

**Major Issues Affecting Recruitment, Retention and Research Productivity of Women
at Michigan State University**
A Report to the Provost from the Women's Advisory Committee to the Provost
March 2008

In August 2007, Provost Kim Wilcox met with the Women's Advisory Committee to the Provost (WACP) and charged the group to provide insight and advice on several critical issues facing women on the Michigan State University (MSU) campus. Three topics were chosen for investigation and included 1) recruitment and retention of female graduate students, 2) research support for female faculty to increase research productivity, and 3) promoting civility across campus. The purpose of this report is to summarize the key issues and recommendations from each of the three subcommittee reports that cut across all three topics, thereby representing the most pressing issues needing to be addressed. The selection of these cross-cutting challenges is based on the following premises:

- Recruitment, advancement, retention, research productivity, and civility are all closely linked. Addressing one of these issues affects the others.
- Some of these issues pose challenges for both men and women on campus and addressing them can benefit everyone, regardless of gender. However, they all have particular implications for the recruitment, retention, advancement and research productivity of excellent female faculty, staff and graduate students.
- Previous reports have been generated by other groups including the WACP, Women's Resource Center and the Ad-hoc Committee for Worklife and Family Balance. This report is based on a review of their work, a review of related literature, and recently conducted interviews and focus groups with close to 100 MSU administrators, faculty, and students representing a wide range of units and disciplines. Nevertheless, it should not be considered an exhaustive list that represents all major issues, constituencies, or potential recommendations. Rather, it is a starting point for more thorough study and to facilitate moving forward on select, action items that will have an impact on all three areas investigated.
- The WACP has identified short-range recommendations with potential for implementation within the current University mission, structure and budget. However, we submit that longer-range strategies requiring the types of investment necessary for achieving the University vision to become a world-class institution are also needed. Both short- and long-range goals could position MSU to be universally recognized as a leader in support of diversity, fairness, and work-life balance.

Key Issues

The top key issues identified in all three subcommittee reports include the following:

1. **A clear perception of unequal and exploitative practices** that are disproportionately experienced by women including in the following areas:

- access to opportunities for research funding, promotions, and leadership roles;
- leadership positions in which research agendas and priorities are set;
- committee, advising and teaching assignments (women being assigned to committees requiring a high level of work with low recognition value; more difficult advising cases, and; courses requiring greater amounts of preparation such as new courses);
- rates of pay, and;
- respect accorded women in both personal encounters as well as formal forms of recognition (example - men being introduced or addressed by their title while women are addressed by their first name, even though they may have the same credentials or qualifications as their male colleagues).

Simultaneously, there is a lack of recognition of the unequal responsibilities of dependent care placed on women in our society and inherent in this, the lack of value placed on both women and dependent care. Unequal assignments and opportunities, combined with unequal responsibility for child and senior care, create a double-jeopardy for women, critically handicapping their ability to sustain optimal productivity, advance, conduct research, or remain at the university.

Recurrently voiced perceptions indicate that such uneven access to opportunities is due in part to the distribution of assignments, information, resources, and research support taking place behind closed doors which eliminates open and fair competition. Much of the work of dismantling the barriers to full participation falls to the deans, directors, and department chairs, but the Provost's role in setting expectations and exercising leadership is a crucial key to change.

2. **Climate/Civility** is a term that is open to interpretation. Concomitantly, there are different levels of incivility, e.g. some behaviors are offensive whereas others cross over into being discriminatory and illegal. University policy regarding sexual harassment and gender-based discrimination is based on federal and state laws. While some allegations investigated each year rise to the level of illegal sexual harassment, others involve inappropriate and unprofessional behavior that is not necessarily a violation of law or policy. The vast majority of students, faculty, and administrators model exemplary behavior and reflect University values of respect. However, even without clear definition, it was apparent in all three subcommittees that behaviors that violate acceptable codes of conduct occur at all levels of the university structure. They are multi-directional with students engaging in uncivil behavior to faculty and visitors, faculty being uncivil to students and staff, and administrators both unwittingly and openly being uncivil to and discriminating against faculty and peers. Further, issues related to civility are more critical for women on campus and have devastating implications for their recruitment, retention, advancement and research productivity.

Although there are existing programs and resources to minimize and remedy incivility across campus, recurrent themes continue to surface. Examples of the following have been reported:

- Allegations of sexual harassment and allegations of gender-based discrimination towards faculty and graduate students. These allegations may or may not meet definitions of legal violations or be subject to disciplinary action. Such determinations are made through existing resources if brought to the attention of the appropriate parties. However, eliminating behaviors that undermine civility is an important aspect of creating a respectful and supportive environment for all members of the University community.
- A general lack of knowledge exists regarding definitions of harassment, discrimination, and incivility as well as of University policies and resources for reporting and assistance. This may result in underreporting of potential violations of respectful and professional codes of conduct, making it difficult to appropriately address unacceptable behavior.
- Insufficient recognition that fear of retribution for pursuing assistance may exist, may be legitimate, and may prevent some individuals from reporting violations even when they are fully aware of the reporting avenues.
- A lack of sensitivity among chairs, directors and deans when working with women and minorities. This lack of sensitivity negatively impacts climate, morale, retention, and public reputation.
- A lack of sensitivity to cultural differences which is of particular importance given the University's high emphasis on encouraging study abroad, welcoming international students and faculty, and extending its global presence.

These key points indicate that increased vigilance is needed to ensure that all of the University's members are treated with respect and experience a supportive culture and environment. The WACP believes that addressing these challenges requires a multi-pronged approach, and will not be successful without on-going clear direction from the President and Provost in setting standards and communicating expectations to all members of the MSU community.

3. **Dependent care** – Access to affordable quality child care has been consistently cited as a primary need for the MSU campus. Although strides have been made in the last ten years including construction of a new child care facility, this continues to be a central issue that is critical to recruitment, retention, advancement and research for MSU women and families. There is considerable unmet need, particularly with regard to the following;
 - Shortage of infant care
 - Cost of childcare for graduate students, especially international students
 - Need for dependent care for extended or non-business hours

- Need for exploration of types of dependent-care support beyond increasing slots
- Attention to the special needs of parents with children with disabilities and grandparents raising grandchildren
- Availability and type of needs associated with eldercare
- Support of women who choose to breastfeed, particularly thru the availability of private lactation locations.

Although the WACP recognizes that it is unreasonable to expect that the University can meet all identified dependent care needs, we believe that it is possible to determine several cost-effective strategies that would not only make a meaningful difference in meeting several of these needs but would also make a powerful public statement about the value MSU places on seriously addressing this issue.

Recommendations

1. Mandated Transparency is necessary to reduce actual and perceived unequal and exploitative practices:

- Publicly post all funding opportunities that are available at the unit level such as summer research support, travel funds, etc. as well as who requests them and how they are allocated. This could be done through a department Angel site on a standard schedule such as at the end of each semester.
- Post teaching assignments in every department, using grids that depict information such as who is teaching each course, who is on sabbatical, and who has bought out of courses. Existing models are currently in use, in Mechanical Engineering for example.
- Post all committee assignments.
- Require each chair to disclose in a summary statement at the end of each term, where/how/who all discretionary funds of over \$1000 were distributed.
- Conduct exit interviews with all faculty leaving the University. These interviews should collect quantitative as well as qualitative data and should be followed up by personal contact to obtain clarification on reasons for departure. Aggregate results should be posted in public venue, such as University and departmental web sites.
- Make the performance of people in administrative and leadership roles visible through public report cards, publication of data tracking/metrics, surveys, recognition ceremonies, etc.
- Establish expectations for chairs and unit leaders in line with these recommendations and hold chairs accountable via pay incentives and sanctions. Expectations, transparency and accountability can create an environment in which faculty are empowered to voice concerns early and violations not only can be addressed in positive ways but prevented from occurring in the first place.

2. **Education for the University community to address issues and challenges related to University climate and civility** including:

- **A Multi-Media Public Education and Relations Campaign.** All communications should convey the University's vision and mandate for being an institution that celebrates and promotes diversity and respect for the contributions and potential of all people.
- **Mandatory trainings and Continuing Education for all Deans, Directors and Chairs** that would raise sensitivity to the issues and needs specific to women; understanding of the University's expectations related to climate; knowledge of University policies and how to implement them; and ability to set the desired tone and model values of diversity and respect. Many administrators do an excellent job related to these issues. However, the University should strive for zero tolerance of inequitable and uncivil practices and ensure that all administrators are equally prepared to provide all faculty, staff, and students with a supportive work life environment.

These trainings (including simulations, case studies) should include a wide range of topics such as how to mentor other faculty in this area, provide guidance and information to faculty about existing resources and how to access them, and violation resolution. Tie attendance and outcome measures that indicate actual adoption of desired practices to annual reviews.

- **Ongoing education of all faculty, staff and students** thru orientations and workshops at the University, unit and classroom levels; onsite HR personnel; and publications, email alerts, and other sources of communication. Recommended topics include but are not limited to:
 - Definitions of incivility with clear expectations for what behavior is and is not acceptable within any unit, group or level at the University.
 - How to effectively prevent and manage uncivil behavior in various settings. Example at student level – syllabi can be living documents or contracts between students and teachers. Models for this currently exist.
 - Venues for reporting uncivil behavior and violation of rights
 - Mentoring and networking opportunities
 - Communication to all about resources available for dependent care and work-life balance
 - Uniform implementation of policies related to dependent leave care

- Information provided with regard to sensitivity to diversity issues related to women, minorities, culture, and society (mandatory for all incoming freshman, all incoming faculty).
3. **Create a task force for the specific purpose of addressing issues related to civility** including, but not limited to, establishing standard definitions for different levels of civility, conveying these definitions to the University community, and further examining the issue to determine key concerns and concrete recommendations for change. Recommendations should focus on ways in which the University can become a proactive leader, widely recognized for respecting and supporting expression of diverse ideas, academic freedom, discourse, and diversity of its community - goals which can not co-exist with tolerance for clear violations of accepted definitions of civility. The WACP recommends that this task-force be appointed by the Provost by spring 2008, and include individuals who can reflect the concerns identified through WACP. The committee's final report and recommendations should be submitted to the Provost no later than December 2008.
 4. **Convene a task force to determine how to improve child and senior care.** We recognize the Provost's recent decision to establish a task force with the sole purpose of exploring the issue of infant slots. We request that this action be followed by similar attention to other issues related to dependent care, as outlined in the recent memo from the WACP to the Provost. The need for a greater number of childcare slots should be explored in addition to alternate solutions including reserved infant slots for University hires, vouchers, respite, providers that can travel, funding mechanisms, etc.
 - **Create formal lactation stations** in multiple locations across campus including in public buildings such as the library, international center, etc. MSU data indicates a number of women are breastfeeding on campus, or plan to, and do not have any private space in which to express milk. This is of particular concern for those individuals who do not have a private office space, such as graduate students, or office staff. The creation of lactation stations is a simple, relatively low-cost, yet high-visibility strategy to show University support for families on campus. These spaces need not be large and only require an electrical outlet, a comfortable chair and nearby sink and water.
 5. **Reward & Recognize** people at all levels who actively support and promote standards of respect and diversity within the University community, e.g. those who visibly strive to create just environments for women, minorities, graduate students, etc. Recognition could be achieved in multiple ways including clear communications from the President and Provost throughout all ranks that underscore our

institutional standards and desired public image. Recognize the contributions of women who make break-throughs in male dominated situations and celebrate them in multi-media ways. Ensure that female faculty members are represented in receiving MSU's top awards – such as “Distinguished Faculty” and Endowed Chairs. Importantly, explore options for setting measurable criteria for diversity performance at the University level that can be tied to merit pay, promotion and tenure.

The WACP believes that the University is committed to the ideals reflected in the above recommendations and has an excellent opportunity at this particular time in its history to make changes that will have a lasting impact on the University community as well as the community at-large. The recommendations are within the University's current capacity and have the potential to directly affect the recruitment, advancement, retention, and research productivity of both current and prospective female faculty and students. Moreover, they have the potential for strengthening the University's stability, viability, productivity, public image and world-wide influence. The President and Provost can successfully champion these issues.

Resources:

The following is a partial list of data sources used to create this report. It represents the wide range of literature reviewed and number of persons interviewed from multiple disciplines and ranks. Primary sources include interviews with female faculty across campus, female graduate student focus groups from various campus departments; the Science and Technology Council (STC), Karen Klomparens, Lori Strom; Stan Soffin; Director of the Sloan-Rigas Program in the College of Engineering; John Revitte; Kristine Moore, Paulette Granberry Russell; Jayne Schuiteman; Michael Rice; David Gift; Debra DeZure; Richard Shafer; Beth Alexander; Cindy Helman; Nancy Lange; medical students; Terry Curry; Estelle McGroarty; group of past-WACP Chairs; groups of student s living off –campus. Literature included web literature on NSF ADVANCE grants; Lovitts, B. 2001; Leaving the Ivory Tower, Rowan and Littlefield; Wulff, D. H, and A. E. Austin. 2004; Path to the Professoriate: Strategies for Enriching the Preparation of Future Faculty: Jossey-Bass; Austin, A.E., M. McDaniels. 2006; Preparing the Professoriate of the Future: Graduate Student Socialization for Faculty Roles; Springer; Faculty Council minutes and Civility Report from Faculty council task force on civility; 1993 report on dependent care; status of women report.

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