve the climate for women generally.

Among the problems that have come to the attention of the CSWA in US institutions are: (1) inadequate mentoring of members of underrepresented groups; (2) instances of sexual harassment; (3) the continued pervasiveness of unconscious bias and other issues affecting the climate for women; and (4) too-slow advancement of women, especially women of color, through the ranks of the profession.

Indeed, the proposed CSWA Climate Site Visits for astronomy departments will suggest ways the departments can:

- Enable senior faculty in those departments to provide better mentoring for students, postdocs, and junior faculty;
- Enable the visiting team to assist with mentoring the students, postdocs, and junior faculty in those departments;
- Improve the teaching of diverse audiences in those departments;
- Promote the knowledge and practice of professional ethics to the next generation of astronomers and to their mentors;
- Provide advice on how to recruit and retain a more diverse group of students and faculty.