



A Presentation by

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The University of Michigan

# Women's Issues: An Agenda For Action

Center for the  
Education of Women  
The University of Michigan  
March 28, 1989



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## Introduction

It is a pleasure to be here this afternoon to talk about the further advancement of women at the University of Michigan. I particularly want to thank Carol Hollenshead, Director of CEW, for convening this meeting and for her valued service to the University in taking the leadership on women's issues for many years now, even during her days as an undergraduate. As we all know, Carol is but one of a long line of women leaders who have pulled, pushed, and sometimes dragged this University along the path to equality for women in life and leadership of the University.

Of course we all know too well that we are still a long way from our final destination of equality. But it is important that we acknowledge a debt of gratitude to those many women whose efforts have brought us this far along the road, as well as to those of you with us today who, I gratefully acknowledge, are helping to guide us the rest of the way to our destination. But before I talk specifically about where we are trying to go, it is fitting that I make a few comments about where we have been.

## The Past

This is Women's History Month. Hence it is appropriate that we pause for a moment and reflect on the history of women at the University of Michigan to honor them and to learn from the example they provide for us today. An excellent summary of this effort is the important work of the late Dorothy Gies McGuigan, "The Dangerous Experiment," published by CEW in 1970, in commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the admission of women to the University. I have drawn heavily from this important work, which chronicles women's participation in the life of the University. It is a history largely ignored by the male historians who came before her.

Women themselves have consistently and persistently been the leaders in the long struggle at the University to achieve equality for women, to recognize women's contributions, and to foster an environment in which women can succeed. From the time in 1858 when Sarah Burger first applied for admission to the University to the present, women from the University and the community have dedicated untold effort, overcome formidable barriers, and endured considerable hardship and sacrifice to make the University a better, more fair, more intellectually challenging, and a more diverse and enriching place for us all.

Three women made history in 1858, creating great controversy when they submitted their applications for admission to the University. After heated debate on the topic, the University denied them admission, and this stance was not reversed until after the Civil War. Finally, in 1867, the State Legislature declared, "The high objects for which the University of Michigan was organized will never be fully attained until women are admitted to all its rights and privileges."

Three years after this declaration, in 1870, Madelon Stockwell became the first woman to enter the University. Many followed in her pioneering footsteps. Women's enrollments increased steadily until 1930 when they peaked at thirty-seven percent. The 1940s and 1950s witnessed stagnation and then decline, and by 1950 women represented only thirty-two percent of the student body. Fortunately, we made much progress in reversing this trend over the past several decades, and today the total women's enrollment stands at forty-four percent on the Ann Arbor campus.

Since the 1960s, there has been an intensified commitment by and on behalf of women that continues to this day. Spurred on by the efforts of many women in the audience

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this afternoon and many others well known to us, the University led the way in a number of important initiatives:

- Creating the Center for Continuing Education for Women in 1964;
- Establishing the Commission for Women in 1971;
- Establishing the Women's Studies program in 1972;
- Implementing the sexual harassment policy and the "Tell Someone" program in 1980;
- Initiating the Women in Science Program in 1980;
- Creating the Sexual Assault Prevention and Awareness program in 1986.

## The Good News and the Bad News

The University has made real progress on a number of fronts.

- As I have already noted, nearly 120 years after the first women were enrolled in the University, nearly half (forty-eight percent) of Michigan's undergraduates are women.
- In the last decade, we have seen many more women at middle and upper management and administrative levels.
- In fact, just last week, I announced the appointment of two women to senior positions in the University administration: Elsa Cole as General

Counsel and Zaida Giraldo as Director of Affirmative Action. Both are outstanding additions to the University team.

- I believe we have improved access for women to the full range of educational programs and have achieved greater equity in pay and fringe benefits for faculty and staff.

But, we all know that not all the news is good, by any means. This is particularly true in faculty hiring and retention where, despite increasing pools in many fields, the number of new hires of women has barely held steady, much less increased. In addition, along with other universities and, indeed, our society, we still suffer from the well-recognized problem of "the higher, the fewer." Overall, it appears that we have not made much progress in total numbers of women faculty over the past decade, and in some scientific disciplines the shortages are particularly acute—although I should note we are not alone in this failure. It is lamentably a common failure of higher education.

## The Need for New Agenda

In its report, the New Agenda of Women in Higher Education of the American Council on Education called on leaders of the nation's institutions of higher education to make a commitment to understanding and addressing the concerns of women and to implementing new agendas. They pointed out that the president of the institution plays a critical role in assuring that institutional change occurs.

I accept this responsibility and this challenge, and I am here this afternoon to publicly declare my commitment to a new agenda of women's issues for the University of Michigan.

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## The Reasons for a New Commitment

My reasons for this commitment are many. Of course, fundamentally, it is based on principle. The equal representation of women is a matter of justice and democratic rights, too long deferred and too often denied.

But I am also a colleague, a husband, a father, and a friend to many women, and they have helped me see and understand the barriers—large and small—that continue to prevent women from achieving their full potential and contributing their great talents and leadership, not just to the University, but to our society. The cost to women—and to the rest of us—is high. We need your talents, perspectives and experiences, and your leadership representing more than half of the human race!

This brings me to another and more pragmatic reason for my commitment to women's equity issues. This is that our country, if it is to thrive in the next century, must call on the talents of all our people. As some of you may be aware, for the past several years I have served as chair or vice-chair of one of the two standing bodies of the National Science Board that are concerned with Education and Human Resources. It has become painfully apparent that the underrepresentation of women in many fields of science and engineering seriously threatens this nation's security and well-being. As we move into an era of increasing diversity where knowledge is ever more important to our society and to the world, we simply cannot ignore talents represented by over one-half of the population. Bringing women into full partnership in academia is a national imperative. Given the impending shortages of faculty, of scientists, and of educated professionals in many fields, it is clear that women's contributions will be increasingly critical to higher

education and to the public and private sectors of our economy and social life.

I suspect most of you are aware that, during the 1990s, almost two-thirds of the new workers entering the job force will be women. Indeed, white, native-born men will comprise less than fifteen percent of the new workers. This will be occurring at a time when the decline in the number of young adults, as we slide down the backside of the post-war baby boom, will trigger serious shortages of young adults entering key knowledge-intensive fields such as science and engineering. Indeed, the National Science Board has recently concluded that the only way that we can stave off the pending shortage, now estimated to be almost one million scientists and engineers by the early twenty-first century, will be a massive effort to attract more women and minorities into these fields. I might add that Provost Vest and I have already met with the University's Science Development Council to launch major discussions and initiatives eventually meant to address this pending crisis on our own campus.

But this is not the only reason we must seek women's equality at Michigan. I am convinced that we also must commit ourselves to women's equity because it is fundamental to our teaching and research mission. The scholarly contributions of women strengthen and invigorate our intellectual climate and academic standing in many ways, as we have seen in the case of Women's Studies. The research and teaching in this burgeoning field has brought important new perspectives, vitality, and theoretical interpretations to scholarship and teaching in many disciplines.

## The Task Ahead

But I don't really have to persuade you that our reasons for committing ourselves to

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women's issues are sound. The fact is that I have learned much of what I understand and know about this rationale from you and from other women. And I confess I am still learning. But I already do understand that addressing the women's agenda is a compelling necessity both for this University and for this nation.

It was last October that campus and community women's organizations honored me with an event and a reception as part of my inauguration as President. I pledged then that I would work with you to advance women's interests at the University. Of course, we face many of the same challenges in achieving equity for women that stimulated our development of the Michigan Mandate. For example, while well-intentioned, many of our present efforts are:

- ad hoc;
- lacking in coherence;
- too independent of one another;
- lacking precise strategy and goals;
- providing no assurance that we will actually get where we want to go.

Hence I am convinced, as I was with the Michigan Mandate, that we need both a commitment and a plan with:

- shared operational goals;
- programs testable against these goals;
- a program that provides confidence that we will succeed.

To this end, I have already taken what I believe are some important steps.

## The President's Commission on Women's Issues

To begin to make good on my pledge, I asked Carol Hollenshead to chair an ad hoc women's leadership group to identify key women's issues and to make some preliminary recommendations for addressing them. That ad hoc group has worked hard throughout the year, and its excellent report was presented to me and the other members of the administration at the end of December. Subsequently Provost Vest and I have met with the ad hoc group, discussed and reviewed their report and recommendations, and we are beginning to take action in response to them.

It was the ad hoc group's strong recommendation that we give high priority to women's issues in the University's agenda for the future and that they be addressed at all levels of the University's strategic planning and in policy documents and statements. We agree to this essential commitment. It is my purpose here today to make this public policy commitment for my administration.

The next action recommended by the committee was the appointment of a new women's commission. This is also in keeping with the ACE recommendations. I agree and therefore I have asked members of the ad hoc group to serve on a newly constituted President's Advisory Commission on Women's Issues, along with several additional students, faculty, and staff. The Commission is charged to:

- Assist the President in incorporating women's issues and goals in the University's strategic planning activities;
- Monitor national educational and social trends affecting women in higher education;

- Advise the president on matters of interest and concern to women with particular attention to access, success, and equity;
- Inquire into the status of women at the University and recommend actions to help insure full representation at all levels of the faculty, staff, and student body;
- Advise the president about University policies, procedures, programs, and practices that affect women of the community and recommend improvements as needed.

I have every confidence that this Presidential Commission will make a significant contribution to progress towards greater equity for women, in part because of my confidence in its membership and its leadership. My confidence is also due to the fact that this new Commission is modeled on the Commission for Women, appointed by President Fleming in 1971, that was so powerful a force for women's advancement in the University in the 1970s. That Commission's goal was to "ensure the fair and equitable treatment of women at the University." Its work led to salary increases for many women, a system of job posting, greater equity in fringe benefits, establishment of grievance procedures, increased hiring of women in non-traditional jobs, and many other gains. We will look to the Commission for advice and counsel in our strategic planning and as we work with our community for the full and equal participation of women in the life and leadership of the University.

I hope and expect that the new Commission will help the University enter the new century with its promises for women's equality fulfilled at last.

## The Challenges Ahead

Let me point to a few of the challenges ahead of us as outlined in the report of the ad hoc committee, and also indicate some of our early steps to meet them:

### 1. Faculty Hiring

Without question the greatest challenge before the University is to increase the number of women on our faculty at all levels and to help them advance and succeed in their academic careers. As I said earlier, women faculty at our institution are still an unjustifiably small minority, and the number of women of color on the faculty is an even more acute problem. Increasing the numbers of women faculty must be given a very high institutional priority.

The statistics reveal the challenge before us. Last year there was actually a one percent decline in the number of women assistant professors. Further, the problem of "the higher, the fewer" does not appear to be getting any better. This year about twenty-eight percent of assistant professors are women, nineteen percent of associate professors, and only eight percent of full professors. And of course, there is great disparity among fields, with women in some of the scientific disciplines a distinct rarity. Given the increasing numbers of women with excellent academic preparation, there is simply no excuse for not making significant progress in faculty recruitment.

We must not only succeed at recruiting and hiring women faculty at all levels, but we have to work harder to ensure their successful advancement. One of the barriers to academic success may be the extra demands on women both academically and personally related. To help ease the pressure, faculty are being asked by the Provost's Office to develop proposals for programs that will address the competing

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demands of family responsibilities with those of becoming productive scholars of the first rank. The faculty response will form the basis for the new support programs and policy adjustments. In addition, Provost Vest is now exploring effective mechanisms to improve the recruitment of women to the faculty in fields where they are seriously underrepresented.

## 2. Dependent Care

Another institutional priority for action recommended by the ad hoc committee and the Dependent Care Task Force is the need to address issues of dependent care. If we want to be competitive, attract women, and support their personal and professional advancement, we must meet the need for more responsive dependent-care policies and services.

A family care program is being announced by the Provost and the VP/CFO. It will, among other things:

- Establish a general policy disposition to promote flexible work arrangements for faculty and staff with family care responsibilities;
- Explore financing family care as one of the benefits to be considered as the University continues its investigation of a flexible benefits program;
- Change University policies with respect to time off for dependent-care responsibilities for office, primary, allied health, technical, and P/A staff, effective this September, so that these staff may use some of their paid time-off benefits to care for incapacitated, ill, or injured family members;
- Establish a Family Care Resources Program to facilitate informed choices by faculty and staff about family care.

New resources will flow to this program to:

- Stimulate family care placements that meet quality standards;
- Implement a resource and referral system;
- Develop criteria for quality family care;
- Develop educational programs to providers to improve the quality of care;
- Provide information and educational programs for faculty and staff to address questions and concerns about family care;
- Serve as a clearing house for operating units to consider on-site child care to meet unique needs of their faculty and staff not met by existing community resources.

The Family Care Resources program will operate as part of the Personnel Office. A ten-member advisory committee will be appointed jointly by the Provost and the Chief Financial Officer to provide general oversight, to assess changing family care needs, and to recommend ways to address those needs.

### 3. Students

Although women account for forty-eight percent of the UMAA undergraduate enrollment, they account for only one-third of those in our graduate and professional schools. This fact should concern us because it means that women are not obtaining the advanced levels of training increasingly necessary for high level jobs. It should also concern us because it means that we are not attracting enough women to academic careers with the risk that the

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professorate of the twenty-first century will be little more representative than it is today. This situation is particularly bleak in scientific fields. The University needs to develop more programs to recruit women, improve their educational preparation, and support their academic success from K-12 through postgraduate education. We need to be more creative in developing educational programs to assist women, and we should not hesitate to borrow from our peers across the country if they have developed effective programs.

Of course, there are also nonacademic factors affecting women's educational achievement. We need more role models and mentors, building women's confidence in their own abilities and improving the classroom climate that all too often is regarded as chilling for women. The ad hoc committee has recommended several constructive steps to address both the academic and nonacademic issues, including more active recruitment of women to graduate and professional schools, mentoring, financial aid, academic support programs for undergraduate women, curriculum enrichment, and continuing efforts to attract and serve non-traditional students. These are all under active consideration.

Further, I might add that I am continuing to work with my colleagues in Washington to develop an array of new federal programs for FY91 to address these same concerns.

#### **4. Safe Environment**

We need to improve the University environment to better support and sustain all of its women members. We cannot tolerate discrimination or sexual harassment. And this is a good opportunity for me to express my own sense of personal outrage about recent incidents of harassment on the campus. I am appalled by such behavior. It has no place in a civilized community and cannot be countenanced here. I

believe that the University's complaint mechanism has led to sanctions for the perpetrators. But sanctions after the fact are not as good as preventing harassment in the first place. I believe the Sexual Assault Prevention Center is providing real leadership in prevention through education—not just on our own campus, but nationally as well.

We must also continue to strengthen our efforts to assure a safe environment in which women can learn and work. To address campus safety issues and concerns, a university-wide task force has been convened by Provost Vest and CFO Womack, with Dean Paul Boylan serving as chair. I hope to have a report and recommendations for action from the group by fall and ask that those of you here will assist the task force in identifying safety problems and recommending solutions.

## 5. Women of Color

We all know that women of color face the double jeopardy of racial and gender discrimination. We have lost ground on this issue and therefore we must now pay special attention to hiring and advancing faculty women of color. Recruitment of minority women is an integral part of the Michigan Mandate, but we may need to fine-tune some of our programs to focus on women of color.

I can report that one-third of the nineteen Target-of-Opportunity minority faculty hires last year were women, and this year three of the seven offers accepted thus far are by women. But clearly over the last ten years, we have lost ground for women of color in tenured and tenure-track positions, especially in LS&A. Too often, too, we have seen a revolving door for women faculty, and this has been a particularly acute problem for minority women. A new minority faculty support program in Rackham will, I hope, help minority women faculty advance and succeed in their fields.

## 6. Gay Rights

In a similar manner, gay women in our community also face unusual challenges because of possible dual discrimination. It is appropriate, in view of the fact that this is Gay Pride Week, that I also state the importance in this set of initiatives that we address the particular concern that lesbians face as students, faculty, and staff.

## 7. Staff Issues

Staff issues are women's issues by definition, for over sixty percent of the UM staff are women. While staff are the backbone of the University, all too often staff contributions go unrecognized. In keeping with the recommendations of the ad hoc committee, the University plans to develop new ways to recognize these contributions.

Moreover, there is a need to develop more and better avenues for staff development and advancement. Staff members have to be able to grow and improve their skills and to prepare themselves for new challenges of leadership as the University evolves in the decades ahead. On a campus as large and decentralized as ours and in a time of limited resources, this is not an easy issue to address. Nevertheless, it is critical to our future, and we are grappling now with the new approaches to staff organization and advancement. I will ask the new Women's Commission to help us on this front as well.

We are working on more specific recommendations from the ad hoc group report. I won't go into all of the details now, but I think the main point is that the University is taking seriously women's needs and concerns, and we are taking steps to address them.

## Accountability

A key to our ultimate success, I believe, is accountability, and I think it is appropriate for me to accept the ultimate responsibility for achieving our goals. As we fully integrate the women's agenda into our overall strategic planning, line responsibilities will be assigned. I feel quite certain that the Women's Commission will play a very key role in this accountability process.

## An Expanded Role for CEW

It seems to me that the University needs an organizational focal point for women's educational issues and programs. Given its demonstrated success and leadership, it seems logical that CEW should be encouraged to expand its purview to include a broader array of programs and services relating to women in the educational pipeline.

- Increasingly we understand that education is a continuum and that the University must concern itself with lifelong education if it is to succeed in its mission. I would expect CEW and its Women in Science program to broaden its programs to serve women from schools through continuing education as well as serving returning students.
- It would also be helpful to have CEW serve as a clearinghouse for internal and external information about how to improve women's education.
- CEW will support the work of the Women's Commission in providing policy advice to the President.
- CEW should expand its efforts to provide advisory and consulting

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services to academic and administrative units on how to improve women's access and success in education.

It follows that CEW will require additional resources to carry out these assignments.

## Concluding Remarks

Let me stress that this is only a beginning. We must work together for improvements in the future. I admire, respect, and am grateful for the efforts of the many women who have helped us build one of the world's great centers of learning. I commend those of you who inherit their tradition of leadership. I pledge to work with you in the months and years ahead to achieve our common goals for equity for women in all areas of University life.

