

# Amherst The Student



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## Women Faculty Report Released

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The Report of the Ad Hoc Committee to Study the Conditions of Work for Faculty Women was released to the faculty Friday, November 16 by President Pouncey.

The report, presently under discussion by the Committee of Six, and, if the Committee of Six so decides, to be discussed by the faculty next semester, makes several recommendations to the administration and faculty including the appointment of "a committee that would formulate a proposal for a Women's Studies Department or Program," an eight year tenure track, the establishment

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of an on-campus day-care center, "a thorough rationalization of the present committee structure," an increase of women in the faculty, and "an end to tokenism."

"The debate will be hot and heavy on this one — and that's fine," said President Pouncey.

In the fall of '83, the Committee of Six appointed a committee of five professors: David Sofield (Chair), Amrita Basu, Frederick Griffiths, Stephanie Sandler, and Marguerite Waller, to respond to nine questions assessing the work conditions for women faculty at Amherst. The 65-page report, the result of a year's work by the committee, responds to these questions by dividing their

report into seven sections:

I. Are women faculty disproportionately burdened with committee and advising responsibilities?

II. Do women faculty lack full access to the informal collegiality that nurtures scholarly development and encourages full participation in the life of the College?

What, if any, are the consequences of the uneven distribution of women faculty across the departments of the College and among ranks? Have women been disproportionately

**President Peter Pouncey**  
appointed to visiting faculty positions?

III. Do students bring different assumptions to their evaluation of the competence of male and female faculty? Do faculty?

IV. Is the absence of a separate women's studies program perceived as a signal that scholarship on women is less valued?

V. Are the regularly accepted practices of the College predicated on a model of the one-career family with spouse's support?

VI. Has the College adequately recognized the demands of childrearing as well as

childbearing?

(Does the coincidence in time of traditional professional development — as reflected in tenure decisions — and of a woman's reproductive years pose special difficulties for women faculty?)

VII. In addition, the committee should review current College policies designed to accommodate women's life patterns (maternity leave, provision for regular part-time appointments), and it should review other policy issues which may affect the recruitment and retention of women faculty.

In December of '83 the committee began a lengthy and in-depth interviewing process. Meetings were held with faculty, administrators, and resident counselors. A questionnaire was prepared; 62 completed questionnaires were returned, a little less than half of those sent out.

All women presently on the faculty, except one or two, and ten former faculty women, met individually with the entire committee.

"It seemed to us that it would be irresponsible to do the report without interviewing, in person, all women faculty presently and previously at the college," explained Sofield.

The committee invited all male department chairs to two group interviews. Approximately half of them responded, and these 20



Professor David R. Sofield

men were also interviewed. According to Sofield the committee believed that this was a representative group comprising a good cross-section of the male faculty.

This combined testimony became the basis for the report. Sofield said the results were not shocking, for it was known that conditions for women were problematic. However, what was disturbing was the great amount of testimony, how consistent this testimony was, and how seriously alienated that testimony demon-

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strated women faculty to be.

He says, "I had some sense that there was anxiety for some women faculty. But I didn't know much, in a systematic or deep way, about that anxiety. And I expect most men did not, and do not, know in a comprehensive way about the nature, seriousness, and depth of that anxiety."

President Pouncey, after having been on campus for only a few months, also was struck by this anxiety: "One thing that is interesting to me, coming from outside, is that the volume of anxiety, anger, and sense of dislocation that I've felt in this area on the campus is a little higher than I would've expected of a college that has been coed for eight years."

The report addresses this anxiety throughout and concludes that, "nearly all faculty women at the College consider, and precisely because they are women, that their professional and private lives have been unnecessarily and unduly difficult."

At a most general level it is suggested that the disruption is caused by two things. One: a "marginalization" and "tokenization" of women faculty. The report states that "Virtually every woman we talked with felt in one way or another on the periphery. If her sex alone did not place her there, and usually it did and does, a woman faculty member might consider herself marginalized by her age, sometimes her race, by her field, sometimes even by where she lives."

Two: the "paternalistic" make-up of the college creates structural and emotional barriers for women. Sofield emphasized that a historical view of the College's paternalism was needed. Women faculty and students have been members of the Amherst community for a relatively short time, and for this reason have had less impact on the College's structure.

"Paternalism isn't incompatible with caring," Sofield continues. "I think Amherst has cared a great deal — has been extremely concerned with its junior faculty. If there is a problem it is that the family didn't quite know how to care, because it had new members to care for and about. It takes a while to know how to do this and it is undeniable that some faculty women found the caring itself to a degree patronizing."

The report responds to the range of problems faced by women faculty in two ways. Specific administrative actions are suggested. No less significantly, says Sofield, "an address to conscience is made. One audience of the report — senior male faculty — asked to meditate on the history here recounted. I'm hoping that that meditation will be one that might produce a kind of examination of one's own attitudes, that would in itself lend to making conditions for faculty women less anxious and more productive."

In a letter to President Pouncey the committee summarizes its response given in each section: "In I. we ask for a thorough rationali-

zation of the present committee structure, including the democratization of committee assignments, an end to tokenism, and a reduction in the number of members on some committees; we also ask for more flexibility in the scheduling of committee and staff-course meetings."

Section I emphasizes that women faculty have a disproportionate burden of committee work compared to their male counterparts. This occurs because the College desires a woman on each committee. In addition, the number of faculty committees have increased from eight to twenty-four since 1966.

However, as the Report states, "junior and senior women faculty members alike have found their position in the committee system not empowering but tokenizing them: their presence is said to be necessary in order to make committees representative, yet they are

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recurrently told that they are on committees because of their femaleness (not their competence), and their contributions and perspectives are too often treated as peripheral, biased, and unimportant."

Advising is also discussed in Section I. Although women and male faculty have the same number of advisees, women spend more time per week advising (4.8 hours compared to 3.7).

"We are concerned about the consequences of this stereotyping (women advising more about personal matters) for those women faculty who widely commented upon the pressure they feel from students to be warm, caring and more friendly, less aggressive than their male counterparts ... The differences in what students consider appropriate behavior with a female as opposed to a male professor may, in other words, make the hours that female faculty spend with students highly stressful ... Sometimes a student's comment in a tenure letter about how nice a female teacher is has been read by colleagues as a negative quality, as if intelligence and niceness were incompatible."

In Section II the slow integration of women into senior faculty positions is stressed. "67% of the women, as opposed to 20% of the men, are untenured." The result is greater committee responsibilities while few women hold positions of authority on these committees, and a lack of a necessary mentoring by older women faculty. In the letter to Pouncey the committee states "We ask for more opportunities, formal and informal, to exchange scholarly ideas with colleagues; for the provision of more, and more candid, information to junior faculty."

The uneven distribution of women across departments is also considered in the report. "There were in 1983-4 no more than three (FTE) women in any department at the college ... The unevenness in the distribution of women is even more evident among the divisions of the college ... The uneven distribution of women by department and division within the College often erodes women's sense of efficacy."

Another problem women faculty face is isolation within their own department, especially for those women teaching in less traditional, often marginalized disciplines.

More interdisciplinary and outside-the-department teaching, which will allow for women in different departments to share their academic interests, is a possible solution.

Also, the style of teaching at Amherst — "abrasive, competitive, and conflictual" — is often alienating to women. "There is the sense that bright people are abrasive and less bright people are nice," one faculty member was quoted as saying in the report.

Section II discusses the conditions for visiting faculty. Because a great number of visiting faculty are women, there is an "illusion of a larger and more enduring female presence on campus" than actually exists. "For many reasons, therefore, we recommend against the practice of hiring a disproportionately large number of women to visiting faculty positions." Also, a general improvement in the treatment of visiting faculty is suggested.

In Section III student and faculty assumptions about women faculty are discussed. Women faculty's less abrasive teaching styles are again discussed, as are their less formal methods of interaction.

Section IV asks the Committee of Six to appoint a committee to formulate a proposal for a Women's Studies Department or Program. "In order that we serve our student's needs better, that we not allow our curriculum to become obsolescent, and that we better attract and retain feminist scholars, we believe that the time has come for some structure that can support and further the aims of women's studies. Amherst College has a strong tradition of interdisciplinary studies; it is completely appropriate, as it is overdue, that in a more formal and more extensive way women's studies be a presence on our campus."

The report stresses the many scholarly contributions by feminists in existing disciplines, but says women professors, mostly untenured "felt little encouragement in that direction and suspected considerable risk." A women's studies entity would provide validity as well as

support for such work and discussion.

The task of the new women's studies entity would be a greater co-ordination of women's studies offerings, and the offering of an introductory course.

The question of marginalization of a women's studies entity would be combated through a system of joint appointments, so that all members would be in this and another department or program. Sofield added, "If there is a desire on the part of the faculty to marginalize a women's studies program or department then it will happen. There is some danger that the existing skepticism regarding the viability, effectiveness, and nature of a women's studies program will continue. Let's hope that some attitudes are not unchangeable."

Sections V, VI, and VII address the College's policies and their effects on the lifestyles of women and their families. These sections determine these "regularly accepted practices," based on one-career families and a faculty composed almost entirely of men, are no longer a realistic or healthy way to base institutional and social patterns.

The committee summarizes their suggestions in the letter to Pouncey: "In V we ask for an eight-year tenure track; for the presence in a departmental tenure proceeding of a faculty member from another department; for a paternity leave policy and a more liberal maternity leave policy; and for an extended second mortgage policy. In VI we ask for the establishment of an on-campus day-care center. At various places we ask for the introduction of late afternoon and evening classes, and at others we ask for what makes the greatest difference in the working conditions of faculty women, a real increase of women on the faculty, especially in tenured and tenure track positions."

Besides these administrative changes, a more subtle change in the Amherst community is suggested. "As is common knowledge, there has been a troubling series of decisions not to stand for tenure in and of resignations from a wide range of departments," notes the report.

In 1979 several faculty women, in tenure track positions resigned. "At Amherst, they felt they were regarded...with suspicion and disrespect...The three women who held a meeting in 1979 to explain their leaving concurred that the question for them was not why they were resigning, but why they should stay. The day to day disparagement they encountered showed no sign of abating after six years."

One former faculty member said Amherst has "a diminishing environment compounded or prejudice against pedagogical nurturance and disapproval of those women who become overworked in trying to respond to a largely un nurtured student population."

It is difficult to determine how many of the problems discussed are Amherst based, and how many are simply problems faced by women throughout society. However, the report makes it undeniable that the small community of Amherst which holds closeness and welcoming as ideals can be inaccessible and uncomfortable from the outside.

"An insider/outside psychology seems to prevail even at the senior level, putting both sides on the defensive. It is perhaps due to this psychology that attempts to make room for a greater range of voices are treated by some as attacks upon the very foundations of the institution," said the report.

Says President Pouncey, "It's an interesting thing what size and locality can produce. To be small, isolated, claustrophobic can produce greater paranoia and can produce greater care. The goal should be to reduce the paranoia and increase the care."

Nevertheless, the report is a first and positive step, according to both Pouncey and Sofield. "I think the mere fact of the report will inspire more courses and consideration in this area," said Pouncey. "The fact of the report has already stimulated reflection that will be exciting in curricular terms."

Says Sofield about the effect of the report: "Things will get better—some."

Three copies of the report have been put on reserve in Frost library.

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