

President's Commission on the Status of Women
Annual Report
Prepared by the Executive Committee on Behalf of the Commission
May 22, 2017

This report summarizes the work of the President's Commission on the Status of Women (Women's Commission or the Commission) during the period of Fall 2015 to Spring 2017.

Background and History of the Commission

The Commission was formed in September 2011 for a two-year pilot appointment with the following charges: (1) Examine the Campus Climate Survey data, drilling down into details of responses and anecdotes not previously reported on, particularly related to women's perceptions; (2) Collect information from focus groups comprised of individuals from diverse areas, backgrounds, ages, and levels of responsibility; (3) Summarize these findings and make recommendations for improving the campus climate for women staff, faculty and students to be presented to President's Cabinet. The appointment was extended one semester to allow time for focus groups to be wrapped up and for information to be summarized. The Commission submitted a report to the President's Council in the spring of 2014.

In the fall of 2015, the commission was re-activated with the following goals for the first two years: (1) Establish the full membership, which includes representatives from various constituencies across campus; (2) Form any necessary subcommittees; and (3) Develop any additional procedures or policies.

Over the past two years, we have met all three of these goals. We now have a full membership with three active subcommittees and we have recently revised our bylaws to reflect a membership rotation schedule that allows for both new perspectives and continuity over time.

The full Commission meets four times per year. Meetings include information-sharing from the various constituencies, occasional guest speakers about issues related to women, time for discussion and decisions, and sub-committee report-outs and meeting time. Each sub-committee meets at least once between each Commission meeting and members carry out tasks that move the committee work forward.

Purposes and Membership

The purpose of the Women's Commission can be summarized as follows: In support of the University's mission, Values Statement, and Vision Statement, the Commission shall function as an advisory group that recommends and advocates for the improvement of working conditions, climate, and safety for women on campus through the following activities:

- Serve as an interface between students, staff, faculty, administration, bargaining agents, and the Council of Trustees on women's issues.
- Promote the enrichment and development of women, and raise the visibility of women's contributions.
- Foster women's leadership.

- Coordinate with or provide point of contact for other internal and external organizations for women

Throughout our first two years, we have engaged in each of these activities. As mentioned above, we have a full membership that represents various constituencies on campus and we have been actively developing a membership rotation that will best support the work of the Commission. The sections at the end of this report that detail the work of the subcommittees reflect our accomplishment of these goals.

With support from the President's Office, we have also had the chance to send women to PASSHE leadership events. In July 2016, Tiffany Lane represented West Chester University and the Women's Commission at the PASSHE Faculty Leadership conference and workshop. The topics covered were: (1) Preparing for tenure and promotion; (2) Promoting self into leadership roles in academia; (3) Time management skills; (4) Negotiating salaries and leadership roles in the academy; (5) Scholarship and maintaining a writing schedule; (6) Self-care; (7) The importance of feminist scholarship and collaboration with feminist scholars.

This year, we will be sending two women (Aneesah Smith and Cara White) to a PASSHE leadership event focused on staff, the PASSHE Women's Consortium Leadership Institute for Staff Women.

Reports and Recommendations from the Three Subcommittees

This section details the work of the three subcommittees of the Women's Commission and the recommendations for the President's Office that are a direct result of that work.

Women of Color

The Women of Color Subcommittee's work started with a discussion about attrition rates of students of color, which was raised by two student members of the subcommittee who were women of color. These conversations were lively and multi-perspectival, as we had representatives on our subcommittee who were students of color themselves, who worked in student services and in the pre-major advising office, and who were faculty coordinators of the Academic Development Program, among others.

Dr. Lisa Huebner (formerly Lisa Huebner Ruchti), a member of the subcommittee, has been conducting ongoing qualitative research on the experiences of women of color students on campus, and her research was informative for our work. She found that while women of color students are doing well academically, they are succeeding *at a cost*. In a not-yet-published report, she shared:

Although women of color demonstrate success through their GPA scores and graduation rates, when asked about their experience in college, they report feeling isolated and unwelcome on campus, tokenized by peers and professors, and the need to constantly negotiate physical, verbal, and sexualized micro-aggressions from their peers (Huebner, Jeune, Kolenky, Rivers, 2017).

A recommendation of the study, which is shared by the subcommittee, is, “continuing and increasing financial support for community-building, networking, and fact-sharing programs that are only for women of color students, staff, and faculty members” (Huebner, Jeune, Kolenky, Rivers, 2017).

In order to support students, faculty, and staff on campus, the subcommittee organized and hosted two Women of Color Celebration events to augment the university-sponsored Women of Color Day celebration. The first was a *Women of Color Networking Reception*, which was held in the late-afternoon of the day before Women of Color Day. This event was a success in that many participants expressed that it was helpful for them to have a chance to meet other women of color from across the university and build supportive personal and professional connections.

The second event was the *Women of Color Day Celebration and Panel*. Participants reported that this was a great conversation, but they felt they needed more time to talk about the issues raised on the panel.

Women of Color Subcommittee Recommendations

At both events, the subcommittee collected feedback forms from the participants. From those comments, Dr. Huebner’s research, and the anecdotal experiences of those on the subcommittee, we determined the following two specific recommendations for the President’s Office. These two items would demonstrate institutional commitment that directly supports Women of Color:

- 1) ***Funding for pilot departmental events to support Women of Color in specific professions (e.g. lunch and learn, speakers, brown bag lunches that are program-specific).*** These events would involve inviting Women of Color professionals in the field to campus to speak with students, faculty, and possibly staff about the challenges and possibilities of being a Woman of Color in that particular profession. Our recommendation is that we pilot three to four of these events during the 2017-2018 school year.
- 2) ***Establishing an annual online and print directory of Women of Color faculty and staff.*** This directory would provide a much-needed visual representation of Women of Color on campus to help students find support and mentors in and out of their academic department. It would also support connections among faculty and staff for resources and support as a marginalized community here at West Chester University.

Policy Subcommittee

The Policy Subcommittee started its work during the 2015-2016 academic year focusing on possible discrepancies between male and female faculty advising loads. This decision was based on the perception among members of the subcommittee that there may be a disparity in this area. We obtained data regarding advising loads from the Office of Institutional Research. T-tests and ANOVAs supported that while women appeared to be advising more people than men, the difference was not statistically significant during the 2014-2015 academic year.

Institutional Research helped us to conduct similar analyses going back to 2010. These analyses included breakdowns by department and separate analyses that included and excluded adjunct faculty. Again, these analyses revealed no significant differences in advising loads by gender at a university level. However, they did find that for some years there were statistically significant differences in particular departments. The only department that had 2 subsequent years of disparities was Economics. In 2013 and 2014, men were advising more people than women.

Thus at this time, gender disparities in advising do not appear to be an issue at West Chester. We have made arrangements with Institutional Research to be able to examine this data in future years should further complaints arise. In order to garner more meaningful data, in the future the Women's Commission might also want to consider finding out how department chairs allocate advisees, how much time advisors are spending with advisees, and whether or not women are more likely to be assigned advisees that require more time and resources.

During the 2016-2017 academic year, the Policy Subcommittee focused on two issues: campus safety and lactation spaces.

We were concerned about the number of campus emergency phones that were out of order on campus and expressed these concerns to the President during our December 2016 meeting. At that time, he suggested that someone from the Commission join the campus safety committee that would be addressing this issue, as well as broader campus safety issues. We are currently in the process of reaching out to the committee in effort to join this committee. We were initially in contact with Chief Michael Bicking, who let us know that there was a subcommittee being tasked by Dikran Kassabian. We have had trouble getting in touch with Dr. Kassabian and would like the President's support in helping us to become a member of this subcommittee.

We were also concerned about lactation spaces on campus. From our own members' experiences and anecdotal evidence, we felt that while some women on the multiple campuses (Main, South, Graduate Business Center, Philadelphia, etc.) had access to a space dedicated to private lactation, others did not. To better understand the nature of this issue, we have developed a survey to assess the needs of faculty, staff, and students concerning lactation space. We have gained approval from APSCUF, AFSCME and SCUPA and are in the process of obtaining institutional approval to distribute the survey to students. We are meeting with Alina Torres and Lynn Kligensmith from Social Equity to discuss sustainability of this effort to increase access to lactation space on campus.

Policy Committee Recommendations:

To support the work of the Policy Subcommittee, we have the following recommendations for the President's Cabinet:

- 1) *The Office of the President will distribute survey about lactation spaces to all faculty, staff, and students.*
- 2) *A member of the Women's Commission will be placed on the long-term campus safety planning committee.*

Advocacy Subcommittee

The Advocacy Subcommittee has worked to meet the Women's Commission's aims to support the enrichment and development of women, raise the visibility of women's contributions, and foster women's leadership.

We have collaborated with the Provost's Office to support a Women in Leadership workshop series that was attended by over 90 women in the original cohort. This workshop series included three two-hour workshops focusing on goal-setting, skill-building, and networking. Each workshop ran three times each, for a total of nine workshops. Members of the Advocacy Committee, and the Women's Commission more broadly, were active members of the planning committees for all of the workshops and co-facilitated with Jen Bacon and other women from across the university. We received positive feedback from the participants. The Advocacy Subcommittee plans to continue to collaborate with the Provost's Office to offer more programming in the area of developing women leaders, as attendance at this first workshop series revealed a need and desire for such programming.

The Advocacy Subcommittee is currently working on raising the visibility of the Women's Commission's work, women's issues, and women's programming. We are currently researching the Women's Commissions at other PASSHE universities and designing the West Chester University's Women's Commission webpage. We expect the webpage will be completed with updated information before the beginning of the fall semester of 2017.

Additionally, the Commission has started to build a relationship with the Chester County Women's Commission (CCWC). During the spring semester of 2017, the Executive Committee met with Dr. Susan Fiorentino to discuss how we might work together towards shared goals. One idea was the funding of a scholarship or internship for a West Chester student to be connected with the CCWC or another community agency working on women's and girls' issues in Chester County. The Advocacy Subcommittee will continue to foster this relationship with CCWC.

Advocacy Subcommittee Recommendations:

Based on the work that the Advocacy Subcommittee has done thus far, we make the following recommendations to the President's Cabinet:

- 1) *Use social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, to reach out to a larger base of women at West Chester University. The goal is to promote and highlight the Women's Commission, women's events, and women's leadership at West Chester University.*
- 2) *Explore funding of a scholarship or Internship opportunity for West Chester University women students, possibly one that focuses on issues facing women and girls in Chester County.*

Conclusion

In the past two years, the Women's Commission has been re-established with a stable membership, regular meetings, leadership, and a subcommittee infrastructure that supports ongoing attention to a wide range of issues impacting women at West Chester University. The six recommendations included throughout this report represent tangible ways that the Office of the President can support the work of the Commission and the safety, success, and well-being of women at West Chester University.

Citations

Huebner, L., Jeune, S., Kolenky, O., Rivers, C. (2017) Success at a Cost: The experiences of women of color undergraduates at a primary white institution (PWI) (unpublished, manuscript in-progress).