Changing the CULTURE for WOMEN in Higher Education

Toolkit for University Staff and Administrators

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AREN’T WOMEN there yet?

As we celebrate the substantial changes made in university cultures in the past four decades to include women, we cannot forget the many challenges women still face. Recognizing that we all have implicit gender bias, we can and must take responsibility to create equitable colleges and universities. With this realization in mind, what can each of us do—regardless of identity or title—to finally achieve equity for women in higher education? How can we use our influence to create change?

Despite the increasing number of women on campuses nationwide and the institutionalization of university policies that strive to encourage equity, women still face a myriad of obstacles within academia, obstacles that the National Coalition for Women and Girls in Education calls the “no trespassing signs” of higher education. Female students, faculty, staff, and administrators continue to be underrepresented in positions of leadership, allocated fewer financial resources, negatively impacted by work-family conflict, discouraged from certain academic disciplines, more negatively evaluated, and threatened by sexual violence. In addition, the long-term consequences of ingrained, often unintentional, gender bias lead to an accumulation of advantages for men, and disadvantages for women every day (Valian, 1999).

WOMEN STUDENTS

In 1970, women received less than half of all undergraduate degrees, fewer than 40 percent of all graduate degrees, and less than 10 percent of all professional and doctoral degrees (Mason, 2009). Today, men and women enter college after high school at about the same rate, but women annually earn 62 percent of all associate degrees, 57 percent of all bachelor’s degrees, and 60 percent of all master’s degrees (Mason, 2009). It is the older students—2 to 1 of whom are women, and many of whom are mothers—that tilt the scale.

RACE MATTERS

The impressive graduation rate of women is more representative of certain races and ethnicities than others. Among 25 to 29-year-olds in 2007, 37 percent of white women earned a bachelor’s or higher degree, compared to only 22 percent of African American women and 13 percent of Hispanic women (Corbett, Hill & Rose, 2008).

HELPING STUDENTS OVER 25

Indeed, women comprise the majority of “non-traditional” students among all racial, ethnic, and socio-economic groups. This statistic is particularly poignant for African American female graduates, one-third of whom enroll when they are 25 or older (Mason, 2009; Corbett et al., 2008). Current studies show that women with children are more likely to graduate when provided with financial aid, counseling, restroom-building, and affordable child-care on campus (Arrows & Roberts, 2009). With the exception of 2-year community colleges, university programs for students with families continue to be limited in size and scope, leaving many women with children on the margins of mainstream campus life. Alongside decreased graduation rates, a lack of support for female students with children negatively impacts their mental health. According to the World Health Organization, disproportionate caregiving responsibilities are among the gender-specific risk factors for common mental health disorders such as depression and anxiety (Arrows & Roberts, 2009). School-family conflict can compound this situation.

BREAKING INTO SCIENCE?

Regardless of age and dependency status, female students still cluster in traditionally “female” majors. On a positive note, women now receive 50 percent of bachelor’s degrees in business and 62 percent in biomedical science (Mason, 2009; Carrell, Page & West, 2009; Lueckman, 2007). However, few women receive undergraduate degrees in the physical and computer sciences (18 percent and 21 percent respectively) (Nelson & Brammer, 2007). The predominance of women in traditionally “female” disciplines means women remain segregated in lower-paying occupations upon graduation (Mason, 2009).

MENTORS NEEDED

Research indicates that a lack of role models within traditionally “male” fields further deters women from pursuing undergraduate and, especially, graduate degrees. Particularly in the physical sciences, engineering, and computer science fields, women often perceive the low number of women faculty members as an implicit sign that they will not be welcomed in the department as students or as future faculty. This is particularly troubling for students of color, as women of color are the most underrepresented demographic in college and university departments (Mason, 2009). Studies have also found that some female graduate students and post-docs are explicitly discouraged from having children by their mentors, who warn them they will not be considered “serious scientists” if they are mothers. On a systemic level, only a fraction of colleges and universities provide paid maternity leave or any other family accommodation for graduate students. Combined, these factors can lead female graduate students to other occupations outside of academia as well as deter women from pursuing graduate work in general.

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WHAT CAN EACH OF US DO TO FINALLY ACHIEVE EQUITY FOR WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION?

The following guide brings together some of the most recent research and scholarship on women in higher education to answer the above question by:

1) providing college and university staff and administrators with a concise introduction to topics and resources in regards to the status of U.S. women in higher education today; and

2) providing ideas and resources to promote further transformation toward equity for women in higher education.

AREN’T ATHLETICS EQUAL NOW?

Though women represent approximately 42 percent of college athletes, male athletes receive over $138 million more than female athletes in college athletic scholarships at NCAA member institutions. Women face a high-rate of gender-specific violence on campus, including: rape, sexual harassment, sexual assault, and domestic violence. In fact, one out of every 5 women will be the victim of a rape or attempted rape in the course of their undergraduate studies (Fisher, Cullen & Turner, 2009).

EDUCATED / LESS VIOLENCE

To make matters worse, a recent study found that many victims of rape and sexual assault feel ignored or further victimized by school-run administrative case proceedings. Some victims and their advocates argue that numerous colleges use the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, which forbids schools from divulging students’ education records, as a way to keep rape and sexual assault cases quiet. In a few recent court cases, universities have been found guilty of ordering illegal gag orders on victims and for encouraging victims to drop complaints (Lombardi, 2009).

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WOMEN FACULTY

LOWER RANKS & LESS TENURE

On a structural level, female scholars are pooled in the lower ranks of academia. As of 2005-06, women constituted 48 percent of the part-time instructors at all college and university campuses, 39 percent of full-time instructors, and only 24 percent of full professorships (Wilson, 2006). While women hold 44.8 percent of tenure-track positions in the U.S., only 31 percent of tenured faculty are female. Women hold 40 percent of full professorships at two-year colleges, but a mere 16 percent at doctoral institutions (Trower & Chat, 2002). In 2005, the American Institute of Physics found that women constitute only 10 percent of faculty members in physics (Masoon, 2009). In engineering and the sciences, only one-quarter of women faculty with a doctorate have been awarded tenure, compared to the one-half of men (Trower & Chat, 2002). In the biomedical sciences—the scientific field where women have made the greatest advance—the proportion of female assistant professors lags the PhD pool from a decade earlier by 10 to 15 percent (Lederman, 2007). In 2008, at the University of Minnesota, 32 percent of full- and part-time faculty were female, compared to 36 percent at comparable universities (University of Minnesota, 2009).

SALARY INEQUITY STILL?

Women scholars, regardless of race and ethnicity, earn less money than their male peers. During 2005-06, the average female professor made just 81 cents of that earned by a comparable male scholar (Wilson, 2006). As women progress through the academic rankings, they carry this pay inequity with them. Thus the pay gap widens from assistant to full, with female faculty taking a smaller earnings-history with them into retirement (Jensen, 1991). Women, on average, earn $10,203 less than men, and women in public institutions and $12,865 less at private institutions. Disturbingly, in a 2002-03 study, this wage disparity widened almost 3 percent from the prior academic year (Trower & Chat, 2002).

WOMEN WITH CHILDREN GIVEN LOWER SALARIES

Often referred to as the “second-shift,” academic women spend a substantial amount of time caring for children and aging elders. University of Minnesota-Twin Cities (UM-TC) female faculty reported spending approximately 32 hours per week on childcare, while males reported around 16 hours. This disparity is emblematic of larger national trends (University of Minnesota, 2009; Harrington & Lodge, 2009). Women with children are often perceived to be less competent, less promotable, are less likely to be recommended for leadership positions, and are offered lower starting salaries. The reverse is found for fathers (Boushey, 2009). Indeed, only 4 percent of college and university presidents today are women of color (“Data Connection,” 2007). At predominantly white institutions, women of color work primarily in junior-level student affairs (around 47 percent) or other specialized positions. These positions often lack institutional authority and professional and monetary advancement tracks (Edghill, 2006).

WOMEN ADMINISTRATORS AND STAFF

STEADY INCREASE

In 2007 women made up 31 percent of trustees on college boards, compared to only 20 percent in 1981 (Jaschik, 2009). Today women comprise 23 percent of college and university presidents, a stark contrast to their 3 percent representation in 1970 (Musil, 2006; Sapiro, 2008). While these are certainly gains worth celebration, such numbers can be misleading. The vast majority of female administrators remain situated in low- and mid-level positions (Edghill, 2006). Even when women are in higher-level positions, the vast majority are found at less prestigious institutions. In 2008, 29 percent of presidents at community colleges were women, compared to 14 percent at doctoral institutions (Musil, 2009).

MORE WOMEN ADMINISTRATORS = MORE WOMEN

The topic of women administrators is intimately tied to that of women faculty. On a fundamental level, the faculty composition and how they advance determines the next generation of leaders, and the proportion of female administrators on a given campus impacts hiring rates of new female faculty. A 2008-09 study by the Cornell Higher Education Institute found that institutions with female presidents, female provosts, and more women on boards of trustees (at least 25 percent women) saw larger increases in their share of women faculty members than did other institutions. Likewise, a recent study by the National Research Council found that the presence of women as science and engineering department chair increases the likelihood that female Ph.D.s would apply for a faculty position, consequently creating a more gender-diverse applicant pool (Jaschik, 2009).

“Only 7% of all senior administrators and 3% of chief academic officers are women of color... only 4% of college and university presidents are women of color.”

RACE MATTERS

The statistics are dramatically worse for women administrators of color. Only 7 percent of senior administrators and 3 percent of chief academic officers across the U.S. are women of color. This latter statistic is particularly significant as the most common path to the presidency is through serving as chief academic officer or provost (“In Brief,” 2008). Indeed, only 4 percent of college and university presidents today are women of color (“Data Connection,” 2007). At predominantly white institutions, women of color work primarily in junior-level student affairs (around 47 percent) or other specialized positions. These positions often lack institutional authority and professional and monetary advancement tracks (Edghill, 2006).

COMPETENT AND LikABLE?

Many women administrations find that once hired, they face what researchers have termed, the “double-blind.” When women administrators exude feminine stereotypes they are often perceived to be “too soft,” while women who portray masculine stereotypes are often seen as “too tough” (Sapiro, 2008; “The Double-Blind Dilemma,” 2007). Consequently, women administrators can find it difficult to gain their peers’ regard as both competent and likeable—qualities necessary for career advancement.

BENEVOLENT SEXISM

“Benevolent sexism” often comes in the form of emphasizing how wonderful (i.e. rare) it is to have a woman leader, perhaps also referring to the leader’s stereotypically feminine traits such as her “people-skills” or “friendly nature.” While well-intentioned, such statements reinforce the view that women leaders are uncommon, and limited in their job skills. Though just as psychologically detrimental as hostile or blatant sexism, “benevolent sexism” can be harder to address as it has a misleading positive veneer. In some cases, highlighting a female administrator is taken as “proof” that gender inequity is no longer a relevant issue on campus. This view can be particularly detrimental to change, as it supports an unwillingness to recognize and, thus, address sexism.

RESPECTING STAFF

Staff at low- and mid-levels are critical to the smooth-functioning of a university or college, and the majority of those positions are filled by women. Many of these women have bachelor’s degrees and/or high-level skills and knowledge. However, these women often report being treated with less respect and are not often encouraged to develop professionally or be mentored into leadership positions. Administrators can make a difference in the productivity and growth of these staff members by recognizing and supporting their contributions and skills.

INSTITUTIONAL ADVANTAGES TO EQUITY

Diverse institutions receive a wider array of applicants for faculty and administrative positions than their less inclusive counterparts. They also have higher retention rates for women—saving universities and colleges time and money that would be expended in finding a new hire. Women and people of color are often more willing to invest energy in creating new curricula and programs that incorporate and validate the lived experiences of women and people of color. Perhaps most importantly, growth in leadership by women and people of color provides much-needed role models for students, faculty, and staff—regardless of gender (Hall, 2009).
“The long-term consequences in the EVALUATION AND TREATMENT OF MEN AND WOMEN based on implicit gender schemas lead to an accumulation of advantages for men.”


REFERENCES


“WHY SO SLOW? THE SCIENCE OF SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING FACULTIES”

If you are a SUPERVISOR:

BE A LEADER THAT CREATES A CLIMATE FOR EQUITY: Design a long-term plan for your unit/department that moves it toward an equitable climate (may include recruitment, retention, scheduled salary equity reviews, family leave, lactation rooms, training for respect, strategic climate change, etc.). Provide incentives for improving the retention of women and people of color. Assess work toward diversity as part of annual reviews. Develop a competitive award program for women.

SUPPORT/ENCOURAGE LEADERSHIP TRAINING: Develop or request leadership training for women in your unit, or encourage participation by your staff in other leadership development programs for women. Recognize and grow staff’s skills and knowledge.

CONSIDER OTHER WAYS TO STRUCTURE WORK LIVES: Our conceptions of work affect the health and well-being of everyone regardless of gender identity. Critically evaluate what it means to be a “good/successful” worker, educator, scholar, administrator, etc.

SUPPORT WOMEN STUDENTS: Support students over 23, especially those with children e.g. via support programs and lactation rooms. Offer maternity leave for graduate students.

BE AN INTENTIONAL, INCLUSIVE LEADER: Think in new ways about how a good leader acts, super-

and increases critical, creative, beneficial collaborations. What opportunities would a different view of power open up for people and the organization?

If you have HIRING/APPOINTMENT authority:

APPOINT WOMEN: Appointing women to leadership positions fosters a more diverse, intellectually creative, and equitable campus. Ensure committees have diverse representation.

HIRE WOMEN: Hire women at all levels of administra-

tion including boards of trustees, as chief academic of-

ficers, as department chairs and deans, and as provosts and presidents. Hire more women, especially women of color and women in the STEM fields. Appoint at least one tenured woman and person of color to each search com-

mittee. EOAA gives workshops on how to recruit a diverse pool of candidates.

COACH ON NEGOTIATING: Offer equitable salaries and benefits. Provide a list of items people have negoti-

ated in the past to all candidates—don’t let it be a hidden advantage.

WHAT CAN I DO TO CREATE CHANGE?

If you have

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If you are an ALLY:

LEARN: Attend workshops. Read (see our webpage online). Sign up for the Women’s Center e-news at women@umn.edu. Check your own professional journal for ideas. Follow our blog. Learn about implicit bias…studies show that increased awareness of one’s own internalized sex bias promotes longer-lasting institutional change.

START CONVERSATIONS: Talk with colleagues about the fact that challenges still face women in academia. Discuss personal and cultural concepts of leadership, privilege, work/life, institutional transformation, etc.

BE A MENTOR: Inform women about opportunities, look for leadership potential and nurture it. Start a formal mentoring program in your unit. Mentoring promotes greater educational attainment by women students; better recruitment/retention of women faculty; and a greater representation in leadership for women administrators.

DONATE: Give to scholarships and awards and help to fund initiatives for women, off and on-campus.

JOIN a campus committee working for transformation or create one for your unit/department.

If you also serve on a DIVERSITY COMMITTEE:

EDUCATE YOURSELF AND OTHERS: Host a workshop or conference in your department or unit about implicit bias, being an ally for women, creating system change, men as change agents, etc.

LOBBY FOR CHANGE: Create, or lobby for, a long-term plan for your unit/department with the stakeholders and supervisors. Use the university governance systems to create policy changes. Collaborate with others around campus to improve the climate across gender and racial/ethnic identities.

If you also are a FACULTY member:

INCORPORATE WOMEN IN THE CURRICULUM: Ask your Center for Teaching and Learning for assistance on how to be more inclusive of women, and all learners, in your curriculum and pedagogical styles. Design an academic environment of excellence for all.

BE A RESPECTFUL COLLEAGUE: Treat people of all “ranks” respectfully, encourage staff to take advantage of professional development, and invite input when appropriate.

CONDUCT RESEARCH: Research and monitoring is a crucial step in understanding gender dynamics, in creating a statistical database for future programs, and in improving the recruitment and retention of women students, staff, faculty, and administrators.