

FINDINGS FROM THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN SURVEY ON PERCEPTIONS OF GENDER-RELATED ISSUES AND INTERESTS

In Spring semester of 2003, the Advancement of Women Office conducted an on-line survey to gather faculty women perceptions of gender-related issues on campus and their interests in faculty programs. Based on information from the Office of Institutional Research, there were 423 women faculty in full-time instructional positions.

A total of 146 women responded to the survey, slightly more than one third of the available population of women faculty. An overwhelming number (86%) of the respondents identified themselves as white. African Americans comprised 8% of the respondents. The remainder identified as American Indian or Alaskan Native (1%), Asian or Pacific Islander (1%), Hispanic (1%), and mixed (1%).

The rank distribution of the respondents was as follows: 38% - assistant professors, 34% - associate professors, professor – 11%, instructor – 7%, lecturer – 4%, and clinical faculty – 3%. One quarter were non-tenure track faculty.

Gender and Advancement

Forty percent of the respondents indicated that they had concerns that their ability to advance at the university has been, is, or will be hindered by their gender. Forty six respondents provided written statements regarding their concerns. Within this group, the largest percentage vocalized the need for the University to make provisions for faculty to fulfill family obligations, that disproportionately affect women. The respondents noted the lack of paid family leave or any provisions to adjust the tenure clock if they decide to have children, as significant obstacles to their advancement.

Equally important to those who responded to this question was their perception of an unequal distribution of workload (i.e., women faculty were assigned higher teaching loads and greater committee work) that took time away from engaging in scholarship. Many of these women respondents believed that these undue burdens were placed on them in large part because of their gender. Although they did acknowledge they are sometimes placed on committees because of their lone female status in their departments, others believed it was due to gendered stereotypes that women are better nurturers. The higher expectations for service hindered them from reaching leadership positions at the university.

At least seven respondents noted that they did not see their gender as affecting their ability to advance, often noting that it once was a problem, but was no longer. For those who are in leadership positions, they noted their male counterparts discredited their views and participation in administrative meetings. Some respondents noted that they had obtained full professor status. However, they found themselves struggling in ways their male colleagues did not. They expressed belief that the men's club still existed, and this system blocks women from information and mentoring that impacts their abilities to

obtain research funding, tenure, promotion, and access to higher paying administrative positions. The lack of female full professors and the slow rate of their advancement remained a looming issue for the respondents as well. Lastly, a few respondents stated that gender disparity in salary existed at the University.

Obstacles to Advancement

Respondents were provided a list of 16 items and asked to identify how much of an obstacle to advancement (tenure, promotion, or movement into senior administrative positions) of women faculty at the university a particular item presented using a scale of 1 = not at all to 4 = very much.

Ranking of those items based upon the percentage of respondents who identified it as very much an obstacle is presented in Table 1.

Obstacle to Advancement	Percentage indicating Very Much	Percentage indicating Much or Very Much
Salary equity	35%	65%
Child care	33%	65%
Service demand	31%	62%
Workload equity	30%	56%
Devaluing of areas research	26%	50%
Family leave	23%	48%
Resource equity	22%	42%
Voice in decision making	20%	44%
Access to valued committees/activities	19%	34%
Undervaluing of women’s professional accomplishments	19%	48%
Partner benefits	19%	33%
Devaluing of particular methods of research	18%	42%
Access to professional networks	15%	27%
Eldercare	15%	43%
Sexist comments	5%	30%
Sexual harassment	1%	16%

Respondents were also asked to provide written comments related to each of the listed obstacles and 64 respondents chose to provide written comments to this questions. Content analysis of these responses grouped thematically follows.

Childcare/Family Leave/ Partner Benefits/Elderly Care

The availability of on campus childcare is an issue identified by many of the respondents (n = 39). The waiting list at the Lanette Suttles Child Care Center is perceived to be at least two years and is viewed as always closed. There also lies the belief that given the center was established to provide child care for students, students are given priority over

faculty members. Further, the hours of operation limit the work choices of parents who could work after hours on campus. It was also noted that the child care center provides no discount for faculty members. Overall, it appears that the respondents recognized the lack of affordable childcare in the area and view this as an obstacle in their advancement at the university. Suggestions to resolve childcare issues included providing childcare to all faculty, and expanding the current centers' size and hours of operation to support late afternoon and night classes.

The responses to childcare often merged with issues of family leave for the respondents (n = 27). While some of the respondents believed that there is a family leave provision at the university, others mentioned that they had no idea what it was or that family leave was placed in an individual sick leave package. The most common thread was the need for the university to address the lack of paid family leave that would support maternity leave/parental leave/leave to care for sick or aged members in the family (n = 25). The belief that the university should step beyond the federal mandated laws to support families was one consistent comment. Single mothers who must take the time off to have a child are also placed with additional financial constraints because of the lack of support from the University. In the case of adoption there are no provisions to assist the families during this transitional time. Further, what family leave is provided lacks to address the needs of couples who are not "legally" married (n = 25). Faculty members' ability to negotiate time off to care a partner who is ill is often not welcomed by unit heads. At least one respondent mentioned that the lack of health care for unmarried and or same sex couples hinders hiring top quality faculty members.

Salary Equity

Overall, 24 respondents noted a belief that salaries are low across the board and this has resulted in the inability of departments to retain valued women faculty. The effect of salary compression also has had negative impact on the salaries of women at the University.

Devaluing of Particular Areas of Research/Methods of Research

Several respondents (n = 23) reported that women who engage in more collaborative, broad and less traditional research is not always as valued by their administrators. This includes a perception that qualitative research is "soft" and that feminist methods are weaker than more traditional research methodologies. This then becomes a major issue in terms of evaluating the rigor of scholarship of faculty during tenure, promotion, and raise decisions.

Workload Equity

When adjusting for the high demand of service work done by female faculty at the University, it is believed that women have a higher workload that is not reflected in salary. The same can be said for the higher number of administrative job/responsibilities that female faculty hold. This is particularly aggravated for women of color who are

placed on even larger number of committee assignments. These women believe this directly hinders them from advancing at the level and pace of their male colleagues.

Service Demands/ Access to Valued Committees/Activities

Respondents (n = 20) perceived that women tend to do more service than men at the University. However, this service contribution is often not valued or given due consideration when decisions are made regarding promotion and tenure. A couple of the respondents noted that the course load required and committee demands are not conducive to the Research I level of the University. One of the problems that arises the respondents noted is the higher level of women who accept these service demands. Often times it is believed that women accept these jobs because of their perception that saying no will be viewed negatively by their supervisors. This burden often extends to women and particularly women of color in their advisement and mentoring of students. One respondent suggested that a workload survey be completed that compared years in rank of male versus female faculty members, and compared research, teaching, and service loads on this campus. Overall, it is perceived women are offered more department service positions that tend to take way from their individual research and professional development.

The most powerful committees within units and the faculty senate appear to be controlled by men (n = 18). This may be due to the most tenured faculty who have more decision making are by and large men. Women, however, get stuck with “secretary” committee work.

Sexist Comments/ Harassment

While many of the respondents recorded that they personally have not experienced sexist comments and/or harassment while employed at the university, an alarming trend was noticed. For those who had witnessed sexist comments, they reported that they ignored the situation and stated that the comments were something they had to cope with. Sometimes the comment were subtle or in a jokingly sexual nature. Other times they were directed towards areas of research such as women’s studies. A couple of the respondents noted that the problem was bigger then the university, but that the University should do more to address how it undermines that advancement of women here.

Resource Equity

Many respondents were unsure of what was meant by this question. Those that did respond noted lack of support in research, space allocation, as well as child care allotments.

Voice in Decision Making

Due to the lack of women at higher levels of administration and as leaders on committees, a number of respondents (n = 16) reported that their voice was not taken as

seriously, even when placed on committees. One respondent stated” the argument is always made, one faculty, one vote...Women are asked to serve on a committee to “present the female perspective” on a committee of 8-10 members.” It is perceived that one vote cannot represent the voice of women on campus if the remainder of the committee tends to be “top heavy with middle-aged, tenured, full, white men.”

Access to Professional Networks

Although not many responded in this area (n = 12) , some of the women believe that this is an individual responsibility. However, others acknowledge that access is granted through the men who hold the power.

Interest in Professional Development Activities

Respondents were also asked to indicate their level of interest (1= not at all interested to 4 = very much interested) in a list of 7 activities related to women’s professional development. Their rankings by percentage are listed in Table 2.

Table 2. Respondents’ interest in professional development activities.

Activity	Percentage indicating Very Much	Percentage indicating Much or Very Much
Material research support	50%	75%
Leadership development	34%	59%
Informal networking	27%	62%
Having a mentor	25%	50%
Speakers	21%	51%
Discussion circles	21%	49%
Being a mentor	11%	46%

Respondents were also asked to identify other activities related to professional development in which they would be interested. Twenty responses were provided and the majority of comments focused on the need for tangible research support, such as small grants, travel support, grant writing and leadership development, such as seminars that focused on skill building - grant management, budgeting, management principles, time management.

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