

# SEEDS of Change

New initiative to increase ranks of women and minorities

**T**heir numbers in grad schools are growing, but women and minorities in nearly all science and engineering fields hit recruitment and retention barriers as faculty at U.S. colleges and universities, states a 2007 National Academies report chaired by University of Miami President Donna E. Shalala. As a result, concludes *Beyond Bias and Barriers*, this nation is losing a significant talent pool.

Hoping to combat that trend and reinforce institution-wide diversity, UM's SEEDS (Scientists and Engineers Expanding Diversity and Success) initiative,



Director Kathryn Tosney kicked off SEEDS with a luncheon in November, attended by around 100 faculty and President Shalala.

established by Executive Vice President and Provost Thomas J. LeBlanc, will study how to improve diversity and gender equity in hiring—and make some recommendations.

“More and more women are becoming graduate students in the sciences,” explains Kathryn Tosney, Department of Biology chairperson and director of SEEDS. “What’s happening is we’re losing minorities unnecessarily at every transition—from graduate to postdoc, to assistant professor, to associate professor, and to full professor.”

To add educational and mentorship opportunities for early-career faculty, SEEDS is inviting noted female academics to the University for conferences and networking. In April, for example, Maria Assonção F. Silva Dias, of the National Institute for Space Research, is slated to deliver a seminar and discuss her career path.

SEEDS, funded by a \$1.2 million National Science Foundation grant, is part of NSF's ADVANCE: Increasing the Participation and Advancement of Women in Academic Science and Engineering Careers.

Tosney serves as the primary investigator. Deans Michael Halleran (College of Arts and Sciences), James Tien (College of Engineering), Otis Brown (Rosenstiel School of Marine and Atmospheric Science), and Pascal J. Goldschmidt (Miller School of Medicine) are co-investigators.



EMMA CASON-PRATT

## South African Connection

**A**ugust 25, 1993 was to be American Fulbright Fellow Amy Biehl's penultimate day in South Africa, after almost a year spent working against apartheid. Instead, that day, she was beaten, stoned, and stabbed to death during a race riot in the Guguletu township. On their penultimate day in South Africa, students in GEG 511, Spaces of Hope, visited the place where Biehl's promising life ended and bore witness to her powerful legacy: the world-renowned Amy Biehl Foundation Trust her parents created to provide opportunities for children growing up in poverty.

“You can't help but be moved,” says Richard Grant, a professor in the College of Arts and Sciences' Department of Geography and Regional Studies. He exposed students to racial, historical, and economic issues as they traveled to the Cradle of Humankind, the Cape of Good Hope, a fashion district, a World Cup stadium, AIDS clinics, and empowerment programs. His immersive curriculum helped them absorb intense moments—like meeting one of Biehl's convicted killers. (All were released from prison in 1998 with the support of Biehl's parents during South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission; two now work for her foundation.)

“I got to experience South Africa as an insider,” says political science and public relations major MacKenzie Sedelbauer. Despite little free time, she and five classmates, who included geography, nursing, premed, and photography majors, managed to go on safari; a brave few even tried shark-cage diving. For the course's service-learning component, they helped high schoolers outside of Cape Town develop environmental initiatives. Sedelbauer says getting to know those teens made her “forever grateful. They have no water, no electricity. They live in four-by-four tin shacks. But they don't feel underprivileged. They have the highest aspirations. They want to be doctors and lawyers. They want to help other people.”

Just like Amy Biehl did. Spaces of Hope will return to South Africa next summer.

### ON COURSE

**Title:** GEG 511 “Spaces of Hope: Engaging South Africa's Urban Reconstruction and Reconciliation”  
**Department:** Geography and Regional Studies, College of Arts and Sciences  
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