

Women in Water Resources



Martha Narvaez, AWRA President

A six interview blog series by AWRA President Martha Narvaez.

As I watched the [2016 White House Water Summit](#) (video) this past March (2016) I was pleasantly surprised to see the number of women in leadership roles at the summit, and I was especially struck when one of the presenters noted the strong leadership roles women have played in water throughout the Obama administration. This comment made me extremely proud and led me to think more deeply about the leadership roles AWRA women have played in the water resources field.

In the 16 years that I have been a member of AWRA, I have had an abundance of female role models. AWRA is full of women, from all over the world, doing great things in the water resources field and I feel fortunate to have the opportunity to build relationships and reap the benefits of their expertise and advice.

As I thought about the summit and my AWRA experiences this blog idea came to mind. I wanted to share with the AWRA membership the stories of a few of our organization's leading women in water resources. These women are decision-makers, researchers, scientists, engineers, teachers and communicators, as well as active leaders in the AWRA community.

As I started the journey to create this blog, it was quite simple for me to rattle off a list of women that I wanted to interview. I was fortunate that the women I chose quickly and enthusiastically responded to my request. Then I learned that was the easy part.

The next step I wanted to take was to collect data on women working in the water resources field and to quantify the gender composition of AWRA. Unfortunately, this was not as straight-forward. Due to the interdisciplinary nature of the water resources field, obtaining a meaningful number of women working in the field is a complex undertaking. So, I then set off to quantify women with membership in AWRA. Finding this number was also difficult since we do not currently collect demographic data on our membership applications (we hope to change this in the near future).

Even with two big fails I wasn't quite ready to quit, so AWRA Director of Membership and Marketing Christine McCrehin and I started exploring AWRA records from the past 50 years to find evidence that women are, indeed, an important part of our organization. It didn't take long to prove this theory. This is what we found:

- Although we were unable to find out the percent of women who are members of AWRA (due to a lack of demographic data) we did find that of the 69,000 unique visitors to the AWRA homepage in the last year (members and nonmembers) 38% were women and 62% were men. The majority of those women (52%) were 25-44 and only 16% were 55+. Of the 62% of men that visited the site in the last year, 49% were 25-44 and 24% were 55+.
- In the past 50 years, 16% of AWRA presidents have been women, the first in 1987. Since 2000, six presidents in the past 16 years (or 37%) have been women.
- In reviewing the Honorary and Fellow members there is work that needs to be done to decrease the gender gap, but in my review of the AWRA awards that have been established in the past 25 years (Mary H. Marsh, A. Ivan Johnson, David R. Maidment) there is a much higher percentage of women award winners, ie. 86%, 38% and 50% respectively.

- Women are well-represented as scholarship awardees. The Richard A. Herbert scholarship is awarded to the most qualified undergraduate and graduate for academic performance and/or research performance related to water resources. Since 1996, 62% of the Richard A. Herbert Memorial Scholarship award winners have been women. In the past 2 years (2014-2015), 75% of the award winners have been women.

*Gathering this information was an enlightening exercise and it became clear to me that in the water resources field, and in AWRA, **women's role and contributions are significant and most importantly, their impact is increasing.***

Following this data search I concluded that I would interview six women who are accomplished leaders in the water resources field and have been actively involved in AWRA. Each one of the women in this group has proven to be a strong and successful leader in the water resources field internationally, nationally and at the state and local levels. Each one of these women is extremely busy, yet took the time to contribute to this blog and I would like to sincerely thank each one of them.

In the interviews each woman provides a brief background on her education and professional experience and insight into her work and career. I hope you find these interviews as interesting and inspiring as I do. With this blog I hope to give a voice to women who have led and continue to lead so that women and men in our community can learn from their successes, hurdles cleared, accomplishments and motivation to keep moving forward.

And without further ado I'd like to get started with the first interview and the most obvious choice, AWRA's first woman president, [Arlene Dietz](#).