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## Female Tenure Positions Unequal

*Females in Disproportionately Few Tenured Positions; Little Progress Made Since 2000 Report*

by Kira Goldenberg

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Columbia's female faculty members, despite dominating their academic disciplines, are still not on top.

Women remain underrepresented at the top echelons of the University faculty—and many who do ascend the ranks say that they continue to endure gender discrimination.

This lack of women in the upper tiers of university faculties, a nationally pervasive issue, was catapulted into the limelight as a result of Harvard President Lawrence Summers' recent intimation that women are underrepresented in math and science because of a biological inferiority.

Last week, the presidents of Stanford University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Princeton University (two of whom are women) wrote in an essay in *The Boston Globe*, "The question we must ask as a society is not 'can women excel in math, science, and engineering?'—Marie Curie exploded that myth a century ago—but 'how can we encourage more women with exceptional abilities to pursue careers in these fields?'"

This question remains a salient one at Columbia.

Columbia was the last Ivy League University to go completely co-ed, admitting women into the College starting in 1983. But today, according to Vice Provost for Diversity Initiatives Jean Howard, Columbia is statistically comparable to its fellow Ivies—gender ratios start out equal at the undergraduate level and then become disproportionately male when moving up the academic ranks.

The 2001 Pipeline Report, completed by the University's Commission on the Status of Women (in which Howard was involved) found that, though acquisition and retention of female faculty improved at Columbia from 1990 to 2000, numbers remained overwhelmingly unequal.

But, Howard said, "Given our values and our commitment to diversity of all sorts, we should be better."

In 2000, female members of the Arts and Sciences faculty represented only 33.3 percent of tenure-eligible positions and 19.9 percent of tenured faculty. Numbers were especially low in the natural sciences, consistent with national statistics. Just 23.4 percent of the tenure-eligible science faculty were women. Only 13 of 116 tenured natural science faculty, or 11.2 percent, were women. The Pipeline Report recommended further study to determine whether these discrepancies were part of a larger national issue or due to specific weaknesses at

Columbia.

Little changed after three years. University data from 2003 reveals that tenure-eligible Arts and Sciences faculty dropped a bit to 32.8 percent women, though tenured faculty rose to 22.2 percent. This pattern was more marked in the natural sciences, where tenure-eligible women fell to 15.7 percent and those with tenure rose to 13.5 percent, though the minute number of individuals involved makes even minor changes appear statistically significant.

Of course, there are people behind the numbers.

And some of these people, Howard emphasized, do “rise through the ranks” at Columbia. In January, art history professor Rosalind Krauss became the second woman to hold a University Professorship, the highest faculty rank at the University. Her appointment ended the two-year period in which no women held the title. The first female University Professor, Caroline Bynum, departed for the Institute for Advanced Studies in 2002.

“We entirely applaud this move,” Howard said of Krauss’ appointment. “We hope there will be more. One female University Professor is not enough.”

“I don’t want to suggest that this is all due to some conspiracy against women,” Howard added. “But nonetheless, it is still the case that now, in the year 2005, we do have more women at Columbia, of great distinction, and we just need to be sure that we honor them appropriately.”

A conference held at Columbia in early February called “Writing a Feminist’s Life: Academics and their Memoirs” featured current female academics and honored the late Carolyn Heilbrun. Heilbrun was the first woman to earn tenure in the Columbia English Department in 1972 and helped found the Institute for Research on Women and Gender. She abruptly left Columbia in 1992 after three decades on the faculty, citing gender discrimination.

“When I spoke up for women’s issues, I was made to feel unwelcome in my own department,” Heilbrun told *The New York Times Magazine* in a large 1992 feature, “Rage in a Tenured Position.”

For Graciela Chichilnisky, UNESCO Professor of Mathematics and Economics, Heilbrun’s remarks still ring true. Chichilnisky, tenured since 1979, has been involved with litigation against Columbia since 1991 due to alleged gender discrimination.

“It’s a very hostile environment, in which women faculty are humiliated, degraded, and intimidated,” Chichilnisky said of the University. She explained that victims are afraid to speak out for fear of embarrassment and retaliation.

“The issue of gender inequality is extremely well known by women faculty,” Chichilnisky asserted. “But, at the same time, they’re embarrassed to talk about it.”

Productive Outreach for Women, a student feminist group, has spent the past semester convincing women faculty to start talking. Their Professor Interview Project entails seeking out and interviewing female professors about discrimination they experienced at Columbia. They have interviewed nine women so far.

“Some of the stuff we heard was very extreme,” said POW co-president Vanessa Carr, CC ’05.

“We were sort of rushed into their office, the doors were closed, the blinds were drawn, and in a hushed voice, the first question we heard was about anonymity,” Carr said. “People can’t speak out because they fear that they’ll suffer professionally.”

Those involved in efforts to increase female faculty representation agree on the problem, but the underlying causes are subject to debate. Chichilnisky cites an entrenched cycle in which women stay home with children because men make more money; at the same time, employers see men as more valuable employees because the women are more apt to stay home. Chichilnisky said that female academics are afraid to become mothers.

Howard attributes the dearth of women rising through the academic ranks to a complex variety of factors including applicant availability, unconscious biases, and the perceived incompatibility of juggling an academic career and having children.

“There are probably 10 factors at work. We have to try to break them down, identify the barriers where they exist, and then do something about the ones we can change,” Howard said.

The Presidential Diversity Initiatives Committee and Commission on the Status of Women will be working with the administration further to forge gender equality on the faculty at Columbia.

“I’m going to ask them for a lot of things in the next two months,” Howard said of the administration, “and I’m expecting full support, right down the line.”

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