

An Action Proposal to Address Women's Issues in the UMass Lowell Workplace

The purpose of this paper is to propose action steps for addressing concerns identified by the women of this University. On March 7, 2007 women representing diverse departments of the University of Massachusetts Lowell gathered together for a luncheon in the Alumni Lounge to share the pressing and pivotal issues they face in the workplace. Sponsored by the Labor Extension Program and the Center for Women and Work, the congenial atmosphere of the luncheon meeting not only contributed to good conversation, it advanced the exploration of hard questions and provided a springboard for positing solutions that would not only advance the women who work here, but also, by logical extension, advance the University as a whole.

Participants in the campus-wide luncheon agreed on the need to bring these pertinent issues to the attention of our new Chancellor because they are issues that constrain productivity and which work to suppress women's advancement. They are not just concerns of a few isolated women but are topics that affect all employees - both women *and* men - on the UML campus and revolved around the following themes:

- gender-based inequity in salaries (some times clear inequities but even more often inequities based on biased assumptions about what types of work is more valued)
- unequal distributions of workload (both within and between departments/work units)
- the need for more women in leadership positions within the University who can serve as role models (particularly in middle management positions)
- the lack of acknowledgement of women's ability to wear multiple hats, which maximizes productivity yet comes without recognition, pay and appreciation
- the balancing act of work and family; child care both off and on campus. The challenge of managing these dual domains continues to place unfair demands on women, who are still more often the primary care takers for the family.
- poor health and safety conditions such as poor ventilation, lack of heat/AC, and construction activities that produce dust and other potentially harmful particles in the air

Our specific proposal is that the University undertake a campus-wide gender equity study similar to studies undertaken at MIT and at other universities across the country. Furthermore, we ask that this be a comprehensive review that includes not only faculty but also all staff and that actively involves the unions on campus¹. We believe that this type of comprehensive review

¹ The following campus unions were represented at this luncheon:

- Women from The Massachusetts Society of Professors - Faculty and Librarians
- International Teamsters Union Local 25 - University Police
- SEIU Professional - Middle Management
- MTA - Classified/Technical
- MTA - Maintenance & Trades
- MTA - Projects and Grants
- Local 1596 UAW - Teaching Assistants and Research Assistants and
- Non Unit Professionals

is what is needed in order to ensure that women working at UMass Lowell are appropriately recognized for their contributions to the University.

We anticipate that such a comprehensive review will also further important discussions that need to come to the attention of our new Chancellor and his top administrators. Such as:

- What is the current situation for our university vis-à-vis gender equity? (in terms of salaries, workload, and conditions of work)
- What are the current barriers to gender equality?
- What other campus factors serve as barriers to individual progress? How are those different for female and male employees?
- How can UML expand career options for ALL employees at all institution levels?
- How can UML achieve fair and consistent implementation of policies?

In summary, the women at the luncheon concurred that the full potential of this University will never be realized unless the University leadership enters into a full and equitable partnership with the women who contribute so solidly to this institution's success. We, all of us, must continue to create opportunities not only for dialogue -- both to advance discussions for the issues stated here and for the sharing of new ideas -- but also to further develop leadership that is responsive to university members' needs. As dedicated professionals, we seek to advance changes that maximize and value our contributions, a position which only stands to further the contributions and mission of this University. The rationale for change is compelling, and the call for recognition and dignity in our work is worthy of the attention of this institution.

We believe Chancellor Meehan has a record of championing the "right thing to do," even when that path has meant breaking new ground. In light of this, we urge Chancellor Meehan to take the opportunity to partake in a history-making process at UML to assist in the creation of a work environment that understands, supports, and benefits from the many roles and contributions of women on campus. Such action will only strengthen – and further – the goals and mission of the University of Massachusetts Lowell.

Submitted and endorsed by
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