

## Appendix 5

### 1999 REPORT ON FOCUS GROUPS CONDUCTED BY THE COMMITTEE ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE UW SYSTEM

The Committee on the Status of Women chose to conduct focus groups to supplement the quantitative data and survey results with the voices of some of the women affected by the issues under study. As research tools, focus groups are necessarily subjective, and what is presented here therefore differs considerably from both the objective statistical information and the random survey results collected and analyzed elsewhere in this report. However, these focus groups add valuable texture to the statistical and survey data. They also provided UW System students and employees with an opportunity to suggest solutions to these challenges. The focus group results are not intended to be representative of all students, faculty, or staff, but to suggest some of the ways in which women experience the issues under study.

The Committee conducted sixteen focus groups of women faculty and staff (one at each UW institution including Extension and UW System Administration) and fourteen focus groups of women students (one at each UW institution excluding Extension and UWSA). UW Colleges were represented by one three-campus group each of faculty/staff and students. In order to be certain that the concerns of specific sub-populations of women were included in our study, the Committee also conducted three focus groups with populations of special interest to the Committee: one group of women faculty and staff who identified as lesbian or bisexual (held at UW-Madison); one group of women faculty and staff who were women of color (UW-Milwaukee); and one group of women administrators (UW-Milwaukee).

Women's studies administrators and affirmative action/equity and compliance officers at each institution selected participants for the focus groups. The groups themselves were led by members of the Committee, who were trained by Russell Consultants. (Materials describing participant selection and the outline of the training for focus group leaders appear at the end of this appendix.) Members worked in pairs as facilitators and recorders, visiting institutions other than their own. Each group was asked the same three questions during a two-hour session: (1) From your perspective, what are the five most critical challenges or obstacles that women face on your campus? (2) From your perspective, what are the major causes of these challenges or obstacles? (3) What specific actions could be taken to address these causes and help reduce the challenges or obstacles to women on your campus?

The following summaries of challenges and solutions are based on written reports submitted by the facilitator/recorder teams. (The discussion of possible causes was intended to help participants think of ways to overcome the obstacles they had identified.)

Participants' comments were counted once for each group in which a specific challenge or action was mentioned. (Where numbers are mentioned below, they represent the number of focus groups in which the item appeared.) Items on those lists were then grouped into four categories corresponding to the key areas for progress identified initially by the Committee (these were later expanded to five key areas), plus one "other" category, and then consolidated to reduce redundancies. In some cases, an item seemed to fit into more than one category.

Participants were promised anonymity and confidentiality, and all identifying information about individual campuses or specific individuals has been deleted from the summaries.

## STUDENT FOCUS GROUPS

### Student Challenges

**Key area #1--Organizational structure:** Students in the focus groups expressed concern about the lack of an organized support system or structure for dealing with women's issues, including the absence of specific institutions or offices that would provide such support. They particularly noted that women's centers were either inadequately supported or lacking altogether on their campuses (an issue that arose in six focus groups). They were unclear about how to report discrimination or harassment, and believed that there would be negative consequences to speaking out about them. According to one student participant, "Administration does everything in its power to silence students from discussing and dealing with sexual harassment and assault incidents on our campus."

With a majority of men in student government, few women leaders, and men "dominating" such programs as freshman orientation, women students in these groups also expressed a belief that women's concerns are not heard. Said one student, "I remember at freshman orientation thinking I came to college to become a leader, but it was very disempowering as a woman to see only male role models setting the foundation for my college career."

**Key area #2—Learning/working environment:** Similar concerns were expressed in terms of campus climate, with participating students asserting that not only men, but also women professors and outlets such as the student newspaper show "no respect" for women's opinions or voices—a perception that was cited in at least nine focus groups. They mentioned debilitating stereotypes, including expectations that women would fulfill traditional roles (e.g., as notetakers in class projects and student organizations) and traditional assumptions about women's career objectives that lead to women students being discouraged from non-traditional fields and having to prove themselves in science, math, and engineering (SME) courses (mentioned in six groups). They described their belief that men are in power in the classroom and in academic departments, and that women are excluded from both formal and informal networks, discouraged from participating in class, or lacking the confidence to speak in class. Male professors were

perceived as biased, although, ironically, they were also seen as taking credit for women's ideas. While these students mentioned bias in specific departments, they were concerned that women's issues are not taken seriously in or out of class, sometimes even by women students: They insisted that women are not subjects in the classroom, especially in general education courses; that lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender (LGBT) information is lacking; and in seven groups, women's studies was specifically described as not respected or supported, and sometimes even stigmatized.

Here, too, students in the focus groups were concerned that there might be consequences for speaking out, and that tenured faculty would not be held accountable for harassment. They expressed concern about sexual assault, violence, and other safety issues, citing a lack of money and publicity for prevention and counseling programs, not enough women security officers, inadequate lighting, emergency phones, and so on. They described existing education and reporting mechanisms on sexual harassment in classrooms and dorms as inadequate.

They mentioned explicit anti-feminism within student government and organizations, including name-calling (e.g., "feminazi"). This was seen as often related to the stigmatizing of women's studies, sometimes also expressed in homophobic terms. They also mentioned the assumption of "post-feminism," the idea that work to correct gender inequities has already been done; since women are the majority of students, everything must be fine.

In discussing the problems of specific populations of women students, six groups cited the difficulties facing women of color and other minorities: racism, invisibility, lack of diversity on campuses, and the presence of few faculty members who are women of color. They also cited problems connected to affirmative action, which may be associated with the notion of "special treatment," so that students of color (as well as women in general) would be subject to the attitude "you got here only because of affirmative action." They also noted that homophobia, heterosexism, and a lack of services are problems for women who are lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered. Insensitivity to economic differences among women seemed to them one of the obstacles to the success of women students. Participants mentioned that older and non-traditional students facing ageism—"Everyone comes to college, not just 19 and 20 year olds." International women may be particularly isolated, with few social options if their culture has different attitudes towards activities such as drinking.

**Key area #3—Access to education/Hiring, promotion, retention of faculty and staff:**

In terms of access, students in the focus groups perceive financial aid as inadequate, and noted the difficulty of making enough money to go to school, especially for women with children. They described themselves as discouraged from participating in class or lacking the confidence to speak, and male professors as biased. They also described University health care as unfriendly to women, not knowledgeable, and providing no abortion services. They mentioned their perceptions that a hierarchy exists in the University based on gender, that women professors are paid less than men, and noted the lack of women in higher administration and of women role models. In this area, too, they

described the special problems facing women of color and other minorities (outright racism, invisibility, lack of diversity on campuses) and the exclusion of women from formal and informal networks as disadvantaging women.

**Key area #4—Balancing work and personal life:** The general problem of balancing family and school, the lack of helpful counseling, time conflicts for students with family responsibilities, and problems finding places to breastfeed came up in five focus groups. Childcare was the greatest single concern. In ten of fifteen focus groups, students described the great need, low availability, underfunding, limited hours, inadequate services (e.g., no sick-child care, restrictive hours), and the fact that childcare is not covered by financial aid. Others noted that children were not accepted in all campus sites (e.g., classrooms, tutoring centers), and that for these and other reasons, student parents suffered in ways other special populations did not. For example, in their experience, student-athletes were given excused absences for out-of-town games, but student parents could not automatically miss class when a child was sick.

**OTHER:** Unequal opportunities for women in athletics, the fact that fewer women are involved in sports than men, and the fact that attitudes within men's athletic departments encourage violence against women were cited in five focus groups. Health concerns, including alcohol abuse, the "party cycle," and eating disorders, were also mentioned in five groups. Students described campus advising services as not helpful to women, noted that women did all the organizing on women's issues, and pointed to a general lack of information on women's issues.

## **Student Solutions**

**Key area #1—Organizational structure:** Students in the focus groups urged that the organizational structure of the University be changed to provide greatly increased support to deal with issues of concern to women. They were adamant in their recommendation (in nine groups) that faculty, staff, and administrators receive mandatory training on gender, harassment, LGBT issues, violence and safety issues, and the consequences of violating existing University policies. These students also insisted that top administrators must speak out, not only to faculty, staff, and students, but also to the Regents and the community, about issues of concern to women as well as about broader issues, such as funding for quality education. They urged the University to support, establish, and/or restore campus women's centers, publicize their existence and services, establish Systemwide links among them, and fund them through something other than student fees. They recommended that focus groups be held on each campus, and they urged that administrators encourage students to report problems and make it safe for students to do so. Among specific suggestions were: more clarity on how to report problems of discrimination or harassment; the establishment of an ombuds to help women students; and the redefinition and clarification of the role of affirmative action officers.

They also suggested that students be given a greater voice, recommending a student liaison for women's issues on each campus and improved shared governance. They

wanted to see more student involvement generally, including greater recruitment of students to student activities, more education about student organizations, and a better approach to new students in the fall. Campus student activities councils should address women's issues, and more efforts should be made through housing and other student sites, such as more mandatory training on issues of concern to women (e.g., sexual harassment) in dorms and classes.

They also said that they would like to see formal mentoring networks with compensation for mentors; mandatory meetings with advisors; and more women in positions of power, as role models for students. Safety issues were raised in five groups, where students recommended more (mandatory) training and more programs dealing with sexual assault; a greater emphasis on safety (e.g., improved lighting), and an emergency page in the student handbook. Similarly, they asked for better enforcement of sexual harassment policies, as well as the publicizing of people who are guilty of it.

**Key area #2—Working/learning environment:** Student participants recommended that there be mandatory training for all members of the University community on gender and related issues, better enforcement of existing policies on harassment, and a commitment among senior administrators to speak out on these issues. They asked that more women faculty and administrators committed to women's issues be hired and that the University work to establish a "culture of respect" in which it would be safe for students to report problems.

They suggested that more open discussions, including forums on women's and LGBT issues, would help to break down stereotypes. Diversity was mentioned in seven groups. Students in the focus groups would like to see more women of color students, faculty, and staff. They asked that faculty stop apologizing for the ethnic studies requirement ("I know you're only taking this course because it fills that requirement"). They also recommended the establishment of support groups for LGBT students, women of color, sexual assault and harassment victims. They want an LGBT studies program, advocate, and explicit policies to combat homophobia and heterosexism.

In six focus groups, students suggested better media representations of women and of the campus, improved programming for women, the promotion of the good things each campus offers women, and improvements in student newspapers. They recommended more and equal opportunities for women in athletic programs; greater participation by the student athletic councils in addressing women's issues; and training of both male athletes and coaches in the area of sexual assault. Student participants asked for more effective addressing of problems such as alcohol abuse and body image. They saw improvements in parking as a safety issue for women.

Students in the focus groups also recommended specific curricular changes, including the evaluation of science and other courses for gender bias; greater support, money, faculty, and more courses for women's studies; and a new required course that deals with gender. They asked that women's class participation be enhanced through strategies such as adding more discussion sections (in which women might feel more comfortable

speaking) and urged that student course evaluations include questions about how faculty and other instructors have treated women and women's issues. They suggested that events such as Women's History Month and Take Back the Night be institutionalized, so that they would not be dependent on student organizers, and that freshman orientation be reviewed in order to ensure a gender balance of leaders.

**Key area #3—Access to education/Hiring, promotion, retention of faculty and staff:**

Once again, issues of diversity (an increase in numbers of students, faculty, and staff who are women of color) were among student participants' solutions to problems of access.

In the area of financial aid, these students asked that "economic diversity" be recognized, with a sliding scale for tuition, family discounts, and housing assistance. They suggested that more pre-college and outreach activities would also improve women students' access to higher education. They recommended outreach to the community about education and careers for returning students; more resources, better information, and a freshman seminar more inclusive of older, non-traditional students; and credit for life experience. They urged more support for women in science/math/engineering (SME) fields. For the conclusion of their college careers they recommended better career counseling, final-year advising, and a women's academic resource center.

They also recommended the hiring of more women faculty and administrators committed to women's issues; the broader recruitment of women faculty, staff, and administrators generally, with students' role in searches clarified; more support for women faculty; and better salaries for women faculty and administrators.

They also urged that improved athletic opportunities for women should be developed.

**Key area #4—Balancing work and personal life:** Childcare received the most attention in student recommendations for this key area, arising in seven focus groups. They urged that more slots be available, along with greater budget support, drop-in centers, and changes in the centers' rules and structure. They asked that childcare needs be included in financial aid; suggested general surveys of childcare need; and noted that other family issues also need to be addressed. More family-oriented financial aid, the creation of women-friendly space (for breastfeeding and as safe space for meetings), and more flexibility for both student parents and part-time students were also urged, including the creation of additional distance education, online, and evening classes.

## **FACULTY AND STAFF FOCUS GROUPS**

### **Faculty and Staff Challenges**

**Key area #1--Organizational structure:** Faculty and staff members in the focus groups described the lack of an organizational structure for dealing with women's issues at both campus and System levels, calling the reporting process for complaints about discrimination, harassment, and other problems unclear and cumbersome. They expressed

concern that administration has not set an example, citing the deterioration of affirmative action, along with both tokenism and “the affirmative action problem,” in which such efforts were seen as giving members of protected groups undeserved advantages.

They noted that women are not trained for or are even actively discouraged from leadership. Seven of the focus groups cited a lack of mentoring (both women/women and men/women), isolation, lack of a network for women, women’s groups working separately, rather than collaborating on issues of concern, such as problems around promotion (“If we worked together, we could make some changes”), and the absence of rewards for mentors.

**Key area #2--Working/learning environment:** Women in these groups described a continuum from what one participant called “insidious” discrimination to open sexism, including the use of foul language, anti-feminist sentiment, open hostility, a lack of professionalism from male colleagues, discrimination in external grant review, and even the poor maintenance of women’s restrooms. Many called the climate “patriarchal,” hierarchical, and ageist. In thirteen focus groups, faculty and staff members argued that women are not viewed as credible or competent (especially in male-dominated areas), and that their contributions and opinions are devalued, not respected, and not taken seriously. They described the dominance of gender role rules, stereotypes, and traditional views of gender and women, including male students’ assumption of male superiority. According to participants, these ideas would typically be expressed when aggressive or assertive women are called “bitch” for behavior that would be admired in men: “If a man approaches administration with a problem or situation to be rectified, he is seen as a leader,” reported one participant, “and I am one of a group of women who is seen as a troublemaker because I am attempting to rectify situations.” In twelve groups, women described some version of an “old boys’ network,” an informal male network excluding women, with men making final decisions, senior administrative positions being filled by men, and campuses dominated by white male culture.

Stereotypes prevail, about both job categories (especially for classified staff) and behavior. Students and faculty assume that women will nurture students and that male and female work ethics exist. Yet they saw traditionally female behavior as devalued, and they observed that caregiving outside of work is not valued at all. Such stereotypes have created particular problems for women of color, who therefore suffer under additional pressure to prove their worth.

Participants described a paradoxical situation: a lack of mentoring and no network to help women advance, yet at the same time, the perception that becoming an administrator would mean “selling out.” Some participants claimed that women administrators “forget where they came from” or “pull the ladder up behind them.” They described the perception that women's problems have all been solved, leading to the deterioration of affirmative action and other programs, yet participants described a lack of communication between the genders and said that men remained uncomfortable discussing discrimination.

The women also described workload problems that could be especially heavy for younger faculty members, with the small number of women on the faculty leading to increased pressure on those few, in the form of committee and service overloads. The fact that there are few women of color among students, faculty, and staff—and particularly in leadership positions—has led to the perception of these women as tokens, but also to an overload of committee work for them. Instructional academic staff (IAS) described a similar range of problems: low pay, heavy teaching loads, exploitation, and a lack of job security, even in the form of rolling horizons appointments. They said that they were not taken seriously and were treated as second-class, particularly in departments in which women are mainly appointed as IAS, while men make up the faculty despite similar credentials. Some participants described these as “faculty wife” issues.

Clerical (both classified and academic) staff in these groups said that they were often asked to work beyond their formal job responsibilities.

Participants in seven of fifteen groups mentioned sexual harassment as a problem, saying that policies were either ignored or unknown. In contrast to its importance in the student groups, however, participants in only three faculty/staff groups cited safety as an issue.

Other concerns included a lack of support for women’s studies, for LGBT issues, and for conferences on women; an absence of feminist values in education and pedagogy; a lack of curricular attention to women; a concern that, when women dominate a department or field, it gets less respect; and low morale generally on campuses and within departments. One participant mentioned the "intersection of race/class/gender/nationality" and another cited "local [student] culture" as particular obstacles for women.

**Key area #3--Access to education/Hiring, promotion, retention of faculty and staff:**

The faculty and staff participants in these focus groups cited leadership as an area in need of serious attention. They saw a lack of women--and particularly, women of color--in leadership positions; believed that women were not appointed to the interim jobs that lead to permanent administrative roles; and some said that there has often been a backlash after women administrators leave a campus. Participants complained that women administrators often used a “male” voice and leadership style, yet, paradoxically, several noted that women didn’t assert themselves as much as men.

In ten focus groups, women described inequities of salary, promotion, title, and evaluation, which they saw as especially problematic among classified and non-teaching academic staff. Women are a statistical minority in many academic departments and offices, yet the aggregation of data by campus or Systemwide makes it appear that women are present throughout the workforce in large numbers, whereas there are whole units and title levels where women are hardly present. Aggregation of data can suggest a false parity that does not translate to individual departments and workplaces.

Participants mentioned a lack of gender and ethnic balance in certain disciplines, made worse by the fact that search committees seemed unwilling to consider the life experiences and potential of older women on the job market. In addition, those without a

terminal degree were perceived as being at an “academic plateau.” Focus group participants suggested that many men were reluctant to hire women, yet, ironically, outstanding women applicants often got better offers elsewhere. They describe some conflict between the men hired before the 1970s and the women hired in the post-'70s. Retention of women faculty was seen as difficult, partly because of the criteria and pressure for tenure, and participants claimed that student evaluations counted too much in the tenure process.

Opportunities for promotion were also seen as limited for clerical and academic staff at the University (in contrast to other state agencies), with few women holding non-traditional jobs (e.g., technical, manual labor) and a specific lack of opportunities for classified staff to move into academic staff positions. They described a "glass ceiling," with a lack of credit and rewards for good performance, especially for classified staff, and a lack of career progress and professional development opportunities for academic staff, part-timers, and women with young children.

The women in these groups cited inequities in connection with spousal hires; a lack of job security that made it difficult for staff and untenured faculty to speak up; inadequate training on how UW System works; differing expectations for women; and inconsistent personnel guidelines. Instructional academic staff noted that problems of lower pay, heavier teaching loads, and a lack of job security contributed to their sense of second-class status.

Women faculty and staff in the focus groups claimed that women appeared to work harder and longer for success equivalent to men's and face inequitable workloads. For both faculty and staff, the "old boys network" and the absence of mentoring and networking opportunities exacerbated the situation.

**Key area #4—Balancing work and personal life:** Women faculty and staff in these groups noted a lack of flexibility in the implementation of family leave, maternity leave, and family-friendly policies, with the result that theoretically supportive policies were sometimes ignored or were implemented only grudgingly. Difficulties in balancing work and personal life were discussed in thirteen of these focus groups. Other obstacles included the six-month lag between an appointment and the beginning of insurance coverage; the failure to assume that employees have caregiving responsibilities; the absence of adequate support services such as daycare; the perception of childcare as women's responsibility; and the conflict between the “tenure clock” and the “biological clock.”

Inequitable teaching loads were also seen as creating conflict with family responsibilities, as was the fact that part-time often means full-time for part-time pay, especially when employees cut back for family reasons.

**OTHER:** Among the obstacles participants noted that did not seem to fit into the four key areas were poor management generally (mentioned in two groups), departmental

budget cuts, a general lack of progress on women's issues, and several individual campus problems.

Participants in one group also mentioned that male athletes "get away with anything," which corresponds to student expressions of concern over campus athletic cultures.

### **Faculty and Staff Solutions**

**Key area #1--Organizational structure:** Thirteen of the fifteen faculty/staff groups urged that the UW fund and mandate training on gender and diversity for staff, faculty, and administrators, as well as improved training about the hiring process and family needs and policies. They were particularly adamant about the need for change at the top, the fact that administrators must lead, be vocal advocates, and demonstrate responsibility (e.g., via public forums on issues of concern to women). "There needs to be a real commitment to want to do something to effect change, and a sense that you're not merely going through an exercise," said one participant.

Eight groups urged the revival or establishment of campus committees on the status of women, ongoing campus climate evaluations, and local focus groups and studies. They asked for a clear vehicle for communicating to the top and influencing administrators about women's issues; a dialogue with men over these issues; and a revamped grievance process for discrimination and harassment complaints. Seven groups also recommended a salary equity review and/or an independent audit; the equalization of salaries not only for gender, but also among campuses; equal pay for LTE's; and an evaluation of salaries in female-dominated fields. Six groups recommended that the UW System establish an office on women parallel to Plan 2008 and a Systemwide committee on the status of women to continue the newly established Leadership Institute, follow through on these focus groups, and share committee reports with campuses. They said that they would like to see workshops, mentoring, more information on opportunities and rights, training of managers about expectations for support staff, and the enforcement of policies on sexual harassment, including better reporting. Participants suggested adding gender and sexuality to the Board of Regents' definition of diversity. Members of more than one focus group called for reorganizing affirmative action (to keep it separate from Human Resources, with direct reporting to System).

**Key area #2--Working/learning environment:** Twelve groups recommended the establishment of both formal and informal mentoring (both men/women and women/women) and networking, with campus and System funding. They also urged a consideration of the overburden of advising and committee responsibilities in merit evaluations and the establishment of internships. They said that they would like to see more accountability, at both the individual and departmental levels, and more openness. Along with improving the working and learning environment through the workshops and other methods mentioned in the previous category, participants talked about the importance of developing a sense of community, perhaps through faculty/staff social gatherings; making sure all employees know they are part of the organization; addressing

LGBT issues; paying attention to diversity and the changing culture; supporting women's studies; and providing mechanisms by which women can support women. They expressed their belief that women's issues should be made central, uniting women across job categories and positions. Two groups also mentioned specific safety measures, such as self-defense courses, security assessments, escort service, and cell phones in classrooms.

**Key area #3--Access to education/Hiring, promotion, retention of faculty and staff:**

In addition to urging that the environment be improved in more general ways and that salaries be reviewed and equalized in order to make it more attractive for faculty and staff to accept and keep jobs at the UW, participants urged that there be specific efforts to recruit, retain, and promote women in all positions, with particular mentions of senior faculty, women in the sciences, and women of color faculty and staff. They wanted to see more women in upper administration, decision-making positions, and the interim jobs that often lead to permanent administrative roles. Job shadowing and internships would give women access to appropriate training. The University should take advantage of retirements to make more balanced hires, and they insisted that search committees needed to be aware of the variability of women's work experience, redefining what it means to hire "the best person for the job."

For faculty, participants said it is crucial that the tenure clock really stop in colleagues' minds, and they recommended that the various obstacles women face in achieving tenure also be addressed. They asked that teaching discrimination and workload inequities be documented and corrected; that service and outreach be more highly valued—including getting male faculty involved in them; and that faculty evaluations for promotion and tenure review consider family responsibilities.

Participants noted that there needs to be greater accountability to women academic staff, including increased job security, succession planning and development, and the acknowledgment and rewarding of their contributions. The limited promotional opportunities for classified and academic staff need to be addressed, as does professional development. Participants also urged a greater voice for academic and classified staff, better treatment, and opportunities to participate in the campus community. They recommended the review and revision of the current evaluation system in order to make the merit system "more human-friendly." Among the specific suggestions were the use of larger review committees, the creation of a paraprofessional class of jobs, and the coordination of training (e.g., technology, career advancement) for the changing world. They urged that faculty and staff be given time to learn and incorporate new technologies. They asked that career counseling and professional development be included in annual reviews.

Participants also recommended that workloads be reconfigured, where necessary, to be appropriate for both faculty and staff. In particular, classified staff participants asked that "nuisance work" be reduced by, for instance, installing voicemail and insisting that administrators use computers. They also suggested a separate personnel office for

classified staff, broad changes in the civil service structure, a stronger union, and more collaboration with DER.

Other recommendations included evaluations of administrators by employees; the development of a more informal orientation/interview process; "gender impact statements" about hires; better planning for staffing generally; the rewarding of managers for innovative solutions; and less use of LTE's.

**Key area #4—Balancing work and personal life:** Participants said that they would like to see a more flexible and family-friendly workplace, with job sharing, paid family leave, maternity leave separated from sick leave, domestic partner benefits, sensitivity in scheduling meetings, and part-time work paid at the full-time base. They also recommended that these things be built into job descriptions, and in one group, participants suggested that faculty reviews consider the instructor's family responsibilities. Seven groups urged that childcare be improved, with the addition of such services as care for children under age two, drop-off and sick-child centers, grants to those in financial need, cheaper services, 52-week availability (versus access only when school is open), and breastfeeding support.

**OTHER:** Among the other suggestions were changing the governance structure to make it more representative and to get more women involved, especially among academic staff; improving faculty governance by including more instructional academic staff in voting positions; creating more links to the community; and disaggregating employment data so that it reflects real gaps.

## **LESBIAN/BISEXUAL WOMEN FACULTY AND STAFF FOCUS GROUP**

The participants in this focus group were women faculty and staff members who self-identify as lesbian or bisexual. In order to ensure comfort and confidentiality, an openly lesbian faculty member was asked to select and invite participants, and the group itself was led by Committee members who are openly lesbian. While many of the challenges and solutions were similar to those cited by the general faculty/staff groups, this summary concentrates on those issues directly connected to sexual identity.

### **Lesbian/Bisexual Faculty and Staff Challenges**

**Key area #1--Organizational structure:** Women in this focus group described many of the same organizational problems other faculty and staff members noted, such as the absence of adequate mentoring, networking, and women in positions of power at the University. However, they also explicitly described a "fear of lesbians and women in power" and the specific absence of open lesbians in leadership positions.

They did not feel that issues important to lesbian and bisexual women are important to the units and administrators responsible for women's concerns, equity, diversity, and

other related issues. One woman said, "I just don't think that these units have the commitment to deal with these issues." Instead, these women said that they found it necessary to remind those charged with equity and diversity issues about lesbian concerns. Participants had very different experiences depending on their work unit, though, with some calling their own workplaces extremely supportive in contrast to other departments and offices.

**Key area #2—Working/learning environment:** Participants noted the difficulties connected with being visible as a lesbian or bisexual woman. They have found it hard to be taken seriously as both lesbians and women, experience feelings of insecurity despite anti-discrimination laws, and said that it still feels risky to be "out"—or even to be gay and closeted. (In fact, participants and the group's organizer pointed out that it was difficult to find women willing to take part in this group.) They mentioned "the heterosexual assumption"—the presumption that everyone is heterosexual—and "an unusually pervasive heterosexual climate" on the campus, giving them the sense that it would be fine to be a lesbian as long as you didn't talk about it. One participant commented that "it's kind of like you have a criminal past and it's not polite to mention it." Others said that they felt pressure not to associate with other lesbians in their departments, post LGBT material on bulletin boards, or bring partners to events.

**Key area #3—Access to education/Hiring, promotion, retention of faculty and staff:** Participants noted that problems of visibility were especially thorny for probationary faculty, who worried that colleagues and students would react badly to learning that they were gay, and particularly that being out to students would generate harsh evaluations from homophobes, which would then endanger their chances for tenure. They said that the classroom felt particularly insecure for them, and the pressure to remain closeted affected their teaching (e.g., preventing them from using examples from their personal lives that other instructors might employ). They believed that when they did come out in class, students perceived them as exhibitionistic and/or as using the course to promote a political agenda, although they noted that students made these assumptions through a lack of education on the subject.

Women in this group noted that lesbians and bisexual women often face "odd expectations," such as the assumption that they would always be supportive of other lesbians and that openly gay faculty would not, for instance, discipline gay students. They also noted that openly lesbian faculty doing research in women's and/or LGBT studies were taken even less seriously as scholars than other feminist researchers.

**Key area #4—Balancing work and personal life:** Focus group participants identified the lack of benefits for domestic partners—including insurance coverage and access to retirement money—as one of the major challenges facing lesbian and bisexual faculty and staff. They described the inequity between LGBT and heterosexual employees as unfair, noting, for instance, that married people automatically received retirement benefits on the death of a spouse, while LGBT employees' benefits were lost.

## **Lesbian and Bisexual Faculty and Staff Solutions**

**Key area #1—Organizational structure:** To remedy what they described as a lack of commitment to LGBT issues, women in this group urged that there be mandatory training (or, if that is impossible, financial or other incentives) of faculty and staff. They saw this as especially crucial for administrators, beginning with the chancellors, affirmative action officers, program directors, chairs, and others in a position to affect workplace conditions. They insisted that leadership needed to set a tone, expressed by speaking openly about LGBT people and by making affirmative gestures of support and safety. They suggested that administrators look at corporate examples such as IBM, Apple, and AT&T for ideas about dealing with workplace concerns. They argued that to effect real change, there must be a critical mass, not simply of LGBT people, but of advocates and allies within each department or unit.

Participants also asked for campus and System LGBT liaisons who would push administrators to deal with relevant faculty/staff issues, arguing that an appointed liaison would not have to worry about the repercussions of advocating for change.

**Key area #2--Working/learning environment:** Participants urged the development of more LGBT forums on campus, which would help form a necessary critical mass of advocates and allies, provide opportunities to exchange information, and increase LGBT visibility.

Paradoxically, in this group, academic staff (there were no classified staff present) seemed to feel more free than faculty members to be open about their sexual identities in the workplace. This may be because the need to gain tenure makes it riskier for faculty to be out, since faculty colleagues may feel that more is on the line in each hire and promotion.

**Key area #3—Access to education/Hiring, promotion, retention of faculty and staff:** Participants in this group said that they would like to see the establishment of an LGBT certificate program, and that they believe faculty should be encouraged and rewarded for integrating LGBT issues into courses, perhaps through special grants. They suggested that a formal lesbian faculty mentoring group (and perhaps one for graduate students as well) would be a sign of the administration's commitment and would increase visibility. They acknowledged, however, that this does create a dilemma, since a formal program would presume that junior faculty and graduate students were willing to be open about their sexuality in order to seek mentoring.

**Key area #4—Balancing work and personal life:** Most suggestions in this group were intended to make consistent across campus a number of personnel and other guidelines that are now dependent on interpretation by individual administrators. They urged that policy changes be made to equalize insurance, retirement, sick leave, and other benefits, including the redefinition of "immediate family," rather than leaving it up to individual LGBT-friendly unit administrators to include domestic partners in the definition. They

asked that "spousal hiring" be expanded to include domestic partners, and that LGBT people be covered by affirmative action and other policy.

## **WOMEN OF COLOR FACULTY AND STAFF FOCUS GROUP**

Participants in this group also identified many of the same challenges and solutions noted in the general focus groups. The following summary focuses on issues of specific concern to women of color.

### **Women of Color Faculty and Staff Challenges**

**Key area #1—Organizational structure:** Participants in this group cited a lack of support from top leadership (deans and above) and the difficulty of "establishing a voice that reflects the intersection of race and gender." They believed they could not get redress for discriminatory treatment by going through the designated complaint office, because the complaint system is set up to protect the institution rather than to provide adequate support for complainants.

**Key area #2--Working/learning environment:** The majority of challenges seemed to fall into this category. Participants described experiences of harassment, a lack of recognition of their achievements, and a lack of support from colleagues and peers. They described white women as "the minority of choice," seen as representing the experience of all women, although women of color remain the victims of discrimination by both white men and women. They noted their perception of themselves as invisible, conspicuously absent from key committees, and receiving invitations to important events at the last minute. Yet at the same time, they said that they were expected to be the educators and agents of change, to perform service beyond the norm, and to act as liaisons to the off-campus community with little or no recognition. They believed they had been pigeon-holed into a narrow range of positions, especially those dealing directly with people of color, and wondered why they can't be "director of all student services." In addition, they had repeatedly found themselves serving as unofficial advisor to all minority students, especially those experiencing difficulties.

**Key area #3—Access to education/Hiring, promotion, retention of faculty and staff:** Participants found promotion to higher status positions and better salaries hard to achieve, and they believed that they suffered from the lack of other women of color as peers. They reported that research focused on minorities was not valued equally to more mainstream scholarship—unless it was performed by white male scholars. They were not provided with the opportunities to teach innovative courses.

**Key area #4—Balancing work and personal life:** Participants cited no specific challenges in this area.

## **Women of Color Faculty and Staff Solutions**

**Key area #1—Organizational structure:** Women in this group recommended that there be an office that advocates for individuals, rather than protecting the University (as they perceive affirmative action officers increasingly to do) and that such an office should report directly to the System President rather than to specific campus administrators. They asked that there be a non-adversarial perspective on complaints and problems of discrimination and that the University Counsel offices should be revamped with this in mind. They urged the President and chancellors "to make a covenant for change and action" and to seek diversity in management with real decision-making power. They asked that compliance offices, women's centers, and women's faculty caucuses have greater diversity. They noted that someone outside the University is needed to make the institution accountable.

**Key area #2--Working/learning environment:** No specific solutions were offered in this area.

**Key area #3—Access to education/Hiring, promotion, retention of faculty and staff:** Participants suggested that the structure and selection of search committees be changed in order to impact hiring decisions. They asked for independent exit interviews to be conducted, including at the end of a complaint process.

**Key area #4—Balancing work and personal life:** No specific solutions were offered in this area.

## **WOMEN ADMINISTRATORS FOCUS GROUP**

The majority of participants in this group were department chairs and unit directors. The comments summarized here are those that focus specifically on issues facing women administrators, although it was difficult in this group to separate those from broader questions affecting women in general.

### **Women Administrators Challenges**

**Key area #1—Organizational structure:** Participants noted that women were often excluded from important networking activities such as golf outings. They also described a need for more female role models in administration and a sense of isolation that could be helped by the establishment of a critical mass. Yet they also noted a lack of homogeneity among women administrators, making it difficult to propose solutions to a complex situation.

**Key area #2--Working/learning environment:** The women in this group described subtle and overt sexism from men, such as not listening to women; making derogatory comments or complimentary remarks that are actually insults (e.g., complimenting a

woman as if it's surprising for her to have that particular skill); engaging in bullying rather than negotiation; not recognizing ideas that come from women; and calling women by their first name or using endearments while men are addressed by title. These women said that they felt like outsiders or tokens. They believe they are valued less than their male counterparts. They believe they do not have access to important information available to men or the "right language" to be part of the group. They also believe that many men are ignorant about women's issues, do not take them seriously, and think that such issues had all already been taken care of.

**Key area #3—Access to education/Hiring, promotion, retention of faculty and staff:**

The difficulty of simply becoming and then remaining an administrator was one of the major challenges cited in this group. "If there's such a thing as an old boys' club, it's hard for women to break into," said one participant. They said that women faculty members who take on administrative roles had a harder time advancing from associate to full professor, while women department chairs had difficulty moving into higher level administrative position and weren't tapped for senior positions. At the same time, the faculty women in this group noted that once they became administrators, they were no longer seen as viable scholars, while scholars with an active research program were discouraged from going into administration.

Workload issues were seen as exacerbating this situation. Participants found it hard to get men to help them. With committee and other administrative work falling differentially on women, even those whose career goals didn't include administration might find themselves with heavy administrative burdens. They described new faculty and women of color as facing particularly heavy workloads, which in turn increased the burden on women in mid-management positions, who tried to protect members of those more vulnerable groups.

These women also noted that leadership and administration themselves seemed not to be highly valued—perhaps, they suggested, because more women were entering them. They wondered about the possible dangers of moving into administration just as it became less valued than research. They described a lack of clear paths for women who could not move to a new institution and who often remained stuck at lower levels, such as associate dean or assistant vice chancellor. While this might also be true for men, it seemed to present a particular problem in retaining women.

**Key area #4—Balancing work and personal life:** Participants noted no specific challenges in this area.

### **Women Administrators Solutions**

**Key area #1—Organizational structure:** Participants urged that additional studies be conducted and the results of those from UW and other institutions (e.g., MIT) be disseminated. They said that top administrators needed to be courageous in acknowledging the problems, and the administrative structure needed to be rethought in

ways that would bring in more women (for instance, an increase in options for positions that are 50% faculty/50% administration and more part-time administrative jobs). The women in this group also argued that it had to be clear that disrespect toward women administrators would not be tolerated, and that this message had to come from men as well as women. They recommended the establishment of an ombuds for women administrators who would not only mentor and advise women, but would also warn individuals whose behavior toward women was inappropriate.

**Key area #2--Working/learning environment:** Women in this focus group suggested that barriers between administrative and faculty jobs needed to be broken down, allowing easier movement in and out of administration. They also argued that it should be assumed that faculty members in administrative positions would also have a research program.

**Key area #3—Access to education/Hiring, promotion, retention of faculty and staff:** Members of this group urged that the number of women, including women of color, in administration be increased substantially to correct the current gender imbalance. They suggested that early retirement be encouraged in order to open up more positions for women; that higher salaries be offered to women who moved up through the administrative ranks, along with summer salaries for chairs and others on nine-month contracts; and that departments receive financial incentives (such as replacement salaries) when women moved into administration. They suggested that administrative and personnel management sessions be offered for new or aspiring administrators and given prestige by those at senior levels. One possibility would be the establishment of a Presidential Administrative Award that would offer summer salary and an opportunity to shadow a senior administrator. They also recommended that women's options not be limited because of age, whether because they were seen as too young or too old for administrative roles.

**Key area #4—Balancing work and personal life:** Participants made no specific comments on this area.

## SUMMARY

Focus group participants consistently described their perception that the University climate is not as supportive of women as of men, and they cited the lack of a structural organization to deal with the problems they described. Students, faculty, academic staff, and classified staff participants described concerns that affect many members of the University population, such as a lack of adequate and affordable childcare; a lack of women, especially women of color, in visible and powerful positions; and inadequate measures for safety of women on campus. They also described specific situations that they believed prevent women students, faculty, and staff members from achieving their educational and work goals, such as the discouraging treatment of women in science courses, limited opportunities for professional advancement, and inequitable benefits and family leave for lesbian and bisexual women employees.

In reporting on the focus groups they led, Committee members were impressed with the energy and interest of participants from around the state and across all of the populations included in the groups: students, faculty, academic and classified staff, and those specifically identified as lesbian or bisexual, women of color, and administrators. The participants were able not only to articulate the challenges they believe women face as students and employees of the UW, but also to suggest solutions, some of them quite detailed and innovative, that might reduce those challenges. Their comments and recommendations provide an important supplement to other data collected in this study, especially in areas such as safety, job security, financial need, and childcare, in which the experiences of people in the University community cannot always be quantified.