

## AWIS Summit Meeting September 2015

How can we create environments that allow innovative ideas to flourish? It's evident that diversity is key, but how do we tackle the challenges that are still faced by women today? This year's Association for Women in Science Summit in Oakland focused on this from a distinctly entrepreneurial perspective. The highlight was certainly this year's keynote speaker, Janet Napolitano, who discussed the equity achievements and current challenges within the UC system, but much of the rest of the day related to encouraging more women into leadership roles and encouraging women entrepreneurs.

Seeking some strategies for sustained success, the summit approached from several different angles: We heard from companies that had successfully made diversity a priority (such as LinkedIn), from researchers examining trends in business and science (like Amanda Kimball from UC Davis's Graduate School of Management), and from leaders in industry (like Pamela Marrone, CEO and founder of Marrone Bio Innovations, Inc.) -- sharing lessons learned, words of encouragement, and successful models for recruitment and retention.

One conversation that particularly stood out was a lively discussion between Dr. Justin Siegel of UC Davis and Dr. Christie Smith of Deloitte, LLP on the advantages and drawbacks of frankly stating "women and minorities are encouraged to apply" when listing positions. Smith pointed out that such things can create backlash within organizations, undercutting a new recruit's standing by being viewed as getting the position due to their underrepresentation. She said that it may be more advantageous in some situations to focus on each individual's story, to highlight how there is no archetypal person for any one position -- diversity may already exist in companies, and the first step in expanding on it is to encourage and celebrate it within each person already at the organization. Siegel pointed out that academia is structured quite differently from business, and there may be no single formula that can be applied across all fields and jobs, but all areas can benefit from knowledge of impediments like implicit bias.

All in all it was a fascinating and entertaining day -- audience participation was welcomed and after every few sessions, time was made for mingling and follow up between the audience and the presenters. Although strong evidence was provided that showed we still have a long way to go on encouraging women into, and supporting them in leadership and entrepreneurial roles, there were also a lot of great examples of successes. AWIS really hit the mark with this Summit Meeting!