

UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON WOMEN FACULTY AND STUDENTS
UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME
MEETING OF JANUARY 29, 2010
9:00-10:30 a.m. Room 306, LaFortune

Members present: Susan Ohmer, Sr. Susan Dunn, Angie Chamblee, Tracy Bergstrom, Kathie Newman, Allison Regier, Amber Handy, Diane Wagner, Ken Milani.

Members absent and excused: Maura Ryan, Amy Barrett, Laura Carlson, Don Pope-Davis, Susan Sheridan, Nella McOsker, Robyn Grant.

Permanent Invited Guests present: Catherine Pieronek.

Other invited guests: Barbara Turpin—Associate Dean, Office of Graduate Studies

1. Introductions and Welcome: Prof. Susan Ohmer, chair, greeted members and invited all to introduce themselves to the new member, Prof. Diane Wagner, Assistant Professor of Aerospace and Engineering. Ohmer then introduced Dr. Barbara Turpin, Associate Dean of the Graduate School, who had been invited to provide some data on gender issues in the Graduate School.

2. Approval of minutes of December meeting: Amber Handy made a motion to approve the December minutes; Sue Dunn seconded, and the minutes were unanimously approved.

3. Presentation: Dr. Barbara Turpin, Associate Dean, Office of Graduate Studies

Prof. Ohmer introduced the presentation by reviewing the committee's previous discussions of the concerns of graduate students. Dean Turpin was invited to provide some general data on ND's graduate students as context to these concerns; Prof. Ohmer has shared with Dean Turpin the minutes from previous discussions.

Dean Turpin thanked members for the opportunity to share in the ongoing discussions about graduate student concerns. She circulated handouts with statistical information on the current cohort of ND graduate students; these include enrollment figures, graduate school policies on family-related issues, the function of the Graduate School, and funding data.

1. Enrollment: In Spring, 2010, 40% of enrolled graduate students are female; of these, 51% are masters' candidates and 36% are doctoral candidates.

2. Graduate School function: The Graduate School functions as an umbrella organization that oversees all 31 campus graduate programs. In this capacity, it sets minimum standards for academic and financial eligibility. Departments are permitted to set more strict standards, but they may not set lower standards for either academic or financial standing. The minimum academic guideline set by the

Graduate School is a 3.0 average to maintain good standing. If a department sets a higher standard, that standard is determinate.

In addition, the Graduate School sets a maximum number of eight semesters for the completion of oral exams; after this time period, the student's funding may be in jeopardy. Colleges can set their own standards, but again, they may not be lower than those set by the Graduate School. The Graduate School has set five years for masters' candidates and eight years for doctoral candidates as the time period within which the degree must be completed. These deadlines can be extended by petition for extenuating circumstances; Dean Turpin noted that parenting issues and childbirth reasons are considered acceptable extenuating circumstances.

3. Funding: The Graduate School provides tuition scholarships to all masters' candidates; some are also given stipend support from departments. All doctoral candidates receive full tuition scholarship and are completely funded by the Graduate School, faculty grants, or outside funding.

The graduate students also have access to health insurance. The Graduate School subsidizes 70% of the premium for most students and 100% of the premiums for premier scholarship students. While the Graduate School would like this figure to be 90% for all students, Dean Turpin noted that in the not-too-distant past, the subsidy was 30%, so this indicates strong improvement. Once enrolled in the University-subsidized health insurance plan, a graduate student is covered by that plan for the following twelve months regardless of student status—the student may graduate or take a leave of absence and remain covered.

4. University family policies: Dean Turpin said the medical separation policy is meant to cover anyone with a medical emergency and is not limited to maternal leave. The policy covers all students who are registered and enrolled. It was crafted in 2005 by a sub-committee of the Graduate Council in cooperation with the General Counsel's office. It provides a six-week paid leave for the medical emergency with no interruption in one's paycheck or health insurance benefits. The student continues as registered and enrolled, which affords access to all university facilities, such as library and labs. These guidelines are of particular benefit to international students whose visas require that they be continually registered and enrolled on a full-time basis. An additional benefit for all graduate students is that loan repayment is not triggered. However, time used on this policy does count toward the 5 or 8-year limit to degree completion.

The policy is posted on the Graduate School website and all directors of graduate studies are informed about it; however, graduate students themselves may be uninformed about its terms. To apply, students simply need to provide a note from a presiding doctor confirming the emergency; in the case of pregnancy, the note need only confirm the pregnancy and state the due date. Leave begins with birth.

Fourteen students have taken advantage of this policy since 2006: 6 from the Sciences, 6 from Humanities and Social Sciences, and 2 from Engineering.

Dean Turpin said the policy ‘doesn’t begin to address’ the needs of students with a new baby. However, it was ‘the best’ that could be agreed upon in 2005. She says there are plans for an improved policy in the future. Prof. Ohmer asked if the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) covers these medical situations. Dean Turpin said that FMLA covers employees only, but this policy is consistent with FMLA. Members discussed the coverage for post-docs. Dean Turpin said they are treated as employees and so are covered by FMLA and Prof. Ohmer noted that coverage includes health insurance but not retirement benefits. Ms. Handy asked if any men have applied for a medical emergency leave. Dean Turpin said no but she noted that this possibility is under discussion in the Graduate School. Members discussed the reinforcement of the notion of women as caregivers if the policy applies only to women. Prof. Cathy Pieronek, Engineering, cautioned that data from the Government Accounting Office, in a study of the impact of Title IX in the Sciences and Engineering, indicates that when female faculty members take leave for childbirth, they spend the time caring for children; when male faculty members take leave for childbirth, they tend to work on their studies. Thus, the inequity is further exacerbated.

Members then discussed the need for separate policies, one explicitly for maternity leave and another for medical emergency leaves; this change would perhaps enable male students to make use of the policies. Of the 14 cases, only one has been a non-maternity use.

Members discussed the policy impact on students who might require additional leave time, for bed rest prior to birth or a longer-than-normal recuperative period. It is possible to take a leave, but financial circumstances often preclude this option for most graduate students. Students have to be receiving a paycheck in order to purchase health insurance, but they are not paid during leave periods. If the student is on leave during the enrollment period, in the fall of each year, s/he cannot receive the subsidy for enrollment; s/he can, of course, purchase insurance at a higher rate, which is often prohibitively expensive for students. Again, Dean Turpin remarked that a student enrolled in the health insurance plan is covered for 12 consecutive months from enrollment, regardless of status.

Members discussed other options for students who required a leave. Some universities provide an option to enroll on a reduced load basis, which ND could consider. This provides access to campus facilities. However, if the student is not being paid, the option to enroll in the health insurance plan during the fall enrollment period is not available. The arbitrarily negative effect of taking leave during the fall insurance enrollment period was noted. In addition, Dean Turpin reminded members that the time-to-degree completion is impacted by time used for leaves. Dean Turpin said that some peer institutions have a different policy on time-to-degree that ND could consider.

Dean Turpin provided a brief report of future plans. She recently attended a meeting of the Council of Graduate Schools where Prof. Mary Ann Mason from Berkeley presented the results of her latest research demonstrating the “leaky pipeline” of women in the sciences and engineering due to family-unfriendly policies. At that meeting, the dean of the Graduate school at Cornell reviewed what her institution has done to alleviate some of these problems. Dean Turpin shared her experiences with Dean Sterling, who agreed that the Graduate School needs to reexamine the policies. He asked Dean Turpin and USWFS member Prof. Kathie Newman to put together a report on the current situation with

recommendations for more family-friendly policies to be presented to the Graduate Council at its April meeting. Dean Turpin is forming a committee to assist in producing the recommendations to be presented in the report, based on the research already gathered, which includes the survey information reported on by Prof. Jessica Collett at the last meeting and the research of Professor Mary Ann Mason. Ms. Handy volunteered to serve on the committee, and to solicit several other graduate students.

Prof. Ohmer indicated that the UCWFS would like to support this work. She asked about the mechanisms for hearing from a range of graduate students, to insure that their varied needs are identified. Ms. Handy noted that the effort going forward would be beneficial for female graduate students. She also noted that other graduate student cohorts have different needs, including cultural issues and perceived bias issues, as were identified in part in Prof. Collett's survey. Members agreed that 'the time is right' on these various issues, as indicated by discussion of them by a number of on-campus groups. Prof. Ohmer supported a collaborative effort to demonstrate a unified front.

Prof. Newman related her personal experiences in the Physics Department over 15 years that suggest some changes in attitudes, but not enough. Based on a recent consultation done in the department, she said there was a generally shared belief that family friendly policies are not yet sufficient for graduate student needs. In addition, she noted the ongoing presence of gender-biased attitudes among some faculty, staff and graduate students. Working to change these kinds of attitudes takes a different kind of approach and energy, and members agreed that this kind of work needs to be ongoing on the part of the campus community. Prof. Newman also discussed the need for graduate student support groups to give the students more resources to assist in their efforts to balance work and family or private life needs. She described one such group she was able to get started in Science and Engineering several years ago; it was successful but for a short time. She asked whether the Graduate Student Union might be willing to take on this kind of program; she said she would volunteer to assist in such a project. Ms. Handy noted that graduate students with families are a difficult constituency for the GSU to reach; they have acknowledged a failure in this area and are currently working to improve communications here. Members also talked briefly about the needs of male graduate students, who have few faculty role models demonstrating the ways to balance family and professional work. Creating separate support groups for both male and female graduate students was suggested.

Prof. Pieronek offered to forward to members information being collected and disseminated by NASA on 'promising programs' in the Sciences and Engineering, programs that describe recruitment and retention strategies, which have been successful. This information might be useful in the context of today's discussion.

Prof. Ohmer concluded the discussion by noting that the committee will invite Prof. Collett and Dean Turpin to report back on the recommendations they have crafted, so that the committee can consider them for endorsement them. She noted the importance of identifying and accessing graduate student voices, to insure that this constituency gets properly heard.

4. Updates: Mapother Lunches

Prof. Ohmer reported on the development of a list of candidates to be invited to participate in the Mapother Lunches, as was discussed at the December, 2009 meeting. Several invitations have been extended and the next lunches are being arranged. Prof. Ohmer thanked members for their submissions of excellent candidates.

Lactation Rooms

Prof. Ohmer has been in contact with Chris Sterling, in Benefits, who reports that the four lactation rooms being developed on campus are scheduled to be fully functioning by mid-February. Members discussed the need for good signage and a widely disseminated announcement of the facilities; awareness is low on campus, which would lead to low usage of the facilities. Members discussed the need for building managers and other staff to be informed of the rooms so as to be able to answer questions and provide directions to users. The four locations are: the fifth floor of Hesburgh Library, Grace Hall, and two in DeBartolo Hall.

Change in Language of University Award Nominations

Prof. Ohmer briefly reminded members of a discussion that mentoring by faculty be included among the criteria valued in the language of the nomination directions for University Awards. She was happy to report that this change has been effected in the nominating documents. While no new award is being given for mentoring, the language of the request for nominations for the Faculty Award specifically adds mentoring. In addition, the materials also explicitly stress diversity as a goal of the awards process. She particularly thanked Brandon Roach for acting on that suggestion of the committee.

Moreau Postdoctoral Fellowship program

The Moreau Postdoctoral fellowship program received some 300+ applications, which include many women and many fascinating projects connected with gender issues. The group of applicants is exceptionally strong, including candidates from every Ivy League institution, the Sorbonne, Oxford and Cambridge. The process currently is to sort the applications into folders by department and programs so that these units can rank the candidates. This is to insure that each unit has a voice in the selection of these fellows who, it is hoped, will develop into future hires. The departments are pressing for the folders, an excellent sign of the strength of this new program.

Spring Dual Career Services town hall

The idea of a dual career town hall was discussed in committee last year. Two upcoming meetings are planned: Dorothy Mincy will speak on February 18, and Linda Kroll, director of ECDC, will speak in later March. This second meeting is scheduled to occur before the deadline for ECDC applications, to provide an opportunity for questions and answers.

Prof. Ohmer asked Ms. Handy to report on the first meeting of the ECDC committee that has been formed by John Affleck-Graves. Ms. Handy said that Linda Kroll, Director of the Office of Budget and Planning, chaired the meeting and spoke briefly about the programs at each facility and provided members with a tour of each. Ms. Handy was impressed at the service graduate students receive. Only

2% of the waiting list is graduate students, and the schedules permit flexible use by graduate students, which is in keeping with their less rigid work and study schedules. The sliding scale for the Notre Dame facility has recently been redone, for the first time since 1994, which is very welcome. Care was taken to insure that the full-tuition clients are not subsidizing others; the University provides the subsidies. Ms. Handy reported the committee is open to suggestions for topics of concern that need to be addressed. A university website on childcare is planned; there are some liability concerns to be addressed first. The committee next meets at the end of February. Prof. Ohmer expressed satisfaction at the high level of attention being given to ECDC and campus childcare needs and issues.

5. New Business

a. Forum on The Observer cartoon

Prof. Ohmer asked Sue Dunn to report on the January 28, 2010 campus forum, held in response to the controversial anti-gay cartoon published in The Observer on January 13, 2010. The Gender Relations committee and the co-chairs of Student Government organized the forum. Five panelists were invited: Sue Dunn, in her capacity as administrative co-chair of CORE; Maureen Lafferty from the Notre Dame Counseling Center; Laurel Javors, president of the St. Mary's Gay/Straight Alliance; Dan Myers, professor of sociology and associate dean of the College of Arts and Letters; and Patrick Bears, a member of the Core Council. The forum agenda invited panelists to give a personal reaction to the cartoon and then make some remarks on ways the campus can move forward from this unfortunate event. The bulk of the time was delegated to a question and answer period with the audience. Sr. Dunn said the attendance was good.

Sr. Dunn said that the exchange between panelists and students in the audience was lively, with a focus on whether or not ND has a homophobic atmosphere. Students expressed much concern about the use of hateful language, and some students talked of challenging their peers when inappropriate language is used. It was generally agreed that the University's response to The Observer was handled as well as possible. Sr. Dunn said she has received a letter of apology from one of the cartoonists, and she intends to invite this person to participate in a positive way during Hate Week events. There exists a real possibility that some good for the campus will come from this unfortunate experience. Sr. Dunn said that CORE is considering ways to continue to respond and move forward from the incident. She noted that some audience members, who included faculty as well as students, expressed an interest in further exploration of church teachings, specifically the theology of the body. All suggestions will be compiled and distributed to interested organizations.

Members discussed the benefits for students to hear from peers who have first-hand experiences with GLBT issues and the potential for growth and understanding. Exposure and personal contact are vitally important for improved social relations. Sr. Dunn talked in some detail about the program she runs for first year students in the first semester, in which students are invited to participate in dialogues. Overall, these sessions receive positive feedback from students. She noted that in 2001, only 9 of 100 students had personal knowledge of a GLBT person, while today 90% of 100 do. The climate is quite different, and student attitudes and behavior are also shifting. Sr. Dunn noted that the RA staff receives

extensive training on these issues as they pertain to residence life. And she noted a new education and support group program, The Gold Room Initiative, to assist questioning students and their allies. It will meet once a month; the Coffee in the Como program also meets once a month. CORE, sponsor of both, hopes a sign of the success of these programs is that they have outgrown their meeting space.

Prof. Ohmer complimented the two students who were interviewed on WVPE this week, noting that they were articulate and demonstrated great poise in the face of challenging questions; they were well prepared for a confrontational situation. She requested Sr. Dunn to provide members with CORE's materials for further information. She offered the hope that this issue seems to have opened up a new line of dialogue on campus, as witnessed by email exchanges on the progressive faculty listserv. Campus members are expressing concerns that homophobia exists on campus but its location cannot be identified. Prof. Pieronek likened it to the widely stated belief that the campus is unfriendly to women. She said in practice this is not substantially true, yet there lingers some historical leftover attitudes. As with the GLBT issues, perhaps these concerns no longer have 'legs of their own.'

b. Sexual assault task force

Prof. Cathy Pieronek reported briefly on the work being done by the task force that is reviewing and revising the sexual assault policies in Du Lac. The report is not ready for release yet, and Prof. Ohmer requested that Prof. Pieronek give members a briefing when it is finalized. The task force is dealing with the question of consent as a viable defense by offenders; she noted that Du Lac contains a policy against consensual sexual contact.

Prof. Ohmer reviewed the broad agendas for the next several meetings. She said the committee would invite back both Prof. Collett and Dean Turpin to provide further reports on the work they are doing. In the meantime, she noted that it would be useful to invite some graduate students to attend, so the committee can hear first hand their needs and concerns. Dean Turpin requested to be invited to attend on that occasion.

As time had expired, the meeting was adjourned at 10:30 a.m.