

Status of women examined

by Brian Tucker

The Senate task force on the status of women at the U of A has invited the university community to relate cases of discrimination in a series of personal interviews.

Requests for the interviews held in room 5-8A in the mechanical engineering building can be made through the Senate office at 432-1268.

Entering its final stage, the task force has already startled sectors of the university community with a questionnaire distributed to academic and non-academic staff.

Results of the questionnaire released during the Senate's November meeting in Red Deer, show that the staff feels there is discrimination against women in hiring, promotion and salary levels.

"I heard surprise expressed from certain quarters on campus that the situation was such that we felt the study was necessary," said June Sheppard, chairperson of the ten-member task force established last May.

It is this kind of attitude which Sheppard feels is a major barrier to vault in turning out a productive report.

"Even in faculties with no females at all, to the men we met, it never occurred to them that this is unfair, that it should be looked at. This should say

something about attitude."

Reaction to the report has varied from optimism to the feeling that nothing could be accomplished.

"Some men have been antagonistic; they said it was an exercise in futility," said Sheppard.

"We are dealing in a nebulous area," Sheppard admits.

"It would be easier if there was something on the statute books," she concluded.

Sheppard, an Edmonton Journal columnist, suggests there is ample evidence that universities across Canada are totally male dominated.

"The decision making roles are held by men - important administrative units, department chairmen."

But the university community is traditionally a hard group to convince; they want concrete proof of alleged cases of discrimination against women.

Revealing these facts, according to Sheppard, is the most important goal of the task force, along with baring the atmosphere generated by this discrimination.

The difficulty in getting access to computers, coupled with a seeming reluctance of women to bring forward their

complaints, have slowed down the study.

Women apparently fear reprisals from their superiors, says Sheppard. She stresses strict confidentiality will be maintained with a number code protecting the person's name and faculty.

Two teams, each consisting of a man and woman will conduct "informal" interviews with non-academic and academic staff.

One team, for academic staff, is composed of Sheppard and Vern Wishart; the other consists of Valerie Perry of the non-academic staff association and Duncan Campbell of the extension department.

Faculty and students have been encouraged to discuss their experiences with cases of discrimination against women.

"A couple of men have brought to our attention cases in which women with qualifications equal to or beyond men in a department had been passed up in promotion," Sheppard says.

"We would like men as well

as women to come forward people who are convinced there is not any discrimination," she adds.

The three-pronged study modeled after a UBC effort, was recommended by the U of A Women's Club, which charged that discrimination against women existed in salaries, promotions and hiring.

The questionnaire, designed to test perceptions of discrimination found that about 80 per cent of women polled felt men received preferential treatment, and 60 per cent of the men agreed.

Broken down further: more than 60 per cent of those polled think men are more likely to be hired, 53 per cent felt it was more difficult for women to be promoted, 57 per cent felt men were preferred for committee work, and 63 per cent thought men achieved academic recognition easier than women.

These findings correspond to other finds made at other universities across Canada, including the University of British Columbia and Toronto.

UBC's study concurred with these findings and concluded that a woman in the same faculty, with the same experience, same degree, and who started at the same job level were paid \$1,740 less than a man.

It called on the university to provide women equal educational and employment opportunities, "regardless of age, pregnancy or possibility of pregnancy, marriage status, number of dependents or financial position of parents, and a commitment to remedy the present effects of past discrimination against women."

The results have reflected what is true in business and society, she says. "There is no evidence that education makes a difference. Universities have re-inforced all discrimination in society generally."

A second phase involves a data survey being compiled by Nim Mehra of the Institute of Research and Planning. It will be based on variables of sex, age, rate of pay, and level of education.

Probing relationships

by Greg Neiman

"There must be a minimum of centralized decision making and there must be a maximum of decentralized decision making in matters dealing with money," said U of A president Max Wyman at a recent panel discussion at the Provincial Archives.

The topic of discussion, university and provincial government relations, quickly boiled down to deliberations on whether the government was interfering with university affairs, and if it had the right to do so.

The Universities Commission (July 1, 1966-March 31, 1972) was a board set up by the provincial government to allot money to universities in Alberta.

The Lougheed government disbanded it because it allegedly took the decision-making powers in these matters away from the elected representatives of the people.

The department of advanced education now has the powers of money allotment.

Wyman says that decisions that were made in the open by the commission are now made

behind closed doors.

"The advantage of a commission idea is that it acted as a buffer between the government and the university," said Wyman.

"There are great political pressures on a government where decisions are made; the commission relieved the government of having to make decisions under pressure."

Wyman advocates that decisions should be made with at least the consultation of the university.

He sees government action in university affairs, specifically the building freeze, as "a mistrust of University policy."

J.B. Haddow, professor of Mechanical Engineering, spoke in reference to government control of university as "an unfortunate fact of life."

He believes that the government should have a minimum of control over a university.

"The academic profession should be given the same authority to govern itself as does the professions of law and medicine," Haddow added.

Like Wyman, Haddow is in favour of a buffer between university and government.

"There should be an accountability of a university to the government where vast sum of money are spent," but over all, he says that universities should remain autonomous in order to run with maximum efficiency.

Deputy Education Minister Walter Worth defended the government's view.

He said "Universities have a very sensitive and unique role to play and should therefore have some autonomy, but the

university community should develop a greater sensitivity to the role of the government."

In the past there was only one institution of higher education in the province, Worth said. Now there are over twenty.

"The challenge of the next decade is not to reverse the accomplishments of the past, but a greater learning to live with each other."

Worth added that the government will have to respect university autonomy, but the universities should also respect certain government authority, when a government makes a claim upon the capacities of a university.

He said that there has been little government interference or control in university affairs in the past few years and that an unfavourable stereotype has emerged.

Worth is against the idea of a commission. "They weren't making the decisions that mattered...money spending was decided upon by the commission, but building and planning decisions were made by a board of governors. When grave decisions had to be made the universities usually went to the government anyway."

A discussion period followed where the audience was invited to participate. During this discussion Wyman replied to Worth's statement with, "The U of A, as far as I can remember, always worked through the commission."

Other panelists included T.C. Byrne, president of Athabasca university.

The discussion was staged by the Edmonton Chapter of the Institute of Public Administration in Canada.

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