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SURVEYING THE FIELD : GENDER EQUITY IN HIGHER
EDUCATION :SELECTED PAPERS FROM SUCCEEDING AS
WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION CONFERENCE AT SUNY
CORTLAND

2009

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Common wisdom dictates that if the struggle for gender equality could be successful anywhere, it would be in the halls of academia. Over the past three decades, women students have become the majority in both undergraduate and graduate programs across America and many other countries in the world. There are far more equitable proportions of women to men at the Assistant, Associate and Full professor level than in the past. The disparity in pay has shrunk, as has the disparity in opportunities at the administrative level. Women students have more women mentors, and women students and instructors have more available programs and structures of support. If better is good enough, then perhaps women should just relax and enjoy their hard-won status. When it comes to gender equality however, good can never be good enough. This is especially true in light of a few salient dynamics that distort the supposed gains women have already made and seriously undermine the possibility of women continuing to keep the equality they have won.

Data that compares the numbers of women at each professorial level fails to show that in many important ways, at a wide variety of institutions equality of job title does not result in equality of job experience. Women have caught up with men in raw numbers in the ranks of the professoriate, but they still lag in pay and more importantly still lag far behind in the most highly esteemed and best remunerated disciplines. According to a 2008 study financed

by the National Science Foundation at UC Irvine, women still faced what they called “deeply entrenched inequalities.” Among the most pernicious were that high status positions on committees or faculty governance would become less high status once women held them. In addition, women were routinely assigned service-oriented work as opposed to policy-making or other types of professional engagement. Many women reported that they would be assigned time-intensive service work, then be denied tenure or promotion based on the lack of research and publication they could otherwise be doing.

Perceptions of inequity in appropriate appointments and procedures were revisited in a 2010 article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* which concluded that women were much more likely to be hired and promoted in relation to men, if they worked at institutions with strong unions. According to the article, women make up a higher percentage of faculty overall and a higher percentage of Associate and Full Professor faculty at institutions with unions. The clear implication of such studies is that if the institutions themselves embodied the values of gender equality, one wouldn't need unions to impose them.

These issues paint in the broad strokes the picture that despite hard-won gains, women are still facing inequity in the academic workplace. The contributions in this special edition of *Wagadu* go beyond the broad strokes and provide specific data as it relates to a range of vital issues. Each article illuminates its own particular concern, and as a whole the range of findings provided demonstrates that not only is the struggle for women's equality in the academic workplace vital to women, that the struggle is essential to the tradition of liberal education as a whole. Each author is motivated by their own guiding research question. What are the next steps to understanding gender equality in Higher Education? What directions for study and analysis should we pursue? What foci provide a clear vision for future progress? How should success for women be defined, pursued, examined and quantified? What lessons can be learned from past experiences?

What active roles can women and men take to impart the greatest momentum toward gender equity on college campuses around the world?

In October 2009 the State University of New York at Cortland hosted an academic conference to discuss current issues and future possibilities for women in academia. The *Succeeding as Women in Higher Education Conference* provided a venue for formalizing and making visible the discussions taking place in the cloisters of the academy. Participants from around the globe shared insights through a variety of paper presentations, speeches, workshops, and discussions. Conversations were guided by the desire to answer a fundamental question: Is higher education an equitable professional environment for women in the twenty-first century? This special volume of *Wagadu* highlights critical manuscripts and transcripts to represent the dynamic dialogue of the conference.

The first three articles of this volume offer highlights on an overview of the guiding question about how to understand success for women in higher education through closer analysis of the related issues and observed effects. The vestibule piece is the manuscript from the Keynote Address delivered by Sara Fenstermaker at conference. Fenstermaker provides a review of some of the traditional, overarching metaphors for the challenges women face and argues the relevancy of such metaphors past and present in: *Ivory towers, playing fields and glass ceilings: Beyond metaphor to best practices*. In the second article, the discourse on gender impact in higher education continues. Annemarie Vaccaro retraces the findings of a mixed-method study of women's groups at one mid-sized university. A magnifying glass is held up to reveal the ways in which women's groups are critical to developing women's leadership and success on campus, while sexism is challenged as a historical roadblock on the path to success in the university. Margaret Madden reviews social, psychological and organizational development literature on gender stereotypes and leadership style and explores its relevance for leadership in higher education. Madden's analysis provides a

provocative look at dichotomous stereotypes that affect perceptions in academia. Madden effectively weaves quintessential developmental literature on leadership and leadership studies with an emphasis on the effects of gender.

The second section explores the history of women's struggle for equality in higher education and illuminates the dedication of feminists and allies. In her article, *The politics of data: what the EEOC job category compliance chart conceals and so perpetuates as "normative" and how second and third wave feminist strategies might respond and offer best practices for change*, author Jody Lisberger studies the EEOC Compliance Chart as a perpetuator of gender inequalities. Lisberger considers feminist national and global organizing strategies to contemplate best practices for change. Lisberger provides an insightful review of the social and political implications of Second and Third Wave Feminism in current employment practices. Our next paper examines the practices and policies in a university system regarding the status of parental leave. Melanie Sue Hill, Alison Nash, and Maryalice Citera question these practices in *Parenthood in academia: What happens when there is no policy?* The authors study the perceptions and experiences of faculty in a university system that does not have formal work/family leave policies. Despite the assumption by many that academics would have a progressive handle on family leave, the scholars found results to challenge that presumption. Their conclusions provide insight into the confusion that can result when options for parental leave are not clearly conveyed in institutions of higher learning. The next article offers an analysis of five narratives detailing a variety of challenges women in face in higher education. Authors Barbara LeSavoy and Jamie Bergeron argue from a feminist standpoint the realities of women's academic life and counter distorted realities. Readers will find the much to identify with in these thought-provoking histories.

The final section of this special issue highlights the results of two very different research studies conducted to look at issues of gender inequality in higher education. Liliana Trevizan takes a

highly personal look at a group that was charged with reviewing best practices at a state university regarding the status of women. Her article offers some perspective by compiling the results of the Task Force as well as some discussion of the data collection and reflection ten years *expo facto*. Trevizan provides a context to explore the development of one particular women's group on campus, illuminating issues through close attention to the particular. Frederick G. Floss considers gender differences as measured by the wage premium for faculty and full-time workers at the university in *Declining faculty wage premiums: Analysis over time by gender in the public and private sectors*. Using the U.S. Census and the National Center for Education Statistics data on wages, Floss weighs the implications of almost four decades of research on wage inequality and provides a commentary on trends and directions.

With a look back to review and acknowledge, demonstrated efforts to make observations relevant to the present state of affairs, and suggestions for future growth, these articles combine to provide a unique and significant view of the challenges and promise of women succeeding in higher education. While cautious and critical of the status quo, the authors do recognize reasons for hope due to the positive strides being made. The ideal of gender equality on a university campus should continue to be the focus of faculty, staff, administration and researchers. The scholarship must continue. Ironically, then, perhaps common wisdom will prevail.

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