Commission for Women Annual Report

2009–2010

Auden Thomas, Chair
Mission

The Commission for Women (CFW) serves as an advisory group to the President of the University on the status of women at Penn State, advocates for women’s concerns, and recommends solutions.

Since 1981, the commission has identified areas of concern for the women employees and students of Penn State. It is a forum for exchanging ideas that can translate into improved policies and practices to support women at Penn State.

Specifically, the commission:

Examines and makes recommendations about issues that affect women employees and students, including workplace and classroom climate; recruitment, advancement, and retention; mentoring; professional development and recognition; maternity and child/elder-care policies; salary equity; personal/safety and sexual assault awareness; and intercollegiate athletics;

Collaborates with departments/organizations in support of gender-equity initiatives;

Recognizes and celebrates the contributions and achievements of women at Penn State.

2009–2010 Initiatives and Activities

This year, the commission focused on achieving its goals by (1) collaborating with other University groups devoted to diversity; (2) energizing its various committees including executive, standing, ad hoc, program, and liaison committees; and (3) working to make its operating processes and procedures more efficient.

Collaborations

The commission conducted outreach activities in the early fall designed to involve students more fully in the life of the commission. These included hosting a tea with international students, staffing an information table at the Graduate Student’s Orientation, and participating in a Women’s Groups Mixer co-sponsored with the Department of Women’s Studies; the Women’s Leadership Initiative; the Center for Women Students; the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Ally Student Resource Center; the Women’s Studies Graduate Organization; and TRIOTA.

In addition, the commission co-sponsored a number of events and initiatives with student groups such as the Women’s Studies Graduate Student Organization; Graduate Women in Science; Supporting Women in Geography; Alpha Kappa Alpha; Latino Studies Initiative; and the University Park Undergraduate Association. CFW participated
in several student-led events including Campus Night Out and the Take Back the Night March. The commission also supported the University Park Undergraduate Association’s Pledge for Safe and Responsible Actions During State Patty's Day. In addition to these student-focused activities, the commission collaborated with a number of other units to support the University’s diversity mission. Such collaborations included the Martin Luther King, Jr. Banquet, the annual Technical Service Women’s Workshop, and the annual symposium on promotion and tenure sponsored by the Commission on Racial/Ethnic Diversity. Along with the Commission on Racial/Ethnic Diversity and the Commission on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Equity, CFW co-funded a Penn State-specific analysis of National Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transsexual Campus Climate Survey data.

Commission members attended the Board of Trustees breakfast meeting in January 2010 to provide information about CFW initiatives. Six commission members served as evaluators on the review teams for A Framework to Foster Diversity at Penn State. The commission submitted a letter in support of a diverse pool of candidates for the search for the new vice president for Research and dean of the Graduate School and forwarded names of qualified female candidates to the search committee.

**EnergizingExistingCommittees**

Full commission monthly business meetings consisted of an initial open house at the Hintz Family Alumni Center (September 17) and a retreat at the Bryce Jordan Center (October 9). Other business meetings featured CFW members and guests from within the University who could inform outreach and strategic planning efforts and provide information about Penn State’s policies and practices in areas of concern to our committees and constituents. These meetings were open to the public. The 2009–10 schedule included:

- **November 2009**: Damon Sims, vice president for Student Affairs
- **December 2009**: CFW Mentoring Program’s tenth anniversary celebration
- **January 2010**: CFW’s *Work-Family Balance at Penn State* report
- **February 2010**: Issues for women students at Penn State
- **March 2010**: Past CFW chairs
- **April 2010**: Away meeting at Great Valley
- **May 2010**: Annual meeting with President Spanier

**ExecutiveCommittee**

Monthly executive committee meetings provided committee chairs an opportunity to report on their progress and to seek advice from commission officers and other committee chairs. Each meeting consisted of a budget review, committee progress reports, event planning, and discussions about internal processes and procedures.
**Standing Committees**

**Assessment Committee**, co-chairs: Rose Baker and Tracy Vrablik

The Assessment Committee was formed in 2006 as both a supporting committee for the work of the commission and as a means for providing archival and new data and information about women at Penn State. Members of the Assessment Committee gather, review, and synthesize data on the status of women; interpret this data to identify gender-based patterns; and recommend solutions. The committee members also compile periodic reports on the status of women at the University and provide consultation to other Commission for Women committees and women-student organizations seeking data relevant to their studies.

During 2009–2010, the Assessment Committee continued to gather data in the categories that were included in the *Report on the Status of Women at Penn State: 2007–2008*. Members also continued to identify other information related to women at Penn State to consider in future reports and to include on the Assessment Committee’s website.

The Assessment Committee examined admission, matriculation, and retention data on women students in undergraduate and graduate programs at Penn State. The committee began a study of the reasons why women graduate students choose Penn State. In addition, the committee initiated a directory of Commission for Women members that includes information on the reasons why they joined the commission, what keeps them involved in the commission, and the goals they have during their membership. The directory serves as a resource for current use as well as a history of members’ contributions and committee memberships.

Finally, the Assessment Committee reviewed information from the University of Wisconsin at Madison’s Women in Science and Engineering Leadership program website and the ADVANCE grant awards for increasing the participation and advancement of women in academic science and engineering careers.

**Marketing Committee**, co-chairs: Jennifer Pencek and Meghan Flannery Hayes

The Marketing Committee focused on outreach to the University community, especially to students. The committee hosted a community screening at the Palmer Museum of Art on the film *Who Does She Think She Is*, a film that follows five women artists as they navigate the economic, psychological, and spiritual challenges of making work outside the elite art world while balancing the challenges of family life. The committee also continued to focus on student outreach by maintaining a Facebook page and by using Stall Stories and other student-related media to advertise the commission. Committee members also attended various events at University Park to advertise the commission.
Ad hoc Issues Committees

Ad hoc issues committees study and suggest commission responses to key topics that affect the working/learning environments for women at Penn State. The committees consult with the Assessment Committee on available/accessible data and study historical trends, best practices, other institutional models, expert opinions, experiences of University employees, and so forth. Results of this work are summarized below.

Wage Equity Committee, co-chairs: Cathy Dufour and C. Dianne Creagh

Because of ongoing gender-equity concerns with the competencies (broad-banding) compensation and classification system currently being implemented for staff throughout Penn State, the committee chose to continue its focus on this issue that began in 2008–09. This year, the committee developed a staff survey instrument designed to gather data on the perceptions of the new system and its ability or inability to ensure equity and help with professional advancement. The goals of the survey of Penn State staff are to (1) determine the perceived career ladders of Penn State staff members in the competency system; (2) determine professional goals of Penn State staff members in the competency system; (3) assess levels of nonincome benefits for Penn State staff members in the competency system; and (4) determine ways of communication and networking of Human Resources information. The intended survey distribution date is fall 2010.

Family Leave Committee, co-chairs: Melissa Doberstein and Mindy Boffemmyer

During 2008–09, CFW had sponsored a study of faculty and staff parents at Penn State to better understand how they balance the dual responsibilities of work and family in the year following the birth or adoption of a child. The committee spent the fall of 2009 analyzing the resulting data, and in January 2010, published the report Work-Family Balance at Penn State: Findings from the 2008–09 Focus Groups of Faculty and Staff (http://www.equity.psu.edu/cfw/docs/work_family_balance_psu_09.pdf). The goal of the work was to provide CFW with information on new parents’ issues and challenges, allow insight into how Penn State policies affect new parents, and enable the commission to make appropriate recommendations to improve work-life balance for University employees.

The report was widely circulated throughout the University, with presentations made for the Task Force on Workplace Environment; the Faculty Senate Committee on Educational Equity and Campus Environment and, subsequently, the full University Faculty Senate; and at an open meeting of the Commission for Women. The committee then began discussions with University administrators to implement some of the report’s recommendations. At the close of 2009–10, the committee was very actively pursuing an agenda set forth by the report’s recommendations to improve work-life balance for Penn State employees.
Personal Safety and Sexual Assault Awareness Issues Committee, co-chairs: Karin Foley and Dahiana Tejada

In May 2009, President Spanier encouraged the commission to address issues facing the University’s female students. He specifically mentioned sexual assault and alcohol as the two most important, and intertwined, issues facing our women students. The fall 2009 semester began with several well publicized sexual assaults on campus, and subsequently the University Park Undergraduate Association Student Life and Diversity Committee began initiatives to address sexual assault on campus.

As a result of these two occurrences, about twenty interested people came together to form a new issues sub-committee during the commission’s October 2009 retreat; thus, the Personal Safety and Sexual Assault Awareness Committee was formed. The committee grew to about thirty members during 2009–10, including faculty, staff, police officers, and students, both male and female. Consistent with the goals for the commission, this committee's goals are to: (1) advocate for women’s concerns and personal safety; (2) develop and implement initiatives that will enhance women’s safety; and (3) make appropriate recommendations to President Spanier for leadership initiatives that will enhance women’s safety.

The committee spent significant time this year educating itself about the issues and learning from those already working in this area such as the Center for Women Students, Center for Counseling and Psychological Services, University Health Services, Residence Life, and Student Affairs. The committee learned that the most effective way to deliver messages on sexual conduct to men is to do so using credible male peers and to present real, engaging, first-hand experiences. Our Men Against Violence student organization is a leader in this area. The orientation programming offered to athletes on a number of topics has also been cited as a model. Programs developed at other schools have been praised. Examples include a “Men Talking to Men” program developed at Slippery Rock, “Mentors in Violence Prevention” from Northeastern and a “Bringing in the Bystander” program from the University of New Hampshire. The committee also learned the shocking statistic that a majority of sexual assaults are committed by repeat offenders.

One idea for action that came out early in the committee’s discussions was to develop a Gender Relations Dialogues program modeled after the successful Race Relations Project run by Sam Richards and Laurie Mulvey in Sociology. Roughly 7,000 students experience the Race Relations Project annually. These are peer facilitated, small group conversations utilizing the Socratic method to help students discover their own story and their own beliefs on issues of race. Assessment data show that students find the conversations beneficial and that students are more likely to engage in follow-up discussions on the issues of race, bias, and prejudice as a result of participating in the Race Relations Project. Accordingly, during spring 2010, the commission contracted with Drs. Mulvey and Richards to run several pilot dialogues on issues of gender relations.
During these pilot sessions, the facilitators discovered how to start and facilitate the conversations so that issues of sexual conduct were included in the conversation. The experience gained during these pilot sessions is promising, so the committee will continue this work with the Gender Relations Dialogues during 2010–11.

**Program Committees**

**Mentoring Program Committee**, co-chairs: Laurie Schoonhoven and Christy Long

The Commission for Women Mentoring Program was established in 1999 as a result of a University-wide survey revealing a desire by women to develop professional relationships and explore many facets of Penn State not met by traditional HRDC courses. The purpose of the Mentoring Program is to enhance both professional and personal development for full-time faculty, staff, and technical-service employees by connecting them with a mentor who can provide advice on a variety of work-related issues, including career planning, job skill enhancement, and University involvement.

This year was the Mentoring Program’s ten-year anniversary. A celebration was held in December at the Hintz Family Alumni Center to commemorate this occasion. Dr. W. Terrell Jones, vice provost for Educational Equity, Dr. Auden Thomas, chair of the Commission for Women, and Robin Anderson, past chair of the Commission for Women and one of the founders of the Mentoring Program, each shared a few words at the event.

The Mentoring Program had a total of thirty-six participants this year, and again, had representation from all job categories (faculty, staff and technical service). The participation from faculty and technical service has remained steady and we hope to increase participation in these areas in the next year. The committee’s efforts to reach out to all audiences by utilizing multiple communication channels including the Penn State Newswire, open house events, leveraging informal networks, and word-of-mouth advertising proved successful.

One component of the CFW Mentoring Program that makes it unique is the efforts of the committee to create a program year of monthly speakers that aligns with the personal and professional development of the mentors and protégés. The committee worked diligently to seek prominent speakers from the Penn State and State College communities who are recognized experts on topics important to this year’s participants. Featured speakers were: Dr. Luanne E. Thomdyke (The Art of Graceful Self-Promotion), Patty Satalia (Critical Conversations), Dr. Lori J. Bechtel-Wherry (Thoughts on Leadership), Robin Anderson (Nourishing your Authentic Self), Dean Christian Brady (Building Career Connections), and Marcus P. Robinson (Influence: A Presentation on Negotiation).

Featuring high caliber speakers from the Penn State and State College communities for our monthly professional development sessions is an important component in delivering a quality program. These speakers provide an excellent opportunity for women to hear...
from recognized and respected men and women who share their knowledge and skills on a particular topic. It also gives program participants an opportunity to meet and connect with leaders in our community whom they otherwise may not have met.

At the 2008–2009 end-of-year meeting, Dr. Jones asked the committee to consider expanding the program to other campuses through the use of technology. That year, the committee was piloting wiki spaces to see if that would be a viable tool to foster mentor/protégé collaboration. The wiki spaces were not used by participants. After much consideration on how to better utilize technology in the Mentoring Program, the committee decided to pilot the use of Adobe Connect to broadcast and record monthly professional development sessions for 2009–2010.

In the summer of 2009, the committee reached out to several campuses seeking participation in the Commission for Women's Mentoring Program. Three Penn State campuses responded with interested faculty or staff: Hazleton, Abington, and Dickinson School of Law-Carlisle. All participants (including those at UP) had the option of participating in person or via Adobe Connect for each speaker. Mentors and protégés who were in remote locations “met” one-on-one through e-mail, phone, and arranged in-person mentoring meetings while traveling to campuses for University business. The use of Adobe Connect was an important stepping stone to expanding the University Park mentoring program to other campuses. This past year, the committee faced challenges with the technology related to connectivity issues and have learned how to overcome those issues. Additionally, there are planned upgrades this summer to the Adobe Connect technology that hopefully will allow better delivery of monthly professional development sessions.

**Luncheon Committee**, co-chairs: Marcella Fickes and Linda Spangler

The fourth annual spring awards luncheon took place on April 15, 2010, at The Penn Stater Conference Center Hotel. More than 525 guests attended the ceremony honoring outstanding Penn State women. The keynote speaker was Dr. Robert Drago, Congressional Staffer on leave from Penn State's Department of Labor Studies and Employment Relations and Women's Studies. Dr. Drago spoke on the gender gap in academe and the significance of acting on the recommendations in the commission’s recently published report, *Work-Family Balance at Penn State*.

This year’s award recipients were:

**Rosemary Schraer Mentoring Award:**
Ingrid M. Blood, Professor of Communication Sciences and Disorders

**Achieving Women Awards:**
Mercedes Davis, Undergraduate Student, Supply Chain and Information Systems, Smeal College of Business
This committee reports commission activities at campuses other than University Park and serves as a link between the campus CFW groups. The accomplishments of the 2009–10 Liaison Committee were several. First, the committee listserv and website were updated and upgraded. Second, the annual liaison breakfast meeting was held on the morning of the annual Awards Luncheon (April 15). Attendance was slightly less than last year but still solid, with thirty-three campus representatives in attendance. Campus liaisons shared their best practices and discussed future projects. Finally, the committee planned and coordinated the full commission meeting at the Great Valley campus on April 28. In addition to the CFW business meeting, the day included two guest speakers and a complimentary QVC studio tour. The speakers were Beth Rubino, senior vice president of Human Resources, QVC, and Dr. Barrie Litzky, associate professor, Management and Organization at Penn State Great Valley.

In addition, the commission provided funding for CFW programs at nine Penn State campuses: Great Valley for hosting the commissions full meeting in spring 2010; Beaver for a voices against violence gathering; Hazleton for the fourth annual women’s symposium (focus: women’s health issues); Harrisburg for a new member recruiting luncheon; Greater Allegheny for professional development for women faculty and staff, the annual awards luncheon to recognize the achievements of women in the community and Penn State, and collaboration with Penn State departments and community organizations to promote women’s issues; Brandywine for the annual women’s luncheon (focus: woman of the year award, women’s issues discussion, female speaker discussing women’s issues; Fayette for a keynote speaker for the 2010 campus Women’s Day; Behrend for Women’s History Month dinner and talk; and Lehigh Valley to support guest speakers for a professional development day.

The commission’s representative reported on a number of SAC initiatives during the 2009–2010 academic year, including member attendance at the annual benefits fair to increase awareness of the council; the use of Penn State Newswire and Facebook to
attract staff to the council website; the recommendation made to and positively received by President Spanier to extend the probationary period for staff to one year. The council heard from Robert Maney, senior director of Human Resources, about staff grievance procedures and confidentiality practices. Billie Willits, associate vice president for Human Resources, announced that the new Obama Health Care Reform law will be reviewed by the University and OHR to gain a better understanding of its requirements.

University Faculty Senate Committee on Educational Equity (EECE) and Campus Environment, liaison: Doris Malkmus

The CFW sends a liaison to the Faculty Senate Committee on Educational Equity and Campus Environment to coordinate efforts in areas of mutual concern, which this year were work-life balance and personal safety and sexual assault awareness. To that end, the EECE reviewed the commission’s Work-Family Balance at Penn State report and with the Faculty Benefits Committee, had it presented to the Faculty Senate. The EECE also asked sociology professors Sam Richards and Laura Mulvey to share with the EECE their racial dialogue program and the pilot project on gender relations dialogues currently sponsored by the CFW. Richards and Mulvey reported they were encouraged by initial results from the pilots. The EECE will continue to monitor developments in this area and investigate ways it can enhance a family-friendly campus at University Park and across the Commonwealth.

Processes and Procedures

The commission reviewed some of its operating procedures and decided to change a few of them to achieve more efficiency, fairness, and accessibility including:

An increase in the level of grants available to campus liaisons for programming from $100 per campus per year to $250 per campus per year;

Implementation of an online submission request process for groups seeking CFW funding. Among other information gathered, groups are asked to explain how their events further the mission of the CFW. The amount of awards was capped at $250 per group per year;

New affiliate members were welcomed by an e-mail from the CFW chair in addition to a hard copy note that included some CFW promotional items such as a bookmark and pen. The process by which new affiliates were added to the affiliate and CFWPLUS listservs was formalized and taken over by a member of the Executive Committee. A total of forty-two new affiliate members joined the commission in 2009–10;

Affiliate members no longer need to reapply annually. By default, they remain affiliates until they request otherwise;
The taking of meeting minutes for both the CFW Executive Committee and full meetings was assumed by a member of the Executive Committee rather than by staff in Educational Equity.

The bylaws were updated to better reflect current commission procedures and practices.

This publication is available in alternative media on request.

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