

UWEX Status of Women Committee 2004 Executive Report

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.

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 indentified in the Strategic Planning Summary Document:

- A Communications Committee to identify and select effective communication strategies to share the work of the committee,
- 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,
- An Administrative Committee to address structural and procedural issues, and
- An Education Committee to begin to identify potential education and professional development activities to inform and educate employees across the institution.

Regular SWC meetings will include time for regular business, and for subcommittee work. The SWC holds monthly two-hour meetings and occasional four-hour meetings in lieu of the regular 2-hour meeting.