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Gwinn and Walker re: Future of Advisory Committees, undated

Commission for Women

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I have been following changes within the University from several perspectives as they affect or may affect women. One of the emerging patterns that I think should be of concern is women's underrepresentation in administrative appointments to their committees involved in the processes of change and planning. The Streamlining Committee, for example, was composed of 12 people, but only 1 was a woman. There is more representation of women on the 17-member Committee for the Future with at least 5 women and probably 6 (if this classification based on name only is correct), and 1 of the 4 staff, who also serve on subcommittees, is a woman. Another example is the recently appointed advisory committee to update UT's master plan which has 8 members, with the chair being the only woman.

I also am concerned about the potential effect of reorganization on the Chancellor's Administrative Committees. There were 15 listed for this year, including the Commission for Women, and Chancellor Snyder had helped increase the diversity of their membership by inviting self-nominations. Last year's deadline was March 31, and if there has been such an invitation in Context this year, I have missed it. Perhaps someone on the Commission can tell us what they know about the future of these advisory committees and the process for determining their membership.

**Kimberly Gwinn’s Response**

I have been in conversations with President Gilley, Mr. Robinson and Provost Peters. At present, the CFW is preceding as always. I meet with all three of the above mentioned administrators or their staff. The future of the commission is currently being discussed, but decisions will not be made until late spring-early summer. One option that has been suggested is a sort of super commission which addressed the problems of all underrepresented groups. Under this model, the CFW would be a working group supporting this group. No decisions have been made.

I will be glad to accumulate ideas for modeling the CFW in the new UT. I can then forward these as a group to Mr. Robinson and/or President Gilley. Now is the time to have an impact on the shape of the future CFW. I feel that there is an administrative commitment to equity and that a commission-like body will exist within the new system but the details of this are not decided.

Here are some questions designed to stimulate discussion on this topic. (Please note that they do not indicate a lack of support for the CFW on my part.)
1. Do we need a CFW? Have we outlived our usefulness?

2. Are we operating in a vacuum? Could resources be better spent addressing overall issues of equity and not focusing on women's issues?

3. If you were going to redesign the CFW, what would you change? What would you oppose changing?

4. What should be the goals of the CFW?

5. Why do we have difficulty finding people to serve and commit to the CFW's mission?

Again, these questions are designed to elicit responses and should not be taken as an indication of impending doom for the CFW.

Kimberly D. Gwinn

Subsequent Responses

>1. Do we need a CFW? Have we outlived our usefulness?

I think we do need the CFW nor has it outlive it's usefulness, especially when you regard **'s observation of the number of women and minorities in various roles within the new streamlining structure. There could be a number of reasons, one could be that in the reorganizing process they are trying to use people that are currently here at UT rather than cutting positions and then filling with new people.

>2. Are we operating in a vacuum? Could resources be better spent addressing overall issues of equity and not focusing on women's issues?

I think you can see that question two side. One you would have to agree on a common cause and you would have to determine by consensus what that cause would be. Would that be equity in the workplace, increased diversity throughout the university. What do you want to promote and what goals would you set to get there? Perhaps what they want to see is specific objectives such as-- we would like to see pay equity and how would that translate into today's state of affairs (literally and figurative speaking). How do we get more people of diversity, into the UT system? What percentages are you basing this on and would those people come to the UT system? The reason I make this latter statement is because a friend of mine who was working on a post doc in physics, she visited UT the year before I came and chose to go to University of Illinois C-U because the lack of diversity she saw on campus. So there ya go... the old adage of which comes first... the chicken or the egg... which comes first, a diverse campus or a call for diversity?

>3. If you were going to redesign the CFW, what would you change? What would you oppose changing?

This is a tough one, I defer to people who have been on the committee longer than myself. A lot would depend on if we remained as a singular committee or worked on a larger more inclusive scale with other groups.

>4. What should be the goals of the CFW?

Refer to answer three.
>5. Why do we have difficulty finding people to serve and commit to the
>CFW's mission?

I don't think we have problem finding people it's just everyone has limited
time to spend and I think it will continue to be more evident as the new
restructuring continues.

KIM, I wish that I had more time to dedicate to a more thoughtful
response to your message and questions. I will attempt a "hit-and-run"
kind of reply for now. I am afraid that a super commission would
swallow up, like the great fish, the concerns of the Women's
Commission. The devil is, indeed, in the details. It is, indeed, the
universe of little things that "gets us down." These finite matters of
concern will seem like very small fish to a super commission, I am
afraid. Racial issues on this campus, for instance, are so divisive,
difficult and, discouragingly obvious that women's issues may seem less
than urgent when put in competition with the racial issues at the super
commission level. Obviously, if that is the only way that we can
continue to exist -- albeit at a "subcommitted" level -- then so be it. I am
also seriously concerned about the symbolism that would be an inherent
part of any move to "subcommit" the Commission. To overuse the root
word -- symbolically, it would seem that the University and/or the
Women's Commission were viewing the Commission and the concerns
thereof to be outdated or unnecessary or of little concern to the
administration and the university community. The only messages which
would be sent would be quite negative for the W. Commission and its
mission. It is difficult for me to see how resources could be better spent
in another forum. The fact of the matter is that we cost the university and
taxpayer nothing. The only true expenditures are our time and energy
and the cost of the actual award plaques for the Commission's awards
program. I believe that the main thing that needs to change for the
Commission is the way in which it appoints members. We need more
publicity -- through Context, or whatever, maybe -- and we need to let
women know in a more direct manner (i.e. direct mailings through
campus mail) that we are a volunteer group and that we seek diverse
membership from all of the ranks of the university community, that this is
their opportunity to influence the university's policy and mission as it
regards women on this campus. We may need to expand the size of the
Commission in order to accommodate the greater portion of women who
express an interest. I tried for many years to be appointed to the
Commission. Norma Cook finally appointed me a mere four years ago.
I had already been a full-timer at the University for longer than 25 years.
I know of others who have had similar experiences. I know, now, of at
least one woman who has been nominated for appointment on the
Commission and who has not been appointed. I remember others. I
don't see why we shouldn't use anyone who is willing to volunteer and
give in there and work. Wouldn't it be nice to have at least one
"representative" on the Commission from every College, School, or
major Program on Campus? Including a "rep" from the major non-
academic departments on campus -- like Retirement or Finance or
Treasurer's Office or the Bookstore, etc. I have added some answers to
your text below. Thank you so much for your efforts for the
Commission. I'm sorry that I don't have any really good stuff on the top
of my head right now. I know that there are men on this campus who
would go out and celebrate upon learning that the Commission had been
lowered in status in any way. I will be very sad if that has to happen.
Thanks again.
Thanks, Kim, for letting us know this. I had no idea that things were quite this precarious for UT women. I am so appalled by the proposal—which I separate from your role as messenger—that I will wait a bit before replying to its core content.

I will offer some possible answers to the fifth question, however, since it calls for factual information. (Question 5: Why do we have difficulty finding people to serve and commit to the CFW's mission?) While the list will not be complete, here are some reasons that I know about.

1. The campus climate is one where some people fear retaliation for raising equity issues. It is not uncommon in groups wishing to raise questions to have someone state, "I'll say it. I have tenure." The uncomfortable laughter that follows is a recognition of the risk involved.

2. In the case of tenured faculty, the pool of women is so small that many are already overburdened with committee service.

3. Tenure-track faculty are discouraged from devoting time to service since it would take time away from the research which is essential for tenure.

4. University service is not a University priority in the reward system for faculty.

5. Budget cuts have resulted in increased workloads for everyone.

6. Women, still more than men, must juggle two full-time jobs—their profession and their homes.

Perhaps we should consider separately the question of serving and the question of commitment to the mission, and we might even ask a different question—What can the University do to make it possible for more people to serve on the Commission for Women?

My thanks also to Kim for sharing with the list the conversation (however preliminary it may be) about the future of the CFW and to others who responded. I find the news of even a preliminary discussion about doing away with the CFW distressing. To **'s list of reasons it is difficult to find women to serve on the committee, I would also add the fact that a high percentage of women who serve on the teaching staff at UTK, and who thus are listed as faculty, are in non-tenure stream, lecturer, or instructor positions. Norma's presentation at the AWF luncheon last spring explained that almost 44% of the total faculty positions held by women as of 1997 were non-tenure track. The number remained in the 40% range for all of the 1990's, while for men it was only 18% to 22%. Women only compose 20.2% of the tenured faculty, a small increase over 1988's 15.5%.

Even if it is hard to staff from time to time, the idea that the CFW has outlived its usefulness seems misguided. I'm leery of any possible trend to undercut this important group during a time of reorganization. Given the imbalance between women and men on the faculty and the trend toward more imbalanced administrative appointments to powerful committees, this does not seem like the time to make the CFW a subcommittee of a supergroup.

Other thoughts?
I concur with **'s response to point 5 of the earlier mailing about why it's so difficult to get members for CFW. Certainly, for
exempt and non-exempt staff, the fear of retaliation is strong. They do not have the protection of tenure. There is also the possibility that people are unaware of the CFW, or think it is some extreme feminist group, and so don't serve. I know it's hard to believe that there are people out there who, in spite of web sites and newsletters, don't know this group exists, but it's true.

Like ***, the possibility of doing away with the CFW and other advisory groups, is disturbing to me. It's sad, but history supports the fact that one must be always diligent to inequality and discrimination in all its forms. Groups such as the CFW and CFB are critical to this watchfulness. I'm going to have to ponder this.

I'll take this time to say thank you too all women and men who have served, or are now serving, on the Commission for Women. I was an active member of the CFW for ten, maybe more, years and was honored to be connected the group. Believe me, it has made a difference.

1. many of the same mechanisms that produce and sustain sexism also are foundations for other kinds of isms so there is an link between women's issues and other minority issues.

2. for a variety of reasons, this campus administration has been able to "see" ethnicity/race equity issues more readily than issues pertaining to equity for women. If CFW were folded in to a larger commission, I would be concerned that the administration might feel that if ethnic minority concerns had been addressed, that the issue was largely resolved without giving any specific thought to gender issues.

All,
I am very concerned about the context in which the discussion of the future of the CFW is occurring, as are others. In recent months the topics of affirmative action and diversity have been notable for their absence. The merger of the system administration with the campus could lead to a lessened emphasis on affirmative action. The University of Tennessee, Knoxville demonstrated a stronger commitment to affirmative action than what was the system did (e.g., see the affirmative action plans). As new titles are assigned to old/revamped positions and new positions are created, questions appropriately may be raised about when (and which) affirmative action policies need to be followed.

>1. Do we need a CFW? Have we outlived our usefulness?
At least two major issues are raised by the first question. Does the Knoxville campus need to have groups which focus on its issues and concerns or should we have groups which address broad issues which concern Memphis, Tullahoma, and Knoxville? My answer to that question is we need groups which address our specific issues and concerns. The second major issue revolves around whether you perceive that all underrepresented or disadvantaged categories of persons should be grouped together. If you collapse all non-dominant groups into one category of "others," you run a high risk of not representing anyone group's interests or concerns well.

I would answer the second question about usefulness by pointing out that the CFW at its best has been a proactive organization soliciting information from women on campus and drawing the administration's attention to important issues. I do not see how a proactive organization could outlive its usefulness. (I rejected as absurd the idea that the question of usefulness is based on women's attainment of equality.)
2. Are we operating in a vacuum? Could resources be better spent addressing overall issues of equity and not focusing on women's issues?

At present we are operating in a system undergoing considerable change. It feels more like a tornado than a vacuum!

The CFW does not consume much in the way of resources! When you hold diluted programs which suggest that we should all be treated fairly, people do not attend. (If they do attend the issues are so diluted, they're not sure what they are).

3. If you were going to redesign the CFW, what would you change? What would you oppose changing?

As others have pointed out, there are a limited number of women on campus and many of those women are not in a position to speak freely. We need to continually work to insure that there are always people on the CFW who are in a position to raise issues and to limit the number of people who may inadvertently intimidate those who do not have secure positions.

I would oppose lumping us together with Memphis and Tullahoma.

4. What should be the goals of the CFW?

To inform the President about the position of women on this campus.

To bring to the President's attention statistics/particular situations which indicate gender inequity exists or has the potential to occur.

To propose to the President that the campus develop/conduct programs which will improve the situation of women on campus.

To be a sounding board for the President and the chief operating officer.

5. Why do we have difficulty finding people to serve and commit to the CFW's mission?

Others have already pointed out how service is devalued, etc.

Again, these questions are designed to elicit responses and should not be taken as an indication of impending doom for the CFW.

I believe groups need to speak out about the need for campus groups and organizations--be it the Faculty Senate of the Knoxville campus or the CFW. We've already had a dramatic centralization of affirmative action.'**s pointing out that no nominations were solicited has alerted us to the need to speak out.

Shortly before I saw Kim's message, I was reading through some materials from the upcoming national conference on women in higher education. Among them is a list of recommendations which includes the following: "Establish or reaffirm the commitment to a commission on women." The latter is the response that I support in our current circumstances--combined with a statement strongly opposing a super commission.

The only basic question I see for adapting the CFW to the new UT is
determining to which University officer the Commission is advisory. One possible answer is the president.

The regrouping of campuses need not affect the current CFW structure, and I personally would object to any combinations. Many issues are necessarily addressed in site-specific ways. Perhaps what the reorganization calls for instead is the opportunity for women at each location to consider whether they need their own Commission.

Others have answered Kim's list of questions so well that I will just add my support for them. I also like ***'s idea about showing support through a barrage of mail. We also could consider collecting signatures on petitions, asking other campus groups to pass resolutions of support, and publishing an open letter to the administration in the Beacon. I would be happy to help with any of the outside work needed to support the Commission.

Thanks, Kim, for providing this forum for discussion of the future of the CFW. I apologize to everyone for imposing on your time again, but I think it is really important to discuss the timing of the response.

My view is that when there is a consensus on an important issue that an immediate response is stronger than a delayed one. Moreover, if the administration drags out the decision-making process while still accepting our recommendations, there will be setbacks in the functioning of the Commission.

Unlike most (or all) of the administrative committees, the CFW has a set of Bylaws. (See posting on the CFW web site.) It states the responsibilities of the CFW (which I still find to be appropriate) and the provisions for electing the Chair and Vice Chair and also membership provisions. As I recall from the procedures worked out for the two elected positions, the process should be beginning about now.

In addition, the schedule for appointments to administrative committees, as I recall, used to be in August. This was changed to the spring term (maybe at the suggestion of the Faculty Senate President) because it was too late for getting out appointment letters and getting committees organized. Committee appointments also require coordination with other groups. Student appointments, for example, come through SGA. I also hope that we will advocate continuation of the self-nomination process for this and the other administrative committees, and this cannot occur for faculty and most students during the summer.

One final comment—which I have been trying to resist making—and then I will be quiet: I cannot help noticing that no woman is among the three decision-makers to whom the CFW recommendation will go. That by itself should remind us why we continue to need a Commission for Women.

Question: Should UT abolish its Commission for Women?
Answer: Do women hold 50 percent of the leadership positions on campus?

Women do not have equity at UT. That fact alone is evidence that we need a Commission for Women.

Should we merge into an umbrella super-commission for all marginalized groups? Only if the university wants to ensure that marginalized groups spend their precious time and energy trying to prioritize their issues
instead of working for equity and diversity.

Others have been so eloquent I can add nothing more.

I agree very strongly that this would not serve the interests of any of the underrepresented groups as effectively as is done now. There is no argument based on efficiency in favor of combination since these groups cost very little. The level of participation fluctuates according to a variety of factors including campus climate.

I would like to second Suzanne Kurth's comments about the mission of the CFW. It is:

1. To inform the President about the position of women on this campus.
2. To bring to the President's attention statistics/particular situations which indicate gender inequity exists or has the potential to occur.
3. To propose to the President that the campus develop/conduct programs which will improve the situation of women on campus.
4. To be a sounding board for the President and the chief operating officer.

These are necessary functions particularly given the lack of women in higher-ranking positions and the large number women working at lower-paid jobs of all kinds.

I also think it is very, very important for there to be some campus entity that brings together women faculty, staff and students. One valuable function of the commission has been for tenured faculty members to be able to voice concerns of all the constituent groups. In a climate of change, it is often difficult or impossible for staff and students to voice concerns without some fear of consequences. In addition, we all need to be paying more attention to the lack of decent pay and opportunities available to many staff members.

I concur with ***'s and others' responses about maintaining the integrity of the Commission; as we all know, combining interest groups often leads to the disappearance of gender as a lens of concern.