

Princeton Study Strikes Sad But Familiar Chord

Women scientists at Princeton University are far more dissatisfied with their jobs than men are, and nearly a quarter complain about inappropriate behavior by colleagues. Those findings are part of a new report by an 11-member faculty panel that parallels a groundbreaking 1999 study at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) (*Science*, 12 November 1999, p. 1272) and provides more evidence of the academic barriers facing women scientists and engineers.

Released this week, the Princeton study was commissioned 2 years ago by molecular biologist Shirley Tilghman shortly after she became president. Although Tilghman agreed with the report's suggestion to name a special assistant for gender-equity issues, she is balking at a proposal for \$10 million to promote hiring and retention of women scientists and engineers because of budget constraints and concerns about its legality, according to university officials.

The panel, led by molecular biologist Virginia Zakian, found both good and bad news in its examination of 14 departments of natural sciences and engineering. On the one hand, the percentage of tenured women has more than doubled in the past decade to 13%, and it tops 20% in two departments—ecology and evolutionary biology, and psychology. But progress has been wildly uneven, the report states, and “the overall percentages of women continue to be quite low.” How low is demonstrated by the fact that Tilghman's rise to the presidency—which removed her from the faculty rolls—was a noticeable factor in reducing the percentage of faculty women in molecular biology from 30% to 19%.

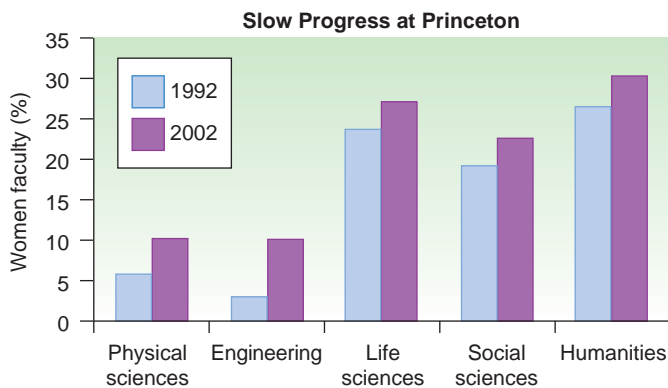
The panel didn't find significant gender differences on important yardsticks such as tenure rates and salaries, and workloads and university-level assignments seem to be gender-neutral. Yet only 39% of women said they were very satisfied with their jobs, compared with 63% of the men. And whereas no men reported being very dissatisfied with their work, 7% of women said they are.

Nearly a quarter of women said their colleagues engaged occasionally or frequently

in “unprofessional” behavior and excluded women from professional activities. Zakian predicts that dissatisfaction and such behavior likely will decrease as more women are hired. “Many of these climate issues will change with more women faculty,” she says.

However, the department is the place where change must come, says the panel, which included two men. There's a long way to go: Only two of 14 departments have had women chairs, and women are less involved in department work than their male colleagues. Even so, the panel stopped short of recommending specific targets, Zakian says, because “each one is a different story—there is no one-size-fits-all goal.”

Tilghman praised the panel's work as “one of the most thorough analyses to date” on the topic. She added that she “intends to



make resources available to meet the recommendations of the task force,” adding that no final decision has been made on the \$10 million fund. But last week she privately told panel members that legal and budgetary issues make the fund problematic. “I'm disappointed,” says one. But she and other women faculty members said they are confident that the administration remains committed to hiring and retaining women.

The president did name psychologist Joan Girus as special assistant to the dean of faculty on gender issues. “I'm optimistic, but it's a very difficult situation,” says Girus, who says she hopes to speak with every department chair. Nancy Hopkins, the MIT biologist who headed that university's study on women, called the Princeton report superb. “I suspect that most universities willing to be as honest as Princeton would make very similar findings,” she added. The presidents of nine major U.S. research universities hope to meet next spring at MIT to discuss the matter.

—ANDREW LAWLER

Budget Battle Drags On, And the News Isn't Good

U.S. science agencies still don't know their budgets for the 2004 fiscal year that started this week. But several recent decisions have left science advocates feeling grim. Late last month, lawmakers put the finishing touches on a \$368 billion defense bill that holds the Pentagon's basic research budget—a major source of university grants in math, computer science, and engineering—flat at \$1.4 billion. Applied studies would grow by 4.7% to \$4.5 billion.

Meanwhile, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Space Environment Center in Boulder, Colorado, is facing some heavy weather. A Senate spending panel last week zeroed out the White House's entire \$8.3 million request for the center, which monitors the sun to warn satellite and electric-grid operators of potentially dangerous flares and other space weather. It follows a vote by the House of Representatives to cut the agency's request by one-third. The two bodies will decide on a final number later this fall.

—ANDREW LAWLER AND DAVID MALAKOFF

BU, Galveston Win Big in Biosafety Building Boom

The last prizes have been claimed in the race to get in on the biodefense research building boom sponsored by the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. Winning the two biggest construction grants—a whopping \$120 million each—are Boston University and the University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston, Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson announced this week. The money will build national biocontainment laboratories as secure as biosafety level 4, which can contain the most dangerous pathogens. The labs will be used to study bugs that could be used as weapons and to design vaccines and treatments.

In addition, nine institutions will receive grants of \$7 million to \$21 million to build regional labs at biosafety level 2 and 3—including Duke University and the University of Chicago, which are also among eight new regional biodefense research centers that were announced last month (*Science*, 12 September, p. 1450). Galveston also won one of those awards, making it the top winner in the biodefense sweepstakes.

—JOCELYN KAISER