Valian to give keynote at ADVANCE-Purdue Symposium

Virginia Valian, distinguished professor of Psychology and Linguistics at Hunter College, will give the keynote address at the 2nd annual ADVANCE-Purdue Gender and STEM Research Symposium. Valian is a cognitive scientist who uses concepts and data from psychology, sociology, economics, and biology to explain the disparity in the professional advancement of men and women. In her landmark book Why So Slow? The Advancement of Women (MIT Press, 1998), Valian asks why so few women are at the top of their professions. Valian also serves as a member of the ADVANCE-Purdue External Advisory Board.

Valian’s keynote, Why So Slow? The Advancement of Women, will kick-off the symposium on February 17th at 5:00 pm in Fowler Hall. The symposium will take place on February 18th from 8:00 am – 5:00 pm in Stewart 302. Talks and posters will focus around emerging methods for substantive studies on gender and STEM.

Both events are free and open to the public. Please register at www.purdue.edu/dp/advance.

Recommendation Letters Impact Women

Research from Rice University found words used to describe females in letters of recommendation were in great contrast to those used to describe males. Although both were positive, specific words caused a woman to be evaluated lower, which appears to impact their chances for being hired for faculty positions.

The study analyzed the content of 624 letters of recommendation for junior faculty positions. They found that “female candidates were described in more communal (social or emotive) terms and male candidates in more agentic (active or assertive) terms.” Readers gave negative weight to letters with the communal terms. It was also noted that “letter writers include more doubt raisers when recommending women.”

As a result of this study it is recommended that both letter writers and letter readers be aware of these subtle gender discrimination issues. Attending the ADVANCE-Purdue / OIE sponsored Search Chair Workshop on Faculty Hiring provides insight on similar relevant research for search chairs and committee members.