Student Project: Women Speaker Series

Alexandra Wesolek (joint work with Danielle Rogers, Kevin Halasz)
May 2023
Simon Fraser Discrete Math Seminar

SFU has hosted a Discrete Math Seminar since the early 1980’s.

- Spring 2020: 100 % male speakers
- Fall 2019: 72 % male speakers
- Spring 2019: 100 % male speakers
- Fall 2018: 83 % male speakers

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2. Feel comfortable.
3. Connect about gender issues with other scientists.
4. Bring awareness to the issue of representation in the DM seminar.
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Structure: Hosted entirely over zoom.
- 45 minutes talk
- 10 minutes QA
- 5-10 minutes “sharing” session
Community Support

- Support from Mary-Catherine Kropinksi and Marni Mishna
- Support from Kevin Halasz (co-organizer of Speaker Series)
- SFU faculty speaker recommendations
- Speaker recommendations from extended professional network
- Acceptance of invitation by our speakers
Position Title: Faculty of Science Associate Dean: Equity, Diversity, Inclusion.

- This position was created in 2020
- Given to a person from the Faculty of Science

If this position does not exist, who do you go to?
Our virtual seminar allowed us to invite speakers from around the world!
Implementation of Project

Financial Support

We received funding from PIMs for our speaker series. This allowed us to
- Pay our speakers for their time with an honorarium.
- Subsidize childcare costs for our speakers during their presentation time.
Spring and Summer 2021 Discrete Math Seminar at Simon Fraser:

- Organized by Shuxing Li
- About half of the speakers are women (more inclusive environment)
- The sharing session has stayed!

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What We Learned

Creating safer spaces for participants:

▶ Compiling a set of questions the speakers could look at prior to their talk.
▶ Moderating questions from the audience (perhaps using an app like Slido).
▶ Support from your community is important.
▶ Improving your surroundings can improve your mental health and feeling of inclusion.

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Asking the community about strategies to create a safer and more inclusive space is important - EDI initiatives should be centered around the voices of marginalized communities.

However, the labor involved in such consultation processes has to be compensated!
Moving seminar series across institutions.