

## **University of Wisconsin-Extension Status of Women Committee Fiscal Year 2005-2006 Update**

### **BACKGROUND**

The UW-Extension Status of Women Study Committee (SWSC) was formed in January 2001 as an ad hoc committee to prepare an institutional response to the work of the 1999 UW System (UWS) Task Force Report and Recommendations on the Status of Women. The UW-Extension SWSC submitted a draft report to Chancellor Reilly in August 2001 and later disbanded.

The UWS report included a recommendation to create an effective organizational structure for improving the status of women in UW System Administration and each institution. That committee would be responsible for maintaining communication with and advising the institution's administration and governance bodies in planning and monitoring progress for women personnel and students.

The current UW-Extension Status of Women Committee, appointed by Chancellor Kevin Reilly early in 2004, was formed in response to the UWS report and the first UW-Extension Status of Women Study Committee. Names of potential committee members were solicited from Deans and Directors, HR Representatives, and Diversity Council members, and a final list was presented to Chancellor Reilly for approval.

### **FISCAL YEARS 2003-2004 THROUGH 2005-2006**

The reestablished committee met for the first time on April 21, 2004. The SWC spent the first few months becoming better informed about issues of concern for women through reviewing established literature, books, and prior UWS and UW-Extension Reports. In addition, several speakers with expertise in women's issues on campus addressed the committee: Louise Root-Robbins, Special Assistant, Office of the President; Bernice Durand, Assoc. Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs; and Maggie Merdler, Madison/University Field Representative for AFSCME Council 24. Individual committee members researched specific topics relating to equity for women in the workplace and presented summary reports to the committee,

Interim Chancellor Marv Van Kekerix, in appointment letters to committee members, outlined his charge to "advise him about a broad range of issues and concerns that influence women's work lives and status in UW-Extension - at all levels and in every aspect of UWEX operations and educational programs. Issues may include, but are not limited to:

- Equity for women in UWEX with respect to hiring, promotion, and compensation
- Specific strategies for women to achieve upward mobility
- Strategies for increasing representation of women throughout upper levels of the organization and in areas where women are generally underrepresented.
- Educational programs for the workforce regarding gender equity, work/life balance, etc."

## Strategic Planning

After several initial meetings, the committee decided to have a strategic planning session. At the first meeting Interim Chancellor, Marv Van Kekerix urged the committee to:

1. Determine a sense of direction, and
2. Build a shared identity in order to move forward with action and resolve.

Kristin Hill, a Cooperative Extension Family Living Agent, facilitated the sessions. The process began with an introductory creative thinking exercise. Each participant was asked to identify one word describing the women of the past, present and future. The facilitator introduced the “divergent → convergent” thinking and discussion model to encourage group reflection on process benefits, successes and difficulties. The process allowed the group to challenge perspectives, indulge in analysis and consider the complexities of societal inequality, to result in the design of meaningful strategies.

## Results

A total of three 1½-day sessions were held during the period of October 20 and 21, 2004, through January 12, 2005. Participants shared their expectations and hopes for the strategic planning process. Guiding principles of constructive discussion were described. The group developed an *Historical Analysis* using a large, visual timeline of events, accomplishments, trends, patterns and insights. Using the historical context and resulting timeline implications, the group was asked to imagine what has been “put in place” a year from now.

The sessions resulted in a document that outlined major themes and results of the three sessions (see attachments).

- The first session resulted in the creation of seven vision elements.
- The second session resulted in a list of potential obstacles to attaining the vision elements.
- The last session resulted in identifying two directions the committee would take to begin to address potential obstacles.

This process created shared meaning, a more cohesive team, and provided an initial blueprint for the work of the committee.

## Moving Forward

Following the strategic planning, the SWC divided into working subcommittees identified in the Strategic Planning Summary Document:

- An Administrative Committee to address structural and procedural issues,
- A Communications Committee to identify, select, and implement effective communication strategies to share the work of the committee,
- An Education Committee to begin to identify potential education and professional development activities to inform and educate employees across the institution, and
- A Data Collection and Analysis Committee to collect and analyze a variety of information to gain a more complete and valid assessment of the status of women in UW-Extension.

## FISCAL YEAR 2005-2006: THE WORK CONTINUES

Numerous changes and transitions are occurring within UW-Extension during fiscal year 2005-2006 including: the integration of the administrative functions of UW-Extension and the UW Colleges; the selection of a Chancellor to lead both UW-Extension and the UW Colleges; and the selection of a new Director of Diversity and Workforce Development in the Office of Equal Employment and Diversity Programs (EEODP) which supports and assists with coordination of the work of the Status of Women Committee. The committee spent a considerable amount of time during meetings at the end of fiscal year 2004-2005 discussing the potential effect of these changes on the work of the SWC. There was a strong sentiment among committee members that concerted efforts should be made to continue the work that had begun and not lose momentum.

During fiscal year 2005-2006, the subcommittees have continued to refine the foci of their work as well as develop and complete a variety of projects. Following is a summary of the work completed to date as well as the work planned for the balance of the fiscal year.

Administrative Committee: The role of the Administrative Committee is to address structural and procedural issues. It is composed of the Chair of the SWC and the EEODP office liaison. Much of the work of the administrative committee during FY2005-2006 was spent on replacing members on the committee. One committee member retired. Of greater concern were the committee members who left because of work commitments. A constant challenge to maintaining the momentum of the committee has been the expectations placed on committee members relative to the workloads of their jobs and available time. Budget cuts throughout UW-Extension have meant increased workloads for employees. SWC members are drawn from throughout UW-Extension in an effort to insure equitable representation. Because UW-Extension employees are geographically dispersed throughout the state, service on institution wide committees requires a considerable commitment of time to allow for travel to meetings. Although teleconferencing technologies are always available and regularly used, there are times when committee business requires in person attendance. To help reduce the workload and to increase participation from a broader group of employees, the subcommittees have sought the assistance of other UW-Extension employees not on the committee. These additional volunteers have been a great asset to the committee on a numerous levels. That being said, three SWC members resigned due to the demands of their positions.

The need to replace several members of the committee provided the opportunity to review the make up of the committee. An attempt was made to fill the vacant positions in a manner which more closely resembled our work force in terms of gender and racial/ethnic balance as well as type of position i.e. faculty, academic staff and classified staff.

The SWC also took the opportunity to fill one of the vacancies with a colleague from the UW Colleges to serve as liaison with our sister institution. As the integration of our two institutions continues, adding additional UW Colleges representatives will be explored.

Some initial thought has been given to establishing term limits for the SWC and a plan for rotating individuals through the cycle. Too often appointment to advisory committees has resulted in a life time commitment. Although the dedication of individuals is certainly appreciated, the SWC felt that limiting terms serves a number of beneficial purposes including: providing more opportunities for employees to provide service to UW-Extension, insuring an infusion of new ideas

into the work of the committee, a way to combat burn out on the committee, and assisting with recruitment of new members. Two and three year limits have been discussed.

Communication Committee: The Communication Committee's role is to identify, select and implement effective communication strategies to share the work of the committee. During FY 2005-2006 the Communications Committee:

- Designed and launched a Web site ([www.uwex.edu/women](http://www.uwex.edu/women)) to highlight the work of the SWC and serve as a resource for UW-Extension employees,
- Worked with a staff member from UW-Extension's Broadcast and Media Innovations division to develop a logo to brand the work of the SWC,
- Developed a communication plan for advertising SWC sponsored training and events,
- Assisted with the planning and hosting the March 8<sup>th</sup> Ellen Bravo event,
- Communicated the work of the SWC in internal newsletters, through Chancellor e-mails, in payroll mailings and on the Web site.

Education Committee: The Education Committee has focused much of its work this year around identifying issues of interest and concern around climate and work/personal life integration. Their work is culminating with two major education events. The first event was a videoconference on March 8<sup>th</sup> featuring a presentation and discussion with Ellen Bravo, an adjunct faculty member at UW-Milwaukee and the former director of 9to5 National Association of Working Women. The event was co-sponsored by the UW System Women's Studies Consortium and the Women and Science Initiative. The videoconference was held around the state at 13 sites at various UW institutions and county Extension offices. Over 160 people were able to attend. A tape of the event has been made available to those who could not attend in person.

The discussion around work and personal life integration will continue with a second event in late April featuring a panel discussion of UW colleagues who will react to Ms. Bravo's presentation. UW colleagues will be given the opportunity to react to and ask question of the panel members' comments as a way to identify issues of particular concern to UW colleagues and further develop a dialogue on how to begin to address the issues.

Data Collection and Analysis Committee: The Data Collection and Analysis Committee has spent the year identifying ways to collect and analyze a variety of information to gain a more complete and valid assessment of the status of women in UW-Extension.

The SWC expressed interest in examining the salaries of men and women across UW-Extension. Payroll data as of January 18, 2006 was used to calculate average salaries based on gender, title, position, and division. Discussions of the data will continue through the spring.

It was decided that a variety of mechanisms should be used to solicit a broad range of feedback from UW-Extension employees on the status of women within our institution. It was a consensus of the SWC that mini-surveys consisting of a limited number of questions which focused on a specific issue would be a more effective mechanism for collecting feedback than longer, more complex surveys.

To this end, a survey asking employees their experiences around the use of various leave and work schedule options for family care giving was chosen as the focus of the first mini-survey. The survey is being conducted between the Ellen Bravo event in March and the Panel Discussion in April.

Information from the survey will be made available to the panel members to prepare their remarks. As future educational events are planned, they will influence the focus of additional mini-surveys. Either follow-up educational events or other methods of communications will be used to communicate the findings of each of the mini-surveys.

### **Conclusion**

All in all, it has been a very busy year for the Status of Women Committee. A great deal has been accomplished by a dedicated group of individuals. Indeed the greatest concern among individual SWC members is how to balance the work of the SWC with that of their positions. Service to the institution, an integral part of university life, is becoming more of an issue for everyone serving on institution wide committees and one which deserves attention through a broader dialogue.