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2000 Vice Chair's Report on the Women in Higher Education Teleconference

Commission for Women

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VICE CHAIR'S REPORT TO COMMISSION FOR WOMEN
April 6, 2000

The bulk of my work for the Commission for Women has been coordinating the Women in Higher Education Teleconference. I feel that the teleconference event was successful although the attendance was not as large as we had hoped it might be.

For the Monday, March 27 session, 32 persons attended. Of these, 11 were students and friends, primarily from Norma Cook's class, 9 were staff members, 10 were faculty, and 3 persons identified themselves as administrators. For the Wednesday, March 29 session, 29 persons attended the session. Of these, 19 were students from Norma Cook's class, 3 were staff members, and 6 were faculty.

Monday's session began with opening remarks by CFW Chair Kim Gwinn, and remarks from Marian Moffett, Assistant to Provost and Chief Operating Officer John Peters who was unable to appear due to scheduling conflicts. The opening remarks were followed by a 2-hour telecast from the University of Minnesota, which included an inspiring keynote speech by Johnnetta B. Cole, formerly President of Spelman College, and currently Presidential Distinguished Professor of Anthropology, Women's Studies and African American Studies at Emory University in Atlanta, GA. Dr. Cole's remarks advocated inclusiveness, collaboration, and persistence in continuing efforts to educate institutions and individuals about the problems in higher education which are of particular concern to women and to work toward solutions for those problems. A panel discussion from Minnesota followed Dr. Cole's speech, which included both recognition of achievements for women and reiteration of problems still confronting women in higher education, including issues from undergraduate students, graduate students, staff, faculty, administrators, and advocacy groups working to improve the climate for women in higher education.

Due to the number of participants here on campus, it was decided that our local group would have one discussion session rather than the three discussions originally planned. When the three discussion facilitators expressed reluctance to lead the discussion, Sandra Walker facilitated the discussion. The discussion was a very lively one, with participation from all attendees. It was especially gratifying to have active participation from the student attendees who contributed discussion of many problems, but also suggested ideas for solutions. The 5 issues which seemed to be of most concern to the local discussion group included: 1) family issues, 2) promotion/retention/opportunities for both staff and faculty, 3) concern that campus is not student centered with a hierarchical structure that lacks communication of resources, services, and problem-solving contacts, 4) lack of women in positions of power and concern for values and integrity in filling positions, and 5) teaching/learning/research including concern about the chilly classroom climate for women and lack of inclusiveness. Some suggestions included: 1) a less hierarchical and centralized structure for decision-making, 2) mentoring of students, faculty, staff, and youth with special encouragement for young girls and women to attend college and to enter non-traditional career paths, and 3) tapping the economic power of women through fundraising with special attention through Development efforts to encourage contributions from women.
On Wednesday, March 29, the second telecast from the University of Minnesota began with a panel discussion which summarized the issues and possible solutions presented during the discussions at the main conference site in Minnesota and throughout the United States at the satellite conference sites such as ours. Three regional sites were linked via interactive TV from California, Virginia and Texas. Many of the issues discussed were very similar to the issues raised for discussion here at our campus. Issues and solutions focussed on family issues, realistic expectations regarding work environments, economic fairness including a living wage for staff, encouragement of campus climate assessments, mentoring for youth, students, staff, and faculty, pipelines for encouragement of promotion for women including promotion and recruitment into administrative positions at the highest levels, networking and building alliances, strengthening Women's Studies Programs, encouraging the use of technology and studying the good and bad effects of technology utilization, ongoing professional development for staff, faculty and administrators, development of resource guides for new women faculty, staff and students, community outreach including community service as part of the curriculum, collaboration among universities, community colleges and K-12 schools, partnerships with businesses, convincing policy makers of the importance of higher education, parity of women in the decision-making process, institutional recognition of the problem of the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions, and the study of best practices across the nation for models of good leadership paradigms.

Throughout both telecasts, video clips were presented on several model programs. These included presentations on the programs for residential and childcare accommodations for single mothers at Wilson College in Chambersburg, PA and at Texas Women's University. Other video clips highlighted Purdue University's Interactive Theatre Workshops on Classroom Climate in which role playing illustrates the problems and solutions and the PLEN program in Washington, DC which coordinates internships to develop political leadership among young women. And, The University of Tennessee was mentioned in a video clip on Title IX and women's athletics. Several universities were mentioned which provide excellent role models, team building and skill building, including our women's athletic program.

Following the second telecast, a dedicated group of 8 persons, including 1 student, 3 staff members and 5 faculty met in the International House Great Room to discuss the next steps to be recommended here on our campus. Several areas for action were recommended by Jo Lynch with discussion from all the participants.

It was suggested that classroom climate might be addressed by tapping into the Teaching Council and the GTA Workshops for presentation of programs to educate faculty and GTAs about the problems and ways to encourage women’s classroom participation. One of the participants mentioned an AAUW videotape on this topic and indicated Peggy Emmett, at ORNL, as the Oak Ridge Chapter AAUW contact person to obtain a copy or borrow this videotape.

Several youth mentoring programs were mentioned which already exist and might be better publicized and encouraged including Suzanne Lenhart (Mathematics Professor) and her work with Vine Middle School; the work of Carolyn Hodges and Olga Welch with Project EXCEL; and a suggestion that Kids U might focus on promoting the attendance of young girls. Lynn
Champion was mentioned as a person with many community outreach contacts.

In the area of promotion/retention/opportunities, Jo suggested that a Network of Opportunity might be coordinated. This network would be formed of several networking alliances, with faculty to faculty mentoring, faculty to GTA mentoring, staff to staff mentoring, and student to student mentoring. Jo Lynch has offered to lead the coordination of the mentoring ideas.

A suggestion was made that the Commission for Women strongly recommend that more women be included on streamlining and futuring committees as well as search committees. It was also suggested that staff be included on search committees and other committees who do not report directly to other members of the same committee as this situation stifles the voice of that person or persons.

The piecemeal knowledge of resources and services available might be addressed by posting a resource guide on the CFW website which includes campus offices, telephone numbers and contact persons for the variety of resources and services available of which students, staff and faculty may be unaware. This resource guide could be similar to the links currently provided under Resources on the website, but would be specific listings for this campus.

It was suggested that Development staff should be encouraged to approach women who might contribute and that special projects or internships which are directed specifically at women might be brought to the attention of Development staff.

The most ambitious suggestion was to advocate the establishment of an Office for Women, similar to that at the University of Minnesota. This office might coordinate many of the suggestions mentioned in the discussion group and could help to bridge resources in Student Affairs and Academic Affairs which may be difficult for students to find. It was suggested that the list of Top 10 universities be researched to determine if they have such an office and what services the respective offices provide to their constituencies.

As chair of the committee which coordinated the Women in Higher Education Teleconference, I want to recognize the effort put forth by the other members of the committee and thank them for their assistance. The committee included Norma Cook, Nancy Goslee, Kim Gwinn, Nancy Howell, Jo Lynch, Susan Martin, Claudia Milstead, Jane Moser, and Linda Sammataro. I also want to thank Marva Rudolph and Jenny Richter, from Diversity Resources and Educational Services (DRES) for their support and for funding the teleconference registration fee. And, I want to express our appreciation to the Department of Women's Studies and to the Association of Women Faculty, who contributed $50.00 each to support the teleconference. That money was utilized to provide publicity through flyers, a 2' x 8' banner in the University Center, and refreshments at the wrap-up session on March 29. Publicity of the teleconference was also provided through an article which appeared on the front page of the Daily Beacon on March 27 and was written by Laura Chandler, through press releases written by Nancy Howell and Claudia Milstead, and through television and radio appearances by Kim Gwinn which were facilitated by Nancy Howell and Claudia Milstead. Sandra Walker and Jo Lynch placed a display in the case immediately outside the Hodges Library Auditorium and Nancy Goslee incorporated teleconference posters into the Department of
Women's Studies display in the University Center. The assistance of the University Center for Telecommunications & Video, the Hodges Library Audiovisual Department staff, and the staff of the International House is also gratefully acknowledged.

Two videotapes of the teleconference were made by CTV. One copy was given to Norma Cook for use in her class in recognition of her assistance as Academic Sponsor and the other copy will be placed in the Hodges Library.

In addition to my work with the teleconference I have been meeting with the CFW Futuring Committee.

I apologize for missing today’s meeting as I am participating in the Visual Resources Association Annual Conference in San Francisco from April 4-9, but I will attend the May CFW meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

Sandra C. Walker
CFW Vice-Chair