

Gender Equity and Faculty Diversity Work

In 1995 Nancy Hopkins chaired a Committee on Women Faculty in the School of Science at MIT that documented that some of the tenured women faculty in the School had been the object of a subtle form of gender bias. This bias manifested itself in the gradual marginalization of women faculty as they progressed through their careers. Marginalization was often accompanied by the women receiving less space and fewer resources for research, and lower salaries, and in their having little or no role in the important decision-making processes within their departments or the Institute. The Committee reported their findings to the Dean of Science, Robert J. Birgeneau, who corrected the documented inequities. Efforts by the Dean also led to a 40% increase in the number of women faculty in Science. In 1995 there were 15 tenured women vs 194 tenured men in the School of Science and these numbers had remained essentially unchanged for the previous 10-20 years.

In March 1999 a summary of these findings was published in the MIT Faculty News Letter and released on the web. This report was accompanied by comments from MIT President Vest, Dean Birgeneau, and Professor Lotte Bailyn, Chair of the MIT faculty, commending the study. The release of the report received front-page coverage in the Boston Globe and the NYTimes. As a result, President Vest, Dean Birgeneau, Professor Bailyn and Professors Hopkins and Potter, first and second chairs of the Committee on Women Faculty in Science, received an overwhelming e-mail response which suggested that gender bias is widespread in the academy and possibly also in medicine, law, business, and other work settings. As Chair of the Committee on Women Faculty in Science, Hopkins attended an event at the White House where President and Mrs. Clinton and the Secretary of Labor expressed their hopes that MIT's handling of gender discrimination could serve as a model for other institutions in the country.

In January 2001, MIT hosted a conference of Presidents of nine research Universities to discuss gender equity. This conference issued a statement of commitment to address this issue at all nine campuses. MIT established gender equity committees in all five of its own Schools to monitor equity issues on an ongoing basis. These committees issued reports in March 2002 and continue to monitor salaries. In addition, President Vest and Provost Robert A. Brown established a Council on Faculty Diversity to examine hiring policies, pipeline issues, and quality of life issues for all faculty. The Council has issued new policies for family leaves for junior and senior faculty, issued new School policies to ensure the breadth of faculty searches and prepared a handbook of hiring guidelines. In addition, MIT has aggressively recruited women to administrative positions in the Schools of Science and Engineering. As Co-Chair of the Council on Faculty Diversity with Provost Brown, Professor Hopkins was appointed to the Academic Council, including the Dean's subgroup and the appointments committee. Hopkins has traveled widely to discuss gender equity issues at many other universities.