

# **Consulting Report on Gender Equity and Work/Family Issues**

For North Carolina State University

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## **Introduction**

Like many other colleges and universities in the U.S., NC State faces issues of faculty retention and the maintenance and improvement of quality in a context of shrinking governmental supports. Part of the approach that NC State is taking in addressing these issues concerns increasing the diversity or representativeness of faculty, staff and students. This report concerns the ways in which family issues relate to faculty and staff, gender equity, and the ability of the institution to fulfill its mission and enhance diversity.

For this report, I met with the Assistant Vice Provost for Gender Affairs, the Association of Women Faculty, the Vice Provost for Equal Opportunity and Equity, the Vice Provost for Diversity and African-American Affairs, the Deans and Provost in a workshop, and other interested faculty, staff and students. Other relevant parties I did not meet with include the Chancellor, the office of Human Resources, the Faculty Senate, the Women's Studies Program, and the Council on the Status of Women. The visit occurred through, and this report was written for, the Assistant Vice Provost for Gender Affairs.

## **Background**

The concerns that led to this report mainly centered on the seeming intractability of gender issues for faculty at NC State, and particularly the inability of the institution to improve the gender balance in a sustained fashion for the faculty across the various colleges and departments.

The immediate rationale for confronting these issues is found in the first of three NC State University Goals:

“Building a diverse and inclusive campus community, fostering demographic and intellectual diversity.”(University Planning and Analysis, October 2000)

The capacity of an institution to achieve diversity and inclusiveness is, in part, indicated by the gender balance among faculty and staff employees. In an unbalanced institution, women will mainly be located in low-wage, low-prestige, low-responsibility positions. Although strict numeric balance may not be desirable, movement away from historic imbalances towards a greater balance in employment would signal that the institution is moving towards meeting the above-stated goal.

Gender imbalance at NC State is pervasive at present. According to the NC State University Office for Equal Opportunity, January 2002, summary of employment for 2001, the percentages of women across various employment categories were as follows:

- Administrators – 29.4%
- Tenure-line Faculty – 20.1%
- Non-tenure-line Faculty – 51.0%
- EPA Professionals – 54.6%

Admittedly, women had increased their representation in administrative ranks substantially during the previous decade, but the largest increases in the numbers of women were among Non-tenure-line Faculty and EPA Professionals, with the largest proportional increase occurring within the category of Non-tenure-line Faculty.

NC State has a long-standing commitment to diversity, as signified by the existence of annual salary equity studies dating back to 1982. Those studies, including the most recent (Haignere, 2001), provide information on the proportions of women and minorities in various positions across the institution, and the salaries associated with the various groups. The collection and dissemination of such information, particularly over such a long time period, is critical to any effort to enhance diversity. Absent such information, no one would know whether problems even exist.

Two recent changes at the institution have shaped both the salary equity reports and how they are employed. The first is that the most recent report by Lois Haignere was designed to uncover evidence of systematic as opposed to individual pay inequities. Previous studies, undertaken at the level of the colleges rather than the university, were designed to permit the calculation of individual salary inequities. The most recent study was constructed to uncover a single amount by which the average woman (or minority group member) on the faculty was underpaid. That number, around \$1,000 in annual average salary, was calculated, and NC State has since committed permanent funding to eliminate the overall gender gap. Because individuals have a tendency to believe that they are above-average performers and underpaid relative to their worth, this policy shift made a great deal of sense.

The second change is that a position of Vice Provost responsible for gender equity was eliminated in the late 1990s. That change was perceived as damaging to the cause of gender equity, and led to the formation of the Association of Women Faculty. The question of whether this change was in fact damaging is not taken up here.

Nonetheless, two structural problems exist at present that may or may not be linked to the elimination of the previous position:

1. The lines of responsibility for policies and policy change regarding gender equity, and particularly policies with respect to work/family issues are blurred, and
2. The lines of responsibility regarding such policies with respect to all faculty, staff and students are separate and disconnected.

Both problems are highlighted by the recent policy change implementing “Medical, Maternity and Parental Leave for Faculty with Academic Year Appointments,” updated in November of 2001 by the Office for Equal Opportunity. That policy derived from the Office for Equal Opportunity, although my understanding of the organizational charts from that Office and the Office for Diversity and African-American Affairs suggests that the policy should logically have come from the latter office. The Office of Human Resources was not involved in writing the policy, although it is my understanding that this office would have been involved if the policy affected staff at NC State.

This blurring of lines of responsibility, and disconnection between policy-making for faculty and other employees of NC State does not imply that the particular policy around medical, maternity and parental leave is poorly written, nor that it is a bad policy. It *does* imply that there may be better, and more systematic ways to construct and implement policy change.

Regardless of the salary equity studies and recent progress in regard to salary equity, It would be difficult to argue that NC State has in any sense ‘met’ the diversity and inclusiveness goal stated above. More needs to be done. The questions are what, how and by whom?

### **Does Family Matter?**

I view work/family issues as integral to the broader question of gender equity. This view is relatively new, and still somewhat controversial. The reason the view is new is that evidence regarding discrimination against women in the academe is strong, regardless of parental status or other family considerations. For example, 1999 data collected from a large sample of U.S. colleges and universities by the U.S. Department of Education found that women comprised:

- 36.3% of full-time, but 47.9% of part-time faculty,
- 29.5% of faculty at public research institutions, but 49.9% of faculty at public, 2-year institutions, and
- 9.2% of Engineering, but 54.1% of Education faculty. (calculated from U.S.

Department  
of Education, 1999)

Consistent with these findings, a highly influential report on women in the sciences and engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology revealed strong evidence of discrimination against women (MIT, 1999). The role of family issues is minimized in the report. A recent follow-up to that report highlights work/family conflicts in somewhat greater detail (MIT, 2002).

Relatedly, studies that have analyzed gender in the academe and the role of work/family conflict in creating or sustaining gender inequities have found relatively limited evidence. For example:

- An on-going study by the American Sociological Association of the U.S. Ph.D. class of 1997 has found no evidence linking parental status to publication rates (Spalter-Roth, Lee, Levine & Thomas, 2000).
- A recent study of all faculty at the University of Michigan also revealed no significant effects of parental status on publication rates for men or women (Blackburn & Hollenshead, 1999).
- A study of academic couples in the U.S. again revealed no impact from parental status on publication rates (Ferber & Loeb, 1997).
- A study of related issues at Penn State University found that, for a sample of untenured faculty, retention rates were higher for mothers than for non-mother women (Drago, Crouter, Wardell & Willits, 2001)

Nonetheless, an examination of the family status of academics in the U.S. suggests that work/family conflict and gender inequities may be closely linked. Astin and Milem (1997) found in a national survey of faculty that marriage rates averaged 82 percent for men, but only 62 percent for women, and that rates of divorce averaged seven percent for men, but 13 percent for women. A study of psychology faculty in the U.S. found that rates of childlessness among faculty were only 12 percent for men, but 34 percent for women (Helmreich, Spence, Beane, Lucker & Matthews, 1980).

The apparent absence of work/family conflict, in tandem with the facts that academic women take on fewer family commitments than academic men, can be explained through appeal to the “ideal worker” norm, as argued by Joan Williams (1999) at a general level, and Drago and Williams (2000) with regard to academic faculty. In general, the ideal worker is someone who enters a profession immediately upon receiving the relevant academic credential, works his or her way up the career ladder by putting in long hours without interruptions beyond short vacations, and continues in this fashion until retirement age. The ideal worker can contribute financially to the family, but cannot make substantial time commitments to children or other family members without endangering his or her career. Pay and promotion systems, practices, and rules around working time, absence, vacations, and retirement systems, and the beliefs of those from previous generations who have succeeded as ideal workers and currently manage our organizations, are all built upon the presumption that only ideal workers should be hired, retained, and rewarded.

For faculty at U.S. colleges and universities, the ideal worker is someone who goes straight through school and receives the terminal degree (typically a Ph.D.) in their late 20s, and immediately takes a full-time position as an assistant professor on the tenure track. The individual usually receives a mixture of relatively short-term contracts during this time (one to three years), and can be released with few if any penalties for the institution. While on the tenure track, the ideal worker performs a modicum of service work, builds a teaching dossier, and strives to generate research resulting in publication,

typically in peer-reviewed journals. At the beginning of the sixth year, the faculty member documents his or her accomplishments; the resulting package is reviewed by faculty at other institutions and at various levels within the college or university. At the end of the academic year (most often in June), the faculty member is notified as to whether he or she will be promoted to the position of associate professor with tenure, or will instead be released by the institution at the end of the seventh year of employment (called the “terminal year” in such cases).<sup>1</sup>

If an individual performs as an ideal worker, he or she will be granted tenure and promotion at the end of the sixth year. The granting of tenure makes it difficult though not impossible for the institution to release the employee at a later date. The ideal worker will then strive to generate an additional equivalent or superior record in the years following tenure to achieve promotion from associate to full professor.

Tenure decisions are not typically made by applying a fixed set of rules. New assistant professors are not given a clear formula regarding the number of articles required for tenure, the level of journals in which the articles must appear, how heavily co-authored as opposed to sole-authored articles count, nor how heavily books count. Individuals in this position are typically told that quality research, teaching, and service are all required to achieve tenure (American Council on Education et al., 2000). If the process were simply a way to reward high-quality individuals, then it might be possible to specify the criteria for tenure in a formula. However, if the process is also intended to produce tenured academics who have internalized the ideal worker norm, then the process needs to remain a mystery to those on the pre-tenure side. The individual is given the consistent message that more work, longer hours, and more research are always desirable.<sup>2</sup>

While tenure and promotion may provide the most visible systems for rewarding academics who function as ideal workers, other incentives exist as well. For academics who most closely fit the ideal worker norm, the department might reward the individual with better teaching assignments, superior office space, and greater support. Above the departmental level, further rewards exist in terms of job opportunities at elite institutions, endowed chairs, and invitations to become administrators and to lead professional societies, along with higher salaries (Gander, 1997).

The point about administration is significant. In contrast to the typical corporation, academic administrators typically receive little or no formal training as managers. Instead, those who most closely fit the ideal worker norm as a faculty member are rewarded with appointment to the ranks of administration. Once within those ranks, long hours and meetings at all hours of the day, and including weekends, become the rule for

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<sup>1</sup> In rare cases, tenure will be granted without promotion to associate professor, or promotion will be granted without tenure. Such arrangements are typically avoided because they tend to create future complications for the individual and the institution.

<sup>2</sup> One way to make this argument is to note that no academic department includes tenured faculty all of precisely the same quality. Assume that higher quality individuals could achieve the accomplishments of medium quality individuals by putting forth less effort. A fixed standard would therefore only motivate the medium quality individuals. By providing even relatively high-quality individuals with some uncertainty regarding tenure, both the medium- and high-quality individuals are motivated to work hard.

those who wish to ascend the ladder and become chancellors or presidents of major institutions. By implication, those who make and enforce rules at our colleges and universities are precisely those who fit the ideal worker norm.

The internalization argument is also important. Bailyn (1993, 49–54) suggests that the absorptiveness of academic research and the unlimited demands of academic life induce faculty to internalize the ideal worker norm. Indeed, she cites a study showing that, “professors far along in their careers tend to be *less* accommodative to family and *more* involved with career success than are their junior colleagues”(1993, 51). Echoing this conclusion, a recent study at the University of Michigan discovered that in three out of four academic divisions studied, “full professors reported a similar or higher” rate of publication in refereed journals relative to assistant and associate professors (Blackburn & Hollenshead, 1999, 12).

Given this background, I predict that a *bias against caregiving* exists at most colleges and universities, including NC State. Such a bias does not emerge because of any dislike of children or other dependents, but rather because caregiving activities signal that the faculty member is not an ideal worker and is therefore a substandard academic. Even within the same institution, different departments are likely to vary in the form and degrees of bias against caregiving. Natural science and engineering disciplines emphasize fast-paced publishing, pressures to secure external funding, intense competition between research groups, and collaboration and coordination within research groups (Becher, 1989). A tenure-seeking Chemist with a young child might need to juggle caregiving with expectations that she bring in grants to offset half her salary, publish five articles per year in a quickly-developing research area, and teach. Her absences from the lab to care for her child will be highly visible to members of her research group. In contrast, the social climate within many humanities disciplines features a slower pace for publishing fewer but longer works, little opportunity for external funding, minimal direct competition, and solitary work (Becher, 1989). A parenting English professor on the tenure track will also face conflicting pressures between work and family. Because she is likely to work alone on the two books she must publish to gain tenure, the time she takes to attend to her family will not be consistently visible to her colleagues. Nonetheless, she will perceive the pressures of the ideal worker norm through the various rewards systems of the institution, and particularly in the tenure and promotion process.

Bias against caregiving generates gender inequities because women continue to perform most childrearing tasks in the home and family caregiving in general (Robison, Moen & Dempster-McClain, 1995). The general argument is that anyone who takes time for family commitments will suffer within an academic context, but that it is in fact women who mainly suffer the consequences.

Colleges and universities, including NC State, have responded with various work/family policies. For example, Finkel and Olswang found in the mid-1990s that across 60 AAUP institutions, typical policies for faculty included a 90-day paid sick leave allowance for new mothers, and up to one year of unpaid leave for new mothers or fathers, with a one year stoppage of the tenure clock for any parent taking at least six months of leave (1996,

125). Relatedly, a study of 375 colleges and universities undertaken at around the same time found 94 leadership campuses with an “average of 30 programs or policies designed to help employees balance their personal and family life with work responsibilities” (Friedman, Rinsky, & Johnson, 1996, 1). At NC State, new parent faculty may stop the tenure clock if parental leave of one semester is taken.

Although many institutions have responded to work/family conflicts, the record to date has been one of limited success. As found with the Faculty and Families project at Penn State, as well as the University of Michigan study of faculty, the vast majority of faculty eligible for parental leave do not formally utilize existing policies (Drago, et al, 2001; Blackburn & Hollenshead, 1999). I suspect that utilization rates at NC State are similarly low.

Bias against caregiving, and related low rates of utilization for work/family policies, suggest that universities have not levelled the playing field for women who wish to become successful academics. Women are implicitly asked to choose between family and career commitments, a choice that has never confronted men. The women who do attempt to mesh family and career commitments find it very difficult because the demands placed upon ideal workers are almost without boundaries. I conclude that any successful attempt to address gender inequities must also address issues of work/family conflict.

Work/family conflict is not, however, merely a question of fairness. It is an issue intimately linked to employee retention and commitment to the organization. As Grover and Crooker (1995) found, family-responsive institutions generate reduced turnover and higher levels of employee commitment among parent *and* non-parent employees.

Work/family conflict is also an issue that alters the institution’s ability to attract and retain the most talented young men and women for faculty and staff positions. Recent decades have witnessed dramatic increases in the time young fathers spend with their children (Bond, Galinsky & Swanberg, 1998). In discussions, the Vice Provost for Diversity and African-American Affairs suggested that family-responsiveness has been an issue of increasing interest to prospective male candidates for faculty positions at NC State. Similarly, a draft report on these issues by the Assistant Vice Provost for Gender Affairs suggests that family-responsiveness is a serious issue for many women already on the NC State faculty.<sup>3</sup>

### **Issues and Potential Solutions**

Although no firm evidence exists, it seems likely that NC State is slightly behind most other research universities in terms of work/family policies. For example, the university is not represented in the membership of the College and University Work/Family

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<sup>3</sup> The draft report made no judgement as to how crucial family-responsiveness was in relation to other issues.

Association,<sup>4</sup> nor is the institution listed as a “leadership campus,” in the *College and University Reference Guide to Work/Family Programs* (Friedman, Rimsky & Johnson, 1996).

Because colleges and universities tend to change slowly, I do not believe it would be difficult for NC State to make significant progress relative to other institutions, and even to quickly surpass most other universities in terms of family-responsiveness. Some recommendations for achieving that end are as follows:

- 1) *Clarify lines of authority and accountability for work/family policies.* At present, lines of authority are blurred. Some separation is usual at universities, since human resources and staff typically fall under the office of the Chancellor, while faculty issues are typically the province of the Provost. Coordination can deal with this usual separation. However, the present structure makes the respective roles of the Vice Provost for Equal Opportunity and Equity and the Vice Provost for Diversity and African-American Affairs with regard to faculty issues unclear. Some clarification would help, and resources will likely be necessary for any expansion of roles here.
- 2) *Monitor policy utilization and retention.* Existing policies for new parents on the faculty are close to those found elsewhere, and if the NC State experience is similar to that of others, utilization rates regarding staying the tenure clock and parental leave are likely very low. Regular collection and distribution of data regarding utilization rates would help to create and sustain change in the campus climate regarding family-responsiveness.
- 3) *Focus on the development of “quick wins” cutting across lines of faculty and staff.* Examples of quick wins might include:
  - a. An adoption benefit equivalent to typical expenditures through university-provided health insurance for biological parents, with the benefit available to all full-time employees.
  - b. A childcare subsidy of, e.g., \$1,000 per year for all full-time employees. A sliding-scale with the subsidy falling to some small amount for high-income employees, could make such subsidies relatively low-cost.
  - c. Contract with a provider (e.g., Bright Horizons, or Work-Family Directions) for back-up or sick child care, to be provided on an as-needed basis at the expense of the employee.
  - d. Contract with a provider or develop an in-house resource and referral service for employees to identify childcare and eldercare providers in the geographic area.
  - e. Develop a ‘dual-career’ program to identify job opportunities in the area, to be utilized by non-academic partners or spouses during the hiring process.

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<sup>4</sup> The membership list is only available to members, but other information on CUWFA can be found at [cuwfa.org](http://cuwfa.org)



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