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More Women for Higher Education

The slowness of many colleges and universities in supplementing their predominantly white, male professional staffs with proportionate numbers of women and members of minority groups is a major force behind the issuance of new, detailed guidelines from the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare's Office of Civil Rights for recruiting, hiring, and promoting qualified persons. In some instances, the delay has been rooted in the inability of frustrated administrators to determine appropriate proportions or to locate qualified applicants. These stumbling blocks do exist in recruiting from minority groups, but they should not be a problem in finding qualified women.

The first step is to understand and eliminate past discriminatory practices. In addition to stricter requirements for admission and less government support for women in graduate study, many who attained advanced degrees were restricted by reverse nepotism. Once hired, women faculty received less research support, lower salaries across all ranks, and slower promotions than their male cohorts. Few schools have accommodated to the needs of women with families.

The second step, affirmative action, begins with a statement of reasonable numerical or percentage goals. The proportion of all research doctorates conferred on women (perhaps the best measure now available in determining realistic goals) has averaged 12.2 percent since 1920 and has risen substantially in the past 5 years. However, there is wide variation within fields. Since about 91 percent of women doctorates are now in the labor force, persons earning Ph.D.'s since 1939 provide a base for a present pool. Sex proportions are available by subfield in the doctorate record file maintained by the National Research Council, and some general breakdowns by field may be useful. In the physical sciences, 4.6 percent of the Ph.D.'s granted since 1939 were conferred on women. The proportion in the life sciences is 11.4 percent; in the social sciences, 14 percent; in the arts and humanities, 15.5 percent; in engineering, 0.5 percent; in education, 20 percent; in professional fields, 11.4 percent; and in all fields combined, 11.9 percent. Since within the doctorate population a higher proportion of women than men seek academic employment, somewhat higher proportions of women may be realistic goals.

The final step is to locate available, qualified women. Every recent survey of involuntary unemployment among professionals has found unemployment rates to be two to three times as high among women as among men. While married women are less mobile than men, eliminating reverse nepotism will allow many women to accept local opportunities.

More than 35 professional societies have internal groups concerned with the status of women, and many have rosters that may be used to find qualified applicants. An extensive listing of women seeking employment in higher education is available through the Cooperative College Registry in Washington, D.C.

Upgrading the rank and salary of women already employed to match their male cohorts requires no outside assistance.

Present law makes inevitable the ultimate acceptance of qualified and capable women on an equal basis with men in institutions of higher education. Only the time lag remains uncertain. While a reluctant few individuals may have to be forced to comply with regulations, most thoughtful administrators will welcome the infusion of talent and dedication from this underutilized resource pool.—BETTY M. VETTER, *Executive Director, Scientific Manpower Commission, 2101 Constitution Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C. 20418*