

Task force to assess status of graduate women

by Tania Hewett

How good is graduate education for women? A new York task force has been set up to find some answers.

In 1987, a report was released by the Council of Ontario Universities (COU) entitled "Women in the Universities of Ontario." The report outlined areas that require investigation which could result in an improvement in the climate of Ontario universities for women, especially in graduate studies. The release of this report resulted in the formation of a task force to study the York community and find out ways to enhance the quality of women's education at York.

The task force was formed last fall and is composed of representatives from various disciplines. Faculty members on the committee include Art Forer (biology), Barbara Godard (English), Pat Rogers (mathematics), Rusty

Shtier (English/Atkinson), Marta Sokolowski (biology) and Cui Visarias (sociology).

The committee also includes representatives from two graduate departments with women's courses: Susan Snelling from psychology and Lee Wiggins of the Graduate Students' Association. Greg Jacobs acts as a liaison for the faculty of graduate studies.

Prior to the formation of York's task force, several other universities had already taken steps to address the status of women in graduate programmes. Some studies involved the examination of completion rates in the graduate studies programme while others looked at how many people dropped out.

In addition to the areas already taken on by other universities, the task force will most likely be looking at recruitment and admission procedures, granting structures, how a discipline is constructed and how women are positioned as producers or non-producers of knowledge.

The university's general attitude towards women will also be looked at, and a focus will be on whether there are biases against women's research. In addition, the committee will examine how much sexism there is at York and how its practice is manifested.

The COU report isolates non-academic issues for the task force to address, which include a review of personnel policies and promotion procedures encouraging the hiring of more women faculty as well as ways of encouraging more women to apply to graduate school.

One area of particular interest is why women have stayed away from graduate studies in science. Godard believes the reason may not be a lack of interest but "the way women see the work force," she said. "Many women believe they couldn't get a job in the science field."

Another question the task force would like to address is how people view graduate education and why women often feel they shouldn't work towards it.

While the COU report is the foundation for the task force's study, it will also be asking for the input of the York community. The task force hopes the community input will give directives as to what people feel are the major issues. This way, a systematic investigation can be carried out.

According to Godard, "If people tell us a particular issue is something they noticed happening, or feel [it] has been a problem for them, we can set up a means of investigating this across the university. We want to know if it is an isolated incidence or a problem created by the structures of York and experienced by a great number of people."

Godard believes the task force will most likely focus its efforts on graduate students, especially people who feel there are barriers to becoming successful graduates. The most common problem, Godard believes, is that women in graduate studies face financial problems, lack of family support and lack of support in the

community, all of which she hopes to address.

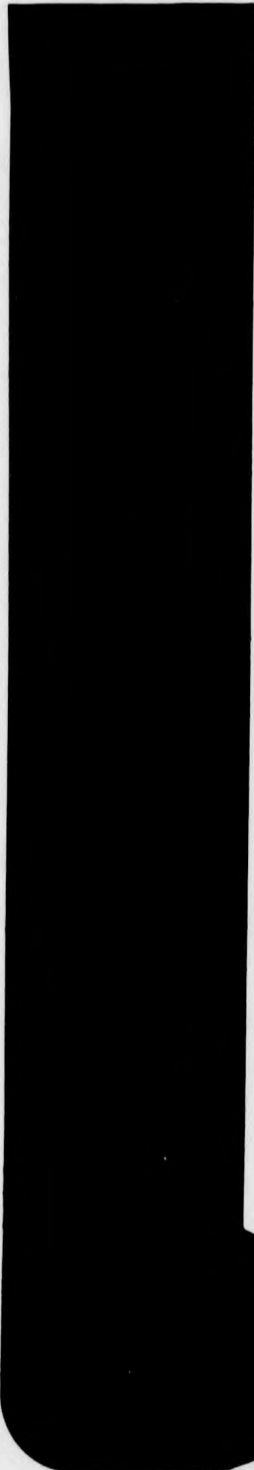
Other sources of input may come from women's groups on campus as well as directors of graduate programmes who will be contacted to find the problems in their departments.

Once the research has been completed, a report will be put together detailing the situation of women in the graduate programmes and recommendations for changes.

The document should be completed by September, when it will be presented to the dean of graduate studies. Although the main focus of the task force is to identify the problems female graduate students are facing, it also wants to provide incentives to encourage women to apply. Once they are in, the task force wants to enforce an attitude that makes it conducive for them to stay in.

The task force has a very large and comprehensive job ahead of it; one that will no doubt improve the quality of education at York.

This could be you or this could be you.



see correction on p. 5 for details

Photo of the Week:



Patricia Hutahajan's "Starr Mountain."



by Ann Barry

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