



SHILPI SHAH

Burn

IWL Policy Track: STEM

Presentation: 12/10/2025



The Leadership Scholars Certificate Program is a two-year selective, interdisciplinary certificate program that prepares Rutgers undergraduate women to be informed, innovative, and socially responsible leaders.

Leadership Scholars design and implement social action projects to expand their understanding of issues and problems and to develop leadership skills.

This project gives Scholars the opportunity to apply the theoretical knowledge they have gained about leadership, advocacy, and social change with the practical and experiential knowledge they have developed about a particular policy issue or problem through the field site placement. It also further develops leadership skills by giving undergraduates the opportunity to *practice* leadership *through* action.

To find out more please visit the Institute for Women's Leadership's website at <http://iwl.rutgers.edu>.

BACKGROUND

- Women are routinely discouraged from pursuing research-intensive or “taxing” careers + face discrimination regarding “commitment”
- Discrepancies begin from childhood and continue deep into professional careers
- Systematic biases regarding “who is *really* the most qualified?”



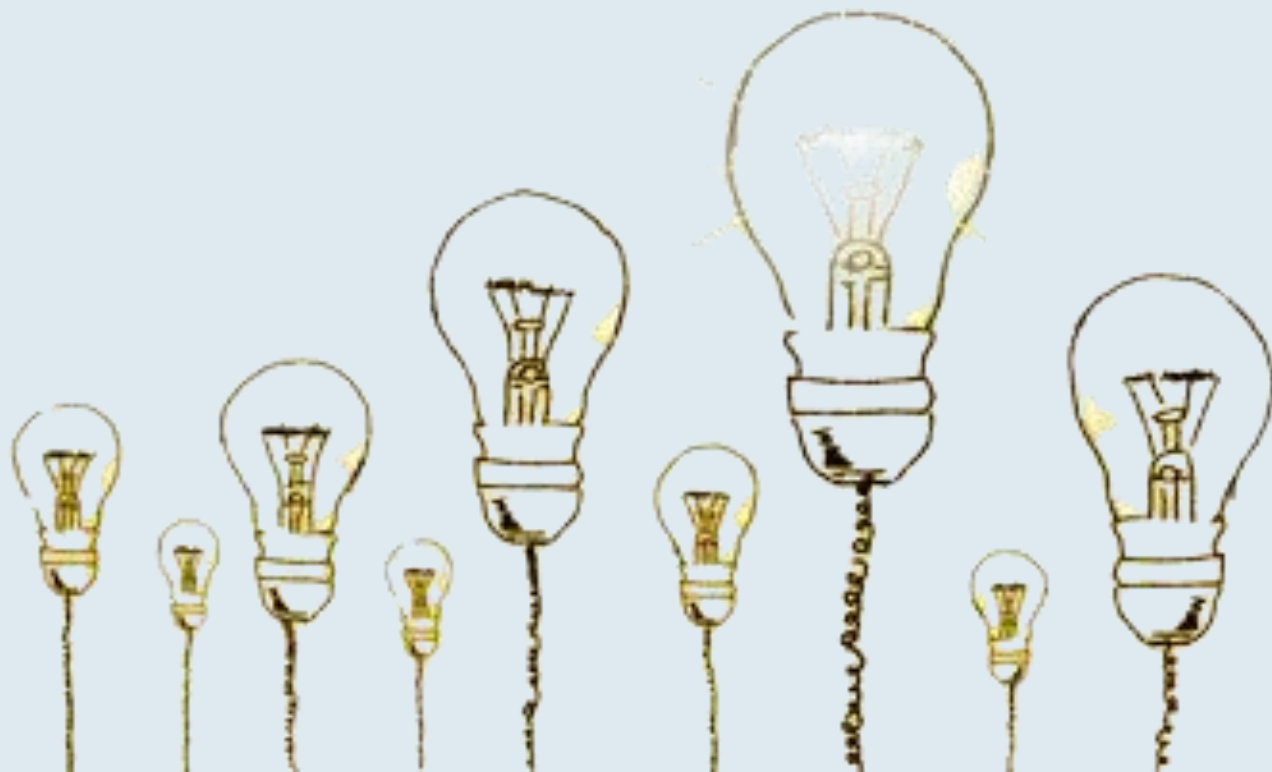
A large, stylized teal cloud graphic with a soft, irregular shape, positioned on the right side of the slide. The word "INTERVENTION" is written in white, bold, uppercase letters across the center of the cloud.

INTERVENTION

- *Short short:* Animated films historically allow for **emotional resonance** - learn a life lesson without realizing
- Rooted in trends from top-performing Instagram reels and YouTube shorts for maximum engagement

SCOPE

- **Mission Statement:** To illuminate the often unseen systemic challenges women in STEM face from early childhood through professional careers through an animated short film
- **Product:**
 - Animated short film posted to YouTube, Instagram, TikTok
 - Firsthand accounts from women in STEM
- **Scope:**
 - Intended for general audiences, targeted towards women of all ages
 - Incorporates storytelling/narrative + community voices tools





TIMELINE

- Spring 2025: Background review
- Summer: Interviews
- Early October: Pivot!
- December: Previews/promo materials
- January: Submit to film festivals

- Discouragement of girls in STEM from childhood (Saucerman & Vasquez 2011)
- Discouragement of undergraduate women and lack of accessible research resources (Ortiz et. al. 2023)
- Discrimination against graduate women and concerns about “flight risks” (Williams & Ceci 2012)
- Harassment in professional settings (Princeton Graduate Women in STEM 2015)
- Lack of mentorship and systematic gatekeeping (Becker et. al.)

INTELLECTUAL FOUNDATION



CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS

- Passion is fueled by support.
- Each study represents a **cornerstone of development in the film** + another nuance to consider for the identities of women in STEM
- Visual language to depict women's experiences in STEM



FEMINIST LEADERSHIP

- Center women's voices through interviews and narrative
- Visualize women's struggles through engaging media
- Challenge social norms using a metaphor
- Need for reflection in STEM communities



LESSONS LEARNED

- Flexibility, adaptability, and resilience – roll with the punches
- Show, don't tell
- Value of metaphors/narratives for sensitive experiences
- New skill: Procreate + animation



FUTURE WORK



- **Current Impact**
 - View systematic issues in STEM and academia through feminist lens
 - Incorporate first-hand accounts from diverse perspectives
 - Use a visual metaphor for emotional resonance
- **Future Impact**
 - Create further animated films on tangentially associated topics to form a playlist/social theme
 - Motherhood in STEM
 - “Burnout” - imposter syndrome
 - Intersectionality perspectives (first-gen, disability, LGBTQ+, racial lens, etc.)

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