Available data demonstrates that the disparity in the representation of women in physics at higher levels does not seem to be a reflection of innate ability. This is made evident by the lack of gender gap in the numbers of high school physics students and standardized test scores as well as the ever-rising proportion of women receiving science bachelor’s degrees. One example is the data on the relative performance of men and women students on the “ACT” pre-college standardized test of science, math, and language in the states of Colorado and Illinois. Prior to 2002, only college-bound students took the test; males scored higher on average. From 2002, all students took the test and the gender gap disappeared. This illustrates the perils of drawing general conclusions about academic aptitude from data on select segments of the populations.

Although much progress has been made to increase the number of women and minorities in physics and applied sciences, much remains to be done. Working collaboratively and collectively including men, women, minorities, University Department Chairs, Deans, Provost, University Presidents and National Laboratory Managers, we can significantly increase the percentage of women and minorities in physics worldwide. To achieve the goal of doubling the percentage of women in physics in the next 15 years worldwide, target set by the gender equity workshops, “Gender Equity: Strengthening the Physics Enterprise in Physics Departments and National Laboratories” [1], we will need to apply a multi-pronged approach. By systematically developing and implementing and evaluating affirmative and programmatic changes at all levels of academic ladder, we will make a significant impact on increasing representation of women and minorities in physics worldwide.


Women of color continue to be under-represented in physics. In the last decade, little progress has been made in recruiting or retaining them. People of color will form the majority of the U.S. population by the year 2050 [2]. Unless significant improvement is effected in the rate at which women of color participate in physics, women’s overall representation in the field will be women’s overall representation in the field will make little progress in the next 40 years. Additionally, due to their small numbers, women of color are in demand as role models and as committee members. This service, while worthy in itself, takes time and does not lead to promotion or career advancement [3].
