

MEMO

DATE: December 16, 2008

TO: AWF and AWN membership

FROM: Rebecca Messbarger, AWF President and Dayna Early, AWN President

RE: Summary update on recent activities of AWF and AWN

- Since their inception, respectively in 1990 and 1995, the Academic Women's Network at the Medical School and the Association of Women Faculty on the Danforth Campus, have been committed to the common mission of promoting the interests and well-being, the professional and social engagement, and the visibility of women faculty at Washington University. However, the past year, which was marked by several notable controversies, the most prominent and widely protested being the bestowal of an honorary doctorate on the anti-feminist activist Phyllis Schlafly, served to focus the advocacy work of the two associations. We felt that it was important to provide an update of recent endeavors by the AWF/AWN leadership to improve the conditions and the climate for women and under-represented minority faculty and, by extension, the university community as a whole. Following is a chronology of this work dating from the spring semester of last year. The summary includes the work of past as well as current leadership:
- March 26, 2008
  - In response to a serious event that many felt exposed a culture at Washington University as unfavorable for women, the leadership of AWF and AWN sent a letter to Chancellor Wrighton. The event was the dismissal of Mary Sansalone, Dean of Engineering and Applied Science, and the only female Dean at the University. The letter was written by Sally Goldman (President of AWF on the behalf of the entire AWF Board), Ingrid Borecki (President of AWN on behalf of the entire AWN Board), and Diana Gray, Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs at the Medical School and, with Dean Sansalone, Co-Principal Investigator and Co-Director of a National Science Foundation ADVANCE IT Proposal to assess and reform the climate for women in science at Washington University. Summary points of this letter included the following:
    - The removal from office of Mary Sansalone, Dean of Engineering and Applied Sciences had created significant distress among faculty on both campuses as it was viewed as a politically motivated firing and perhaps a dismissal associated with gender bias.
    - The letter writers stated that "Any actions taken by the University to repair the damage must have real meaning – symbolic actions such as the creation of committees or the creation of positions lacking true power to transform the institution will be viewed with skepticism by all faculty members, particularly the women faculty."

- Several specific examples of ways in which the culture at Washington University could be transformed were articulated by the writers and mirrored many of the components of the ADVANCE IT Proposal.
  - A recommendation was made to establish an office of the Vice Provost for Diversity, with supporting information regarding this specific proposal.
  
- Commencement, May 2008
  - Phyllis Schlafly, a lifetime political activist against the civil rights of, among others, immigrants, women, Native Americans, and gays, and a vitriolic detractor of women in academe, was chosen to receive an honorary doctorate from Washington University. The announcement was followed by a profusion of e-mail correspondence between faculty and to Chancellor Wrighton denouncing the decision, as well as by student and faculty protests. The Chancellor refused to rescind the decision to bestow the degree.
  
- May 28, 2008
  - In response to the March 26 letter, which was followed by a meeting between the letter writers and the Chancellor, the Chancellor responded with “Summary Points.” The salient points were:
    - The Provost-designate, Ed Macias, would be responsible for developing innovative programs to support women and minorities.
    - Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs Gerhild Williams would serve as a liaison between the Provost and the Chancellor on these matters.
    - Leah Merrifield, Special Assistant to the Chancellor for Diversity Initiatives, would continue in her administrative role and would direct the Coordinating Council for Diversity Initiatives (CCDI).
    - Through the CCDI, Chancellor Wrighton committed \$2,500,000 to support programs that would enhance the retention and recruitment of women and minorities and support some of the components of the ADVANCE IT grant.
  
- June 1, 2008
  - A letter was sent to the Chancellor in response to his “Summary Points” by Diana Gray and representatives of AWN and AWF. The authors expressed their deep disappointment that the Chancellor did not acknowledge the proposals outlined in their March 26 letter, and again stressed the need for active dialogue between the administration and faculty regarding systemic changes needed to enhance the environment for women and under-represented minorities.
  - The writers informed Chancellor Wrighton that a large group of female faculty had convened just after the May meeting between Diana Gray, Ingrid Borecki, Sally Goldman and Chancellor Wrighton, and that a “crisis of confidence” existed amongst the faculty in the administration’s ability to truly embrace diversity.

- Again, a recommendation was made to establish a Vice Provost for Diversity.
- In response, Chancellor Wrighton invited Diana Gray to attend and present at the University Council meeting the following week.

■ Summer 2008

The Chancellor called upon Gerhild Williams and Diana Gray to co-chair a new Advisory Committee on Women Faculty (ACWF) to review the issues involving women at Washington University, and to create a slate of recommendations for the incoming Provost. Two members of the AWF Board were members of the committee.

■ November 3, 2008

- Dayna Early and Rebecca Messbarger sent a letter to Chancellor Wrighton advocating the establishment of an Office of the Vice Provost for Faculty Development, Inclusion and Diversity. (A copy of the letter is available in the Winter 2008 AWNings newsletter, which can be found at [www.awn.wustl.edu](http://www.awn.wustl.edu)) In-coming Provost Macias sent a response to the letter in which he underscored his commitment to improving the climate for women when he assumed office in January. As the Chancellor did not respond directly to the letter, a meeting was held between Early, Messbarger, Chancellor Wrighton and Associate Vice Chancellor Williams to discuss the proposal for the Vice Provost Office. The Chancellor focused his remarks on the university's support for women and progress in promoting women to leadership positions, particularly in the area of Operations (HR, Finance, Government Affairs, Library Administration, etc.). The thrust of the message was that the Advisory Committee on Women Faculty was charged with developing recommendations for the Provost, who in turn was charged with deciding what recommendations to implement. The Leadership of AWF and AWN emphasized the need for more active dialogue between our associations and the university administration and greater transparency and collaboration with regard to the process for developing and implementing policies affecting women faculty. The Chancellor agreed that this was important and made assurances that we would work more closely together in the future.

■ Fall 2008

- Concurrent to the AWF/AWN joint letter of November 3, 2008, additional faculty leadership groups independently sent letters to the Chancellor recommending the creation of a Vice Provost for Diversity. These groups include the Executive Committee of the Faculty Council and Gender Equity Committee, both at the medical school. The Faculty Council of Arts and Sciences on the Danforth Campus discussed the AWF/AWN letter at a regular meeting and was supportive of the proposal.

■ November 26, 2008

- Messbarger and Early received a follow up letter from Chancellor Wrighton, acknowledging concerns discussed at the meeting, assuring us that the Provost would maintain close contact with our organizations, and referencing the Vice Provost position as a matter that would be considered by the incoming Provost.

■ December 2008

The Advisory Committee on Women Faculty produced a series of recommendations regarding women faculty and the advancement of diversity at the university largely consistent with proposals advanced by AWN and AWF. We understand that a committee report has been forwarded to the Office of the Provost.

■ Summary

A recommendation to Chancellor Wrighton to establish a Vice Provost for Diversity has been made in writing 5 times over the past 9 months. This recommendation was originally put forth after extensive research by the co-investigators of the ADVANCE IT grant identified this step as one critical to changing the climate for women and minorities at Washington University. Additional research by current AWF and AWN board members of peer institutions reinforces the logic and value behind this recommendation.

The Association of Women Faculty and the Academic Women's Network head into the New Year cautiously optimistic that real strides will be made toward enhancing the climate for women faculty and under-represented minorities at Washington University. We have been assured that the administration will engage in constructive dialogue and collaboration, yet no mechanism has been created to ensure that our organizations will be central to the process.

Although we want to be actively involved with the communication and action plans that will transpire with respect to women faculty, we continue to perceive that we are on the fringe. We will not be deterred, however, and will continue to push the administration to embrace real change for the benefit of all members of our university community and the national standing of the institution we hold dear.