

# STEM Title IX Before it Hits the Classroom

Sabrina Schaeffer

This week marks the [40th anniversary of Title IX](#), legislation intended to prevent gender discrimination at educational institutions, namely in athletics. So it's no surprise that feminist groups on the left and the White House -- through its [Educate to Innovate](#) campaign -- are using this anniversary to advance their next "gender" battle, aimed at increasing the number of women represented in the science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields.

Hysteria over the shortage of women in math and science has been building for some time. In 2007, the National Academies released [Beyond Bias and Barriers: Fulfilling the Potential of Women in Academic Science and Engineering](#). In 2010, the American Association of University Women (AAUW) published [Why So Few? Women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics](#). And just last week, the National Coalition for Women and Girls in Education (NCWGE) issued yet another report - [Title IX: Working to Ensure Gender Equity in Education](#) - pushing lawmakers to direct more attention and public resources toward "strengthening Title IX" and expanding this legislation into academics.

At a time when national unemployment hovers above eight percent, advocates for expanding Title IX into academics emphasize that workers employed in the STEM fields not only have [more job opportunities](#), but also higher paying jobs. And this is proving to be the justification for why we need the government to help guide women's academic choices. President Obama has put forth a goal of adding 100,000 additional STEM teachers. And he has launched [Change the Equation](#) -- a private-public partnership aimed at collaborating government and private efforts to engage more students in the STEM disciplines.

With such an emphasis on the underrepresentation of women in math and science, it's important to remember that this is not the whole story. From the picture groups like the AAUW paint, one might expect that our colleges and universities -- and especially the academic sciences -- remain openly hostile toward women. Of course, nothing could be farther from the truth. Today, women earn more bachelor's degrees ([57 percent](#)), master's degrees ([59 percent](#)) and now PhDs by a small margin than men. What's more, roughly [50 percent of medical school students](#) are female; and veterinary classes are (on average) comprised of [75 percent women](#).

The problem is that feminists on the left continue to change how we measure women's success. It's no longer sufficient that women out-earn men in terms of higher degrees; now the problem is that women are gravitating toward the wrong fields. It's true women are inclined toward degrees in art history, biology, English and education, while men are overrepresented in computer science, engineering, math and physics. And in certain subsets of the hard sciences -- such as computer programming and engineering -- women are dramatically underrepresented. Still, as Christina Hoff Sommers of the American Enterprise Institute reminds us in her book, [The Science on Women and Science](#), the reason for the disparity is hardly one-dimensional. And she reminds us, in academics, "the physical sciences are the exception, not the rule."

Feminist groups on the left insist it's a function of gender bias, but there is clearly a robust conversation about social, cultural and biological gender differences that all play a role. Simon Baron-Cohen is one of those figures that write about the differences in the way men and women see the world. A professor of developmental psychopathology at Trinity College, Cambridge, he argues that men are more naturally inclined to "systematize" while women are more inclined to "empathize." Perhaps this might help explain why only [16 percent of surgeons are women, while 50 percent of pediatricians are female](#).

Recognizing gender differences doesn't diminish the value of female role models, for instance; nor does it mean we shouldn't applaud companies that provide flexible work policies in order to attract female employees. But too often feminists have tunnel vision. The conversation about the shortage of women in STEM fields hasn't evolved since Congress first enacted Title IX. It's premised on the same line of reasoning -- that discrimination is largely to blame -- that led [Larry Summers](#) in 2006 to resign as president of Harvard after suggesting that biological differences may have had a role to play in the shortage of women in the STEM fields.

The truth about Title IX is that rather than create gender equality on the field, it helped institutionalize reverse gender discrimination and quotas -- a byproduct that supporters are quick to overlook. It's good to have an honest conversation about educational and professional opportunities for women. But before we look to broaden the parameters of Title IX, we ought to give serious thought to the question: Is gender parity in the sciences really necessary in order to have gender equality? Can we accept that men and women see the world differently and choose to engage in different disciplines? Perhaps then we can finally value the differences men and women each bring to the table.

*Sabrina L. Schaeffer is executive director of the Independent Women's Forum. She will participate in an event about the [40th Anniversary of Title IX at the Cato Institute](#) in Washington, DC this Wednesday.*