

Commission on Women & Gender Equity in Academia

Report to the Faculty Senate

1/23/18

Thank you for this opportunity to tell you about our work. The Commission on Women and Gender Equity in Academia has been very busy reviewing our policies and procedures, as well as the representation of women and members of the LGBTQ community, both here at the University of Rochester and at peer institutions.

We have also received input from many people – through anonymous feedback, in person conversations, and e-mails. This has included alumni, students, faculty and staff members, and we thank them for speaking out, with sometimes heartbreaking or frustrating stories.

Based on this review, it is very clear to us that issues of sexual harassment and discrimination as well as dissatisfaction with the University's response to these concerns are not isolated to one department.

There is also a great deal of confusion about the policies and procedures available to faculty, students and staff. Our training has been inconsistent and insufficient. I suspect that many of us did not really read the policies carefully until September of last year, let alone really know we might do if we had a concern of our own or had one presented by a student.

Therefore, we all have a great deal of work to do in order to move beyond the issues presented in the EEOC complaint. The recommendations made in the Independent Investigation are a good starting point, but we do not believe they go far enough to address all of the challenges. While we are still working out some of the specifics, I'd like to share a few important points.

1. We agree that some clarification and strengthening of the intimate relationship policy is needed. We are working with the Senate ad hoc committee to review and improve this policy, but also believe that it is critical that we better explain this policy and the associated procedures to students, faculty and the department chairs or deans who may be expected to manage or monitor such relationships, if they are allowed.

It's important to realize that some of the graduate students have specifically requested that we fix this policy so that faculty will stop "hitting on them". We would argue that is not what we mean by consensual relationship

Therefore the next area for attention is sexual harassment.

2. The commission believes that we have a great deal of work to clarify our policies and procedures related to sexual harassment, while also strengthening the resources available to those affected. This includes the addition of qualified advisors for both parties, potential involvement of faculty and students in the adjudication or appeal processes, and greater transparency in the reporting of the prevalence of harassment claims as well as disciplinary actions that may be taken to address them. Ultimately, we believe that a single center that is appropriately staffed with well-trained and independent individuals who understand the legal, social and ethical impacts of harassment could be a single point of contact for all individuals needing support.

We also strongly agree with the recommendation for improved training related to harassment and misconduct for all members of the community – something that we hope will be taken very seriously this time around. It may include a mix of both on-line and in-person training that is tailored to each relevant group. We are currently helping to review some of these options for training.

3. The Commission believes that some of the confusion related to harassment and other policies related to workplace conditions is the result of general misunderstandings among the faculty about the resources, personnel and procedures related to human resources. We propose that greater attention during orientation and more active communication with both faculty and their department chairs or other leaders are needed to raise awareness. This may include improvements to web pages, consolidation of handbooks, and clarification of the roles of HR business partners and intercessors. It may also require the addition of staff so that sufficient support is available.
4. In order to ensure that any changes to the policies I have just described are adhered to, we believe that it may also be time to clarify our faculty and student governance procedures, including greater clarity of what disciplinary actions may be or have been used to regulate faculty behaviors. There is a real impression in the community that tenured faculty can get away with anything without being punished. There is clearly some confusion or disagreement about how and why tenure may be revoked and what else may be done to try to provide consequences for misconduct.

In addition, it is critical that all voices are heard in the development of these governance procedures, including women, students, and other groups who may not yet be well-represented in leadership positions.

5. The issues of sexual harassment and intimate relationships present great challenges with respect to the balance between confidentiality and transparency, and the rules are often unclear. While we understand that there are legal regulations involved, we agree with the independent investigation that other universities have found a different balance that better informs involved parties about specific cases, while also reporting on general trends to the overall community.
6. We agree with the recommendations for a senior cabinet level official to oversee implementation of these changes in policy and procedures. While we appreciate that President Feldman is taking leadership on this issue and the associated recommendations during these first few weeks, we believe that longer-term we will need someone who has the time, resources and authority to hold others accountable for the implementation of the next steps. President Feldman has already met with the Commission and he has stated his intention to do so after an initial period of transition.
7. The Commission feels very strongly that changes to policies and procedures related to harassment and misconduct will not have any effect until we address issues central to gender inequities. We are actively reviewing hiring practices, recruiting, promotion and mentoring procedures to identify problem areas and best practices that will lead to greater diversity. Equity is also influenced by the nature of the compensation, benefits, work assignments, and family friendly policies that we provide. Further, we will be requesting that the University carry out a comprehensive and in-depth study of patterns of compensation. We have identified several areas warranting attention and continue to welcome your input on other issues that could promote a climate that will support the academic achievements of all women and members of the LGBTQ community.
8. We have heard from many individuals who simply wanted to be treated with fairness and respect. In fact, we expect our undergraduates to abide by a set of communal principles. We have a code of conduct for interactions with patients, and for interactions with our business partners. Many universities and businesses like Wegmans have such values or codes of conduct, but here at the University of Rochester, we haven't broadly articulated such values, nor have we agreed on how we might hold all community members account-

able to these principles. The commission recommends that we work together to establish a set of core values that we expect all members of the community to understand and embrace.

On behalf of the Commission, thank you again for this opportunity to speak to you today. I hope you will reach out if you have suggestions for our work, have a story to tell, or want to get involved with our process. You may do so either through our [online input form](#), or by emailing CWGEA@rochester.edu, or by contacting [Amy Lerner](#) directly.

Thank you.