JUNIOR FACULTY LIFE AT OHIO STATE: INSIGHTS ON GENDER AND RACE*

Committee

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the findings of a study conducted by the Committee for Junior Faculty and Administrative Women of the Council on Academic Excellence for Women under a 1985-86 grant from the Affirmative Action Grants Program, Office of Human Relations and University Senate Committee on Women and Minorities. Undertaken to gain an understanding of the experience of junior faculty, particularly women and minority members, at The Ohio State University, our research led to a series of recommendations to address the problems revealed by the study. Our findings are consistent with those of the research literature and show Ohio State to reflect general trends. In addressing issues of consequence with long term implications, this University has the opportunity to become a positive model for other institutions of higher learning. It is in this light that our recommendations are formulated and in this spirit that they are offered.

Lengthy in-depth interviews were conducted with a sample of junior faculty members, white men as well as women and minority women and men, located in the Colleges of Arts and Sciences. Our interviews show that the successful integration of new faculty members is significantly influenced by their graduate training; therefore our study also has implications for the preparation of students so that the difficulties women and minority members now face may be
reduced for those now aspiring to academic careers.

At present, individuals may join the faculty as highly qualified scholars, yet be ill prepared regarding various unstated requirements of their new positions and certain aspects of the academic environment. For historical reasons, white men tend to acquire such preparation more successfully then women and minority faculty members. Good preparation will lead junior faculty to know what to expect in what is frequently their first regular academic appointment and how to deal with the situations they encounter. It will also assist them in making the most of the opportunities, facilities and support offered by the University.

As our findings show, the probationary period of women and minorities is often complicated by a lack of information on a variety of issues, ranging from workload expectations to tenure and promotion procedures, negotiation tactics and others. Of particular importance are patterns of personal interaction. Perhaps no issue revealed by this study was more striking than the problems faced by women faculty who simply wanted to express an opinion or request routine support for teaching and research or the problems faced by minorities who chose to research minority topics. The problems of being perceived as either too passive or too aggressive, or, of being perceived as conducting insignificant research are far too common.
In addition, for women the probationary period often coincides with the time when decisions concerning childbearing must be made. This is a stressful conflict, complicated by the fact that, if time is taken off — which may indeed stop the tenure clock — not only loss of income but also loss of insurance coverage is incurred. Additionally, there is the fear that the choice to bear children will be seen by colleagues as evidence of a lesser commitment to scholarship and career.

Our recommendations are designed to address these issues, to further faculty development, to facilitate optimal performance by all and thus to retain as well as to attract talented junior faculty, women as well as men, minority members as well as others. While many of the recommendations specify the essential leadership role of the Office of Academic Affairs, deans, department chairs and the faculty themselves must substantively address these recommendations, as well.

**Recommendation 1:** The junior faculty need clarification and communication of the promotion and tenure process at all levels, preferably in writing.

**Recommendation 2:** The Office of Academic Affairs and the Deans should establish a standard system for substantive annual performance review of junior faculty. The junior
faculty members should be informed of both the focus and timing of this performance evaluation at the time of their hiring.

**Recommendation 3:** A strong mentorship program needs to be developed for women and minority graduate students and junior faculty. Where possible, candidates should be matched with senior colleagues in their fields.

**Recommendation 4:** Curricular materials need to be developed and seminars conducted for the faculty on the impact of overt and unconscious racism, sexism, racial harassment and sexual harassment. Curricular materials should be widely disseminated to deans, department chairs and faculty members. The seminars should be offered on a regular basis through the sponsorship of the Offices of Academic Affairs and Affirmative Action.

**Recommendation 5:** The Office of Academic Affairs needs to conduct a University-wide review and assessment of junior faculty teaching loads.

**Recommendation 6:** The Office of Research and Graduate Studies should continue, enhance and expand research support funds and opportunities for women and minority junior faculty.
Recommendation 7: A thorough review of the University's parental/pregnancy leave benefits should be conducted by the Offices of Academic Affairs and Personnel Services.

Recommendation 8: The Office of Academic Affairs needs to develop and offer seminars for faculty women and minorities on: "games mother never taught you," negotiation techniques, and "how to benefit from service assignments."

Recommendation 9: The University should develop a quarterly newsletter for junior faculty that provides them with information about campus resources, about one another, an anonymous Q & A column addressed to the Office of Academic Affairs, "classified ads" that help them locate colleagues with similar research interests, and a flavor of academic humor to restore perspective.

Recommendation 10: The colleges should conduct exit interviews with all junior faculty who voluntarily and involuntarily leave a tenure track position with the University. The Office of Academic Affairs and/or the Office of Career Development should serve as alternatives for any faculty member not comfortable with an exit interview at the college level.