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**Professor's Second Lawsuit Against Columbia University Heading Towards Trial**
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By Shilpa Banerji  
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**NEW YORK**

The 15-year sexual discrimination dispute between Columbia University and a professor who claims the institution underpays women is expected to head toward trial later this year. Likewise, the school's lawsuit against the professor for abdicating her duties is proceeding.

"My demand is simple ... to be treated as other male professors and get equal pay," says Dr. Graciela Chichilnisky. She has an endowed position as the UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) Professor of Mathematics and Economics. Tenured at Columbia since 1980, Chichilnisky, says her case is proof that the glass ceiling exists for women.

"Columbia is hoping to extend the litigation process but I won't give up ... I will be giving my deposition this week," says the Argentine-born professor. "I feel a responsibility to my female colleagues, students and daughter in a male-dominated field."

Chichilnisky says her troubles began in 1991 after she filed a lawsuit against the school, alleging salary discrepancies. The university settled in 1995 by awarding the professor \$500,000 in damages and more than doubling her salary, from \$57,000 to \$107,000. Chichilnisky was also promised an annual \$50,000 grant for support and development of a research center.

However, the university went back on the agreement and had frozen the annual grant by 1998. "The straw on the camel's back was when a crew of movers came and dismantled and damaged years of research at the center," she says.

She filed a second lawsuit in March 2000 in state court. Columbia countersued in 2003.

In court documents, the school accuses the professor of not fulfilling her duties and violating university policy by serving as

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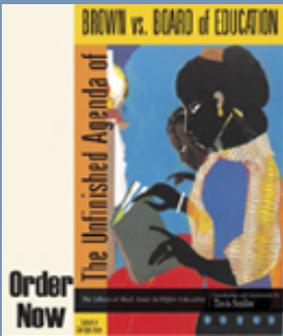
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chairman and chief executive of another company, Cross Border Exchange. The brief also alleges that she continued to serve secretly as the company's CEO after telling university officials, who had expressed concern about her outside business ventures, that she had resigned from the job in October 2001.

"It now appears that [her] leaves were taken on false pretenses, and the real reason she took time off was to devote her full-time efforts to her position at Cross Border," the university's counterclaim says, adding that the professor's annual salary as CEO was \$290,000.

According to a statement released by Columbia, the court recently ruled that the countersuit can proceed.

"Columbia is fully prepared to defend its position in court and we remain confident that the university will prevail in the case in all respects," the statement says.

The department of economics has 17 tenured male professors and three female professors. Although students and some male and female colleagues are being supportive — Nobel Laureate Kenneth Arrow has agreed to testify on her behalf — many are afraid to speak out because of the university's aggressive stance, Chichilnisky says.

But she vows to continue fighting.

"This problem is not just at Columbia, not just at every Ivy League, but all through America. The more successful I become, the worse I am treated. I would be considered proof that women are not genetically inferior in math and economics," she says.

The American Association of University Women has been supporting her case since 2002.

"Her case illustrates the continuing struggle women in academia still face even after breaking the glass ceiling," says Lisa Maatz, interim director of AAUW's Legal Advocacy Fund. "She faces a hostile environment and, unfortunately, that is all too common in the cases we support."

AAUW has contributed nearly \$47,000 to the case, currently one of 18 sexual discrimination cases the organization is backing. Maatz adds that although the financial support is critical, knowing that an organization is behind the professor is an important asset.

"We support her on the strength of her claims and hope that the case will not only assist the individual but also assist others," she says.

According to a 2005-2006 report by the American Association of University Professors, the average salary of a full professor at a private research university such as Yale University is \$151,200. Columbia, which was ranked ninth last year, did not submit figures this year.

Columbia says it continues to actively recruit and promote female faculty members in engineering and science, including economics.

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“We are the only Ivy League to have a \$4.1 million ADVANCE grant to advance the careers in women in science and engineering. These and other recruitment efforts are now bearing fruit in the hiring of under-represented minorities and women faculty in many departments,” says the statement.

— *Shilpa Banerji*

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