



Commission for Women Liaison Committee Handbook

Historical Perspective

Foundation

In 1981, a small group of faculty and staff women proposed that the University establish a Commission for Women analogous to the Pennsylvania State Commission for Women and the Philadelphia Commission for Women. The Commission would seek to strengthen the University community and assist the positive growth and development of its women members. The proposal emphasized the need for greater numbers of women as faculty, as professional staff, and as students throughout the many curricula of the University, not just in the few traditionally sought by women. The University's Perspective on the '80's: Agenda for Action for The Pennsylvania State University stressed this point on faculty and staff:

A vital academic climate draws strength from a pluralistic faculty and staff which includes a mix of ranks, ethnic groups, sexes...At present the University faculty and professional staff do not reflect adequately the diversity present in society at large. The relatively small number of women on the faculty and the administration after six years of affirmative action indicates the University must devote even more energy to this effort. (pp. 42-43)

On academic leadership, the document stated: "A special need exists to identify and develop women and members of minority groups for leadership positions." (p. 47)

The Perspective noted the increasing number of women in all stages of life entering as students: "...the University is committed to insuring that all academic programs are open to women and that resources are allocated to meet women's needs for extracurricular activities, counseling and leadership opportunities." (p.55) Further, the document underscored an important relationship: "Research has shown that women students derive considerable personal and intellectual encouragement from interaction with women faculty members and alumnae." (p.56)

The proposed commission, however, would not limit itself to the needs outlined in the Perspective. The commission could serve as a vehicle for working out the issues brought into focus by Federal regulations on sexual harassment, the primary victims of which, according to research, were women. In addition, it could provide leadership and role-modeling, a supportive need made clear by research which showed women students scoring lower first-year grades and more likely to drop out. On a global scale, the commission could develop, from continuing education student through undergraduates and graduates, a positive atmosphere, University-wide, on women students and women's concerns.

Establishment of the Commission for Women

The constituent group asked Dr. Richard Grubb of the President's Administrative Policy Council to convey their proposal to then President John W. Oswald. After meeting with them, Dr. Oswald established the Commission for Women, appointing 18 women:

- (1) To contribute to the academic climate for women,
- (2) To serve as both focus and forum for women's issues and concerns,
- (3) To coordinate programs and information-dissemination for women, and
- (4) To advocate women's issues and concerns through advice, consultation, or special studies.

Changes occurred as the Commission's mission evolved. The original composition embodied, all female, 4 to 8 faculty, 4 administrators, and 4 students, but the Commission expanded representation to include graduate students and clerical/technical-service employees and a range of ex-officio memberships: the Director of the Center for Women's Students, the Director of the Women's Studies Program, the Chair of the Commission on Racial/Ethnic Diversity (for 1989-90), the Affirmative Action Officer, and the Co-Director of the Undergraduate Student Government Department of Women's Concerns. Appointed members serve three-year terms.

The Commission has a permanent office in Old Main at University Park, a budget, and support staff and meets monthly from September through June. To reach through the system, the Commission visited each of the Commonwealth Educational System campuses in 1986 and promoted formation of campus liaison groups patterned after the Commission. These advise the Commission on issues general and specific to each campus and keep campus women informed on Commission activities.

In 1984-85, the Commission, through its Task Force on the Status of Women, proposed formation of a study group on the major issues regarding the status of women at Penn State. Then President Bryce Jordan accepted the proposal and established the Strategic Study Group on the Status of Women.

Strategic Study Group on the Status of Women

President Jordan charged the Study Group "to conduct a University-wide investigation on the status of women at Penn State and to make recommendations as appropriate." (Final Report of the Strategic Study Group on the Status of Women. p. 1) He appointed Dr. Kathryn Moore as Chair, Dr. Michael Johnson as Research Director, and more than 30 members broadly representative of students and employees.

The Study Group conducted hearings on all campuses with more than 1,000 women participating and interviews with selected University executives and administrators. After two years, the Study Group issued a sequence of five volumes, available through the Penn State Libraries, which set forth 192 recommendations covering the following issues grouped in five packages:

Package 1: Job Assessment and Evaluation, Recruitment of Women Faculty, Part-Time Benefits and Compensation, and Recruitment of Women Faculty.

Package 2: Family-Responsive and Flexible Employee Benefits, Clerical Advancement and Development, Retention and Advancement of Women Faculty, and Sexual Harassment of Students.

Package 3: Chilly Classroom Climate, Dual Career Recruitment and Retention, and Employee Relations and Representation.

Package 4: Women of Color, Sexual Minorities, Returning Adult Students, Sexual Harassment in the Workplace, Sexual Violence Against Women, Women's Athletics, and Health Services for Women Students.

Package 5: Family Care Policy, Women's Studies, Curriculum Integration, Center for Women Students, Non-Tenure-Track Faculty, Staff Exempt and Staff Non-Exempt Employees, Leadership Share, and Advocacy for Women.

Since 1987, the University has endeavored to implement Study Group recommendations, and it remains a major task of the Commission to oversee and advise the University on further implementation.

Liaison Committee Goals

* The Commission for Women represents a diverse constituency of women throughout the University, including the Commonwealth Colleges, Cooperative Extension, and special mission campuses. Many women expressed a need to respond to women's issues in a forum based within their own unit but with a relationship to the work and interests of the University Commission for Women. Thus, each University site has the opportunity to establish a Liaison Committee having a formal relationship to the Commission for Women but also its own individual agenda. Their goals may vary but fit largely into four categories:

1. Supporting and distributing the work of the Commission for Women.
2. Identifying and advocating women's issues within their work unit.
3. Developing and implementing educational programs on women's issues for their work unit and larger committee.
4. Acting as a resource and a referral/information source for individual women with the work unit in problems related to women's issues and well-being.

What are some of the Commission for Women's Current Projects?

The Commission for Women has played a major role in establishing:

- **The Administrative Fellows Program**, which provides individuals with opportunities to enhance their administrative talents and qualifications. A number of Fellows have advanced to higher-level administrative positions in the University and beyond.
- **The Center for Women Students**, which provides a central focus for meeting the needs of women students. The center, founded in 1985, works to build a supportive environment for women in the University's classrooms and research centers and in the community. In 1996-97, the center reached more than 15,000 people through its educational programming. <http://www.sa.psu.edu/cws/>
- **Child care centers at University Park campus**. The University operates three facilities, providing care for 160 children. In September 1997, Penn State contracted with a national firm to provide care for up to 200 more children at a facility in its Research Park. In addition, as part of a long-range Child Care Action Plan, design studies are under way to construct another child care center that will serve 140 children. An on-campus site has been selected, with plans to complete the facility by 1999.
- **Technical Service Workshops and Fellowships** that provide professional development opportunities for employees from across the 24-campus system.
- **Improved sports facilities for women athletes**. As part of the University's five-year construction plan, a large portion of the \$46.5 million allocated to improving athletic facilities will support women's sports. <http://www.psu.edu/sports/womens.html>
- **Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work Day**, which last year attracted nearly 300 participants on the University Park campus alone. The program is designed to introduce girls to the wide range of career options available to them. <http://www.ms.foundation.org>
- **Exit Evaluation Interviews** for faculty and staff members to assess and help improve the workplace.
- **The Center for Adult Learner Services**, opened in 1983 to assist adults in their return to the classroom by providing information and support. The center also acts as an advocate for adult learners. <http://www.outreach.psu.edu/cals/>

Steps In Establishing a Liaison Committee

- 1) Invite Commission to explain mission of the Commission and liaison groups to the campus CEO/Dean.
- 2) Through the Commission, set up a meeting date with CEO/Dean and an open forum for all employees, faculty, and students. The CEO/Dean's office should facilitate details and arrangements.
- 3) Hold open forum, at which:
- 4) A. Commission member(s) discuss setting up liaison group.
B. Participants break into employee/student categories, faculty, graduate students, undergraduates.
C. A leader in each group leads discussion on issues, possible representatives, etc., and arranges future meeting to prepare letter to fellow employees, draw up a slate of candidates, design a ballot, distribute ballots, tally results, etc.
- 5) Hold election for each group to choose its representative.

- 6) Hold meeting of elected representatives to vote on chair and vice-chair and write by-laws along lines of Commission's. 6. Thank formally CEO/Dean for assistance and advice on organization details.

After formation:

- 1) Hold monthly meetings of representatives.
- 2) Hold at least one, preferably two, annual meetings with campus women to hear concerns and inform them on Commission projects.
- 3) Establish goals and projects specific to your campus.
- 4) Communicate ideas, needs, and concerns to the Commission and to your CEO/Dean.
- 5) Attend Spring Banquet and Commission liaison meetings.

Suggested Activities for Liaison Committees

When planning programs, activities, or projects for Liaison Committee programs, consider the needs of the campus community regarding women's issues. Target faculty, staff, students, and/or the entire campus population. Highlight specific events or occasions during the year, e.g., Orientation Week or Women's History Month.

Some Liaison Committees produce a yearly calendar, others less. It depends on members' dedication and free time. With funds limited, planners need to think creatively in organizing and scheduling events. Cooperation with other campus groups can relieve this dilemma. Talk with the cultural events staff, cultivate other campus groups: they will welcome your input. Get into enhancement and EOPC grantsmanship, explore the use of student activity fees and club budgets, and/or seek support outside of the University. You may get financial backing, you will get to know and work with other campus groups and personnel, and that will help.

Work with off-campus groups active in women's issues, e.g. gender-equity programs, shelters or crisis center, women's commissions, and women's clubs. Promote your activities on email listservs, bulletin boards, class announcements, campus newspapers or radio stations, and public media.

Some recommended activities:

- 1) Programs, presentations, or lectures on women's issues such as day care, family care, health, safety, leadership and recognition, communication skills, workplace values and cultures, finances, male/female relationships, professional development, classroom climate, non-traditional careers, sex bias and stereotyping, etc.
- 2) Concerts and performances by women artists.
- 3) Luncheons and open meetings of campus women for networking and discussions.
- 4) Exhibits of women's art, crafts, writing, etc.
- 5) Support groups for campus women.
- 6) Book clubs or women's resource library with reviews and discussions of works by women.
- 7) Circulation of career developmental material to faculty and staff.
- 8) Exchange of ideas with CEO on campus environment or climate.
- 9) Involvement in interviews or selection committees for new hirings.
- 10) Newsletter.
- 11) Annual awards for outstanding female students.
- 12) Network with other Liaison Committees.
- 13) Develop brochures on Liaison Committee and its work.
- 14) Develop brochures on outstanding campus women.
- 15) Network with local women's groups.

16) Sponsor/co-sponsor women-oriented activities.

Finances

Formal funding for campus Liaison Committees, though limited, can come from one or more sources, among them:

University-based:

Commission for Women - small grants to Liaison Committees for specific activities; transportation and lodging for the annual banquet. Apply directly to the Commission office.

Equal Opportunity Program - grants for specific programs. Brief proposals required; schedules and deadlines announced by the EOPC office.

Campus-based:

Campus CEO - limited funds to support Liaison Committee Activities.

Student Government Association - grants for student-oriented programs. Most campuses have a formal approval and distribution process requiring appearance before a committee after submission of a proposal.

Enhancement (and EOPC local) funds - available for specific programming for women or minority students. On most campuses, authority over these funds rests with the Director of Student Programs and Services.

Student Activity Fee.

Funds from Other Sources - be creative in your search.

Community-based:

Larger programs involving community women may qualify for foundation or state funding. Formal proposals generally required. Check with the Office of Contracts and Grants (814-865-1372).

Appointment to the Commission for Women

University President Dr. Graham Spanier appoints members to the Commission for Women when vacancies occur, on the basis of nominations, made by the candidate herself or by someone else. Either is quite acceptable.

In the past, successful candidates have usually demonstrated a history of interest and leadership in women's issues. All employees and students in all categories and locations qualify. A woman interested in candidacy should discuss the nomination, if an employee, with her supervisor to ensure availability to attend the meetings. In the past, the home campuses have provided travel expenses for women not at University Park.

Click [here](#) for the official nomination form. Executive Committee members will gladly discuss eligibility, the nomination process, and duties of membership with potential nominees.