

## Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education

---

Volume 29

Article 7

---

4-1-2006

# Gender Equity in Higher Education: The Marquette Initiative

Cheryl Maranto

Follow this and additional works at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/conversations>

---

### Recommended Citation

Maranto, Cheryl (2006) "Gender Equity in Higher Education: The Marquette Initiative," *Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education*: Vol. 29, Article 7.

Available at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/conversations/vol29/iss1/7>

# GENDER EQUITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION: THE MARQUETTE INITIATIVE

By Cheryl L. Maranto

**W**omen have always been a minority of faculty in American higher education. The proportion of women faculty peaked at 36 percent in 1879. Women's representation waxed and waned in the intervening years, declining to 22 percent in the early 1960s (U.S. Office of Education 1958, 1963), 24 percent in 1981, 34 percent in 1997, and 38 percent in 2004 (AAUP, *Academe*, 1998, 2005). Thus, women's representation among the professoriate took almost 125 years to return to its historical peak of 36 percent. Furthermore, as the status of the institution and professorial rank increase, the proportion of women declines. As these statistics and a plethora of university gender equity task forces across the country attest, the challenge of women's equality in higher education is a national issue with a long history.

Marquette University's gender equity initiative began in the spring of 1999 with a university forum on gender equity. Concerns ranged from perceptions of intentional gender discrimination to subtle, unintentional bias. Statistics from the AAUP's annual survey indicated that women were 25 percent of Marquette's full-time faculty, and only 5.2 percent of full professors—the latter statistic placing it in the third percentile nationally. This forum coincided with MIT's dramatic announcement that publicly acknowledged subtle and largely unconscious discrimination against senior female professors in its School of Science (*New York Times*, March 23, 1999).

## ***The President's Task Force on Gender Equity***

In response to these concerns, then-Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs Christine Wiseman recommended the formation of a Gender Equity Task Force. In May, 1999 Father Robert A. Wild, S.J., the president of Marquette University, announced that he was forming a Task Force on Gender Equity (GETF). He appointed Phoebe Weaver Williams, associate professor of law as chair and eighteen men and women faculty and administrators to serve on his task force. Its charge: to determine if there were areas of perceived gender inequity among the faculty; and to examine data to determine whether faculty were treated equitably with respect to gender in multiple areas of university activity, including recruitment, hiring, appointment, workload distribution, allocation of leadership responsibilities, compensation and promotion. He asked that a report be prepared with findings, conclusions, recommendations, and a plan of action. We believe that Father Wild's leadership and support of this initiative, and the inclusive composition of the task force, were critical to its accomplishments.

The GETF developed a definition of gender equity that contextualized its work within the mission of Marquette University. Jesuit colleagues directed the task force to Decree 14 of General Congregation 34, "Jesuits and the Situation of Women in the Church and Civil Society." Based on the concepts articulated in Decree 14, the task force adopted a definition of gender equity

that mindfully surpasses mere legal compliance with the various civil rights laws that prohibit sex discrimination in the workplace.

Gender equity is the equal treatment of women and men in the workplace.

It includes a consideration of whether cultural mores embedded within the economic, social, political, religious, and even linguistic structures of our society operate in such a fashion that they offend the equal dignity of women created with men in the image of God (Report of the President's Task Force on Gender Equity, Marquette University, January 31, 2001, p. 20).

We gathered data through three surveys: a climate survey assessed faculty perceptions of gender inequity; a quantitative survey solicited information on individual faculty activities in teaching research and service; and a survey of department chairs inquired about attitudes around gender issues and how they were being addressed within academic departments. All surveys were sent under cover letters signed by Father Wild. We used the quantitative survey and university data on individual salaries to assess gender differences in salary, rank, teaching load and performance, research record, and service activities. Additionally, individual complaints of perceived gender inequities and responses to open-ended questions in the climate survey were analyzed.

*Cheryl L. Maranto is an associate professor at Marquette University.*

## **Finding and Recommendations**

### **Perceptions**

Following the literature on women in higher education, we inquired into the existence of a "chilly climate" for women faculty, including feelings of formal and informal exclusion and devaluation, as well as perceptions of organizational fairness, experiences of gender and sexual harassment, and work-family conflict. The perceptions of women faculty at Marquette differed significantly from their male colleagues. Compared to men, women perceived less fairness in evaluation and treatment, felt more excluded from informal networks, perceived more gender harassment (e.g., sexually suggestive jokes and stories, disparaging remarks about women) in their work environment, and more believed that women were excluded from formal positions of power in the university. Women reported greater work-family conflict, and more than twice as many women as men (48 percent) said they delayed or altered their desired family plans due to the tenure clock.

### **Quantitative Gender Differences**

We found no evidence of systematic differences in teaching or service obligations or merit review between men and women. We did find significant gender differences in salary at hire (even when academic discipline and qualifications at hire were accounted for), attainment of associate rank, and compensation for administrative appointments. Our analyses showed that differences in starting salary have effects that continue to the present.

### **Administrator Surveys and Interviews**

Administrators generally agreed that higher administration should intervene to address identified gender equity problems and that gender equity should be included in the university's strategic plan. Very few department chairs reported having educational initiatives about gender equity. About one-third of depart-

ment chairs reported initiatives to recruit women and minorities, and 20 percent had policies and practices to ensure the inclusion of women and people of color in their faculty candidate pools. Most chairs did not perceive morale surrounding gender equity to be a problem in their departments.

**T**he data describe a faculty population in which women are younger, less senior in years and rank, and have fewer scholarly publications and lower salaries, reflecting the fact that participation by women has been increasing relative to men relatively recently. The task force issued a series of recommendations, a select few of which are summarized below.

### **Recommendations**

The loss of senior women was identified as a problem, but the task force was unable to analyze turnover, due to lack of data. The task force recommended that the university collect turnover data, and conduct exit interviews to ascertain the reasons why faculty leave Marquette. The task force concluded that promoting gender equity requires administrators to undertake extensive reviews and to implement changes to policies, procedures and practices. It recommended that a formal ombuds office be established, to provide an independent mechanism for faculty to seek redress for perceived grievances. Due to the skepticism that existed as to whether concrete actions would follow the task force's efforts, it recommended the creation of an Implementation Task Force on Gender Equity. Finally, it recommended that gender equity task forces be established to address the concerns of support staff, administrators and students.

## **Gender Equity Implementation Task Force**

In July, 2001 Father Wild created a Gender Equity Implementation Task Force, co-chaired by Professors Cheryl Maranto and Mary Ann Farkas, in order to oversee Marquette University's progress on the plan of action laid out in the Gender Equity Task Force Report. The charge included, but was not limited to (a) salary guidelines and guidelines for merit review and promotion and tenure, (b) the structure of an ombuds program, (c) faculty recruitment and mentoring, (d) educational initiatives regarding gender equity issues, and (e) procedures for appointing, evaluating and compensating deans and department chairs. The work of the Implementation Task Force (ITF) benchmarked best practices within the departments of Marquette University, at other universities, including other Jesuit universities, from relevant national professional organizations.

The ITF developed a model for an ombuds office, based on the University and College Ombuds Association Standards of Practice. It recommended establishing: an institutionalized mentoring program for all pre-tenure faculty; guidelines for preparation of a candidate's dossier for promotion and tenure; guidelines for merit review procedures; clear articulation of the weight and nature of service in promotion and tenure review guidelines, and in the standards for promotion to full professor.

It recommended that an annual budget be provided for the women's studies program. The ITF developed several models for providing a semester of paid parental leave upon the birth or adoption of a child. General recommendations included: that each unit monitor progress in implementing ITF recommendations and issue annual reports; that a standing committee on the status of women be established; that salaries of undergraduate part-time faculty (many of whom are women) be improved, and that the university sponsor annual symposia and workshops to improve awareness of and sensitivity to gender-related issues.

## Gender Equity Action

In December 2003, President Wild issued a summary of actions taken in response to the Gender Equity Task Forces' recommendations. Academic deans and vice presidents are to include progress on gender equity and diversity in their annual reports. A subcommittee on women faculty at Marquette has been established. Recommendations to improve the work life of part-time faculty were developed, and each college was directed to submit a plan to address these concerns. The provost committed to fund a presentation by a national expert on gender equity. A university ombuds office was established. A program for coaching new faculty on the principles of teaching was initiated. Faculty review systems were examined in each college, and the provost charged the university promotion and tenure committee to consider improvements in the areas identified by the ITF as needing attention.

Pursuant to a review of gender equity in starting salaries by each academic dean, 20 faculty women were given equity adjustments. All department chairs are now evaluated in writing by faculty every three years, and gender equity is addressed in these reviews. Each department chair is required to report annually to his or her dean on gender-inclusiveness in governance structure, work climate, hiring and leadership development, and fairness in faculty reviews. Deans' annual evaluations by the provost now include gender equity issues. Gender equity issues are addressed in new faculty orientation and in an annual department chair retreat.

## Where do we go from here?

The findings of Marquette's two Gender Equity Task Forces identify themes that are echoed in many university's reports. These include marginalization, professional exclusion, and isolation resulting from the low representation of women in many departments,

the residual effects of prior inequities, and greater family responsibilities. Progress in eliminating women's underrepresentation among the faculty will require continuous monitoring and rethinking institutionalized practices that were developed for a male, single-earner labor force. Given the low rate of faculty turnover, women will continue to be a minority for the foreseeable future and thus risk continued marginalization. The entire faculty needs to be educated on gender equity issues.

Marquette University has made significant progress in placing women in leadership positions. The provost is a woman, as are two of the eleven deans and ten of the thirty-seven department chairs. The number of women full professors, as reported to the AAUP, has gone from seven (5.2 percent of full professors) in 1997-98 to 19 (14.0 percent of full professors) in 2004-05. (The national average is 19.4 percent.) This places Marquette in the 20<sup>th</sup> percentile nationally; although still lowest among Jesuit colleges and universities. While significant progress has been made, more remains to be done.

We believe that the work of the gender equity task forces was an exercise in faculty (shared) governance. Leveraging diversity in all its forms must be a continuing process. These reports began the work of designing processes, policies and practices that will enable everyone to contribute their full energy and talents to the Marquette mission.

While these task forces have now finished their work and the formal process we began in 1999 is now brought to conclusion, it is not as though we can say to one another, "Well, that's that. We have finished with that issue!" No, no, gender equity—and indeed equity concerns of all sorts—must continue to be one of this university's foremost priorities going forward (Father Robert A. Wild, S.J., Letter from the President, Dec. 8, 2003). ■

In Decree 14, the 34<sup>th</sup> General Congregation applied faith and justice to the variable situations of women in all contemporary cultures. It acknowledged that, [t]he dominance of men in their relationship with women has found expression in many ways... discrimination against women in educational opportunities, the disproportionate burden they are called upon to bear in family life, paying them a lesser wage for the same work, limiting their access to positions of influence when admitted to public life..." (Decree 14 recognized that the situation of women has begun to change, "...chiefly because of the critical awakening and courageous protest of women themselves." Many men... have joined women in rejecting attitudes which offend the dignity of men and women alike." Nonetheless, a legacy of systemic discrimination exists and remains embedded in "... economic, social, political, religious, and even linguistic structures of our societies." ... Using ecclesial reflections on Scripture, the Decree offered concrete guidance for responding to the current situation of women. Jesuits were invited to "... listen carefully and courageously to the experience of women." ... Jesuits were invited to "... align themselves in solidarity with women..." in very practical ways.