

Scaling the Ivory Tower: Career Advancement Strategies for University Women

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Introduction

In the abstract to this paper I have used the imagery of women in academia looking upwards at the kings and princes who occupy the upper chambers of the ivory tower. Women in academia are not only more likely to be in lower positions looking upwards, they may also feel they are outside ramparts looking inwards.

The 2002 Department of Labour report on pay inequality in the New Zealand workforce estimated that gender pay gap could be explained by educational qualifications, years in the workforce, gender discrimination, and the occupation and industries in which men and women worked.

The proposition I am presenting is that for university women, pay equity depends on getting women inside the walls and up to the top of the tower. This paper will present contextual issues and describe advancement strategies that The University of Auckland has devised to assist in achieving equity for women staff. I will also refer to some innovative strategies from Australian and American Universities.

The career paths of academic and general staff ¹have some distinct characteristics and will be addressed separately.

Academic Women

Women make up 37% of academic staff. At each academic grade men and women have reasonable salary parity but women constitute 55% of the lower paid part-time workforce of tutors, assistant lecturers and teaching assistants and only 18% of professors and associate professors (see Table 1 - 54% of senior tutors, 45% of lecturers and 34% of senior lecturers are women).

Māori women form a slight majority of 55% of Māori academic staff. Acknowledging statistical distortions when dealing with smaller numbers, out of 63 Māori academic staff, women constitute one in three professors, and associate professors, 60% of senior lecturers (8 out of 13), 68% of lecturers (15 out of 22) , 50% tutors, assistant lecturers and teaching assistant (5 out of 10).

¹General staff refers to employees who are not employed in teaching and research positions. Their roles are broad and include administrative, management, technical and service positions.

TABLE 1. Male and Female FTE Academics, July 2003*

| | 2003 | | |
|------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------|
| | Male | Female | Total |
| Professor | 148.9 82% | 32.5 18% | 181.4 |
| Associate Professor | 168.6 82% | 37.2 18% | 205.8 |
| Senior Lecturer | 310.1 66% | 158.7 34% | 468.8 |
| Research Fellow (snr) | 19.8 69% | 9.0 31% | 28.8 |
| Lecturer | 147.2 55% | 122.5 45% | 269.6 |
| Research Fellow | 70.2 56% | 56.3 44% | 126.4 |
| Senior Tutor | 76.4 46% | 91.3 54% | 167.7 |
| LTT/AL/TA | 56.6 45% | 70.1 55% | 126.7 |
| Total | 1,036.3 63% | 611.3 37% | 1,647.6 |

Source: Human Resources EEO Report The University of Auckland 2003, Contracted Academic Staff. (This table excludes casual staff)

Methods of data collection and reporting have been refined over the last decade. The table below does not include research fellows or grades below lecturer and so does not represent the full compliment of academic staff but it does indicate that the percentage of women academics has risen significantly since 1990 when EEO monitoring began.

TABLE 2. Male and Female Academics, 1990

| | 1990 | | |
|----------------------------|--------------|-------------|------------|
| | Male | Female | Total |
| Professor | 95 95% | 5 5% | 100 |
| Associate Professor | 102 91% | 10 9% | 112 |
| Senior Lecturer | 301 86.5% | 47 13.5% | 348 |
| Lecturer | 115 59% | 80 41% | 195 |
| Total | 613 89% | 142 19% | 755 |

Source: Annual EO Report The University of Auckland 2000 – extract Report to the Ministry of Education 1990

General staff women

General staff women outnumber men. They hold 48% of the senior management positions. This is lower than their overall representation (10% of general staff women hold senior positions as compared with 15% of general staff men). A high proportion of women are employed in the University library and slightly over half of all senior general staff women are librarians (14% of women general staff are librarians but 28% of senior general staff women are librarians).

General staff women experience some of the same obstacles to advancement as their academic colleagues but they do not have automatic incremental progression or promotion opportunities. It would not be unreasonable for a lecturer to expect that, in time, they would move up the promotional grades to a senior academic rank. General staff who begin at the lower levels with aspirations for senior roles would need to move around a variety of positions, possibly gain experience outside the institution, and achieve additional qualifications.

TABLE 3. Male and Female General Staff by Level, July 2003

| Level | 2003 | | |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|---------------|
| | Male | Female | Total |
| 9/Exec* | 16.7 75% | 5.6 25% | 22.3 |
| 8 | 9.0 50% | 8.9 50% | 17.9 |
| 7 | 11.8 40% | 17.5 60% | 29.3 |
| 6 | 71.3 51% | 67.7 49% | 139.0 |
| 5 | 138.7 53% | 124.7 47% | 263.4 |
| 4 | 177.5 40% | 268.5 60% | 446.0 |
| 3 | 70.0 28% | 181.8 72% | 251.8 |
| 2 | 44.2 19% | 187.5 81% | 231.7 |
| 1 | 3.3 31% | 7.5 69% | 10.8 |
| Other/ Ancillary | 59.5 65% | 32.4 35% | 91.9 |
| Total | 602.0 40% | 902.1 60% | 1504.1 |

Sources: Human Resources EEO Reports The University of Auckland Contracted General Staff 2003 (*This table excludes casual staff*).

Reasons for the disparity between men and men's positions.

1. External societal conditions have meant that traditionally women have been less likely to hold senior positions or pursue long-term careers. Progression to seniority in academia can be a lengthy process and as there have been fewer women career academics, there is a corresponding time lag in increasing numbers of senior academic women. The disparity is reducing and between 1990 and 2000 the percentage of lecturers has remained similar but the percentage of women senior lecturers have more than doubled, associate professors have doubled and the percentage of professors has trebled (see Table 2).

2. Masculine cultures can make working environments unattractive to women.

“The few women that make it in masculine areas struggle against very entrenched masculinised cultures, and stay at the bottom. Look at the ranks of senior lawyers and medicos. Despite the numbers taking undergraduate degrees, and for some time, women are not there in the senior ranks or even on the way up.” Eva Cox

[A scientist remarked to me that as a PhD student she had to adjust to a very abrasive behavioural style of her senior academics. Her supervisor warned her that she should not “get girly” and take offence].

3. Women may not share the same valuable informal networking or information sources as their male colleagues. Family responsibilities can be a barrier to social activities like after work drinks. [In one department women staff felt they missed out on important career related and professional discussions that took place after work over drinks and so they initiated informal day-time social activities like department lunches to keep the communication flow inclusive].

4. Some women may lack behavioural characteristics, such as high self-esteem, self-assertion, risk taking, and resilience to rejection, which would advantage them in a competitive employment setting.

5. “Homosocial reproduction” can result in systemic discrimination if the performance appraisal and appointment criteria are narrow and only reflect the skills and aptitude of those people who already hold senior and decision-making roles.

Kingsmill Review on Women and Pay Equity 2003 identified the pay gap in the UK is a result of the poor management of people and made strong recommendation for equitable employment processes for all workers through sound performance appraisal systems.

7. Family responsibilities can be a barrier to advancement – some of the issues raised in surveys have included:

- Time taken out of academic careers for child rearing;
- Physical exhaustion;

- Inability to compete with lengthy hours worked by childless staff;
- Barriers to taking expansive research and study leave;
- Dual career marriage inhibiting opportunities.

Strategies for advancement

Strategies for overcoming these barriers have included:

- Providing training to ensure decision-making is fair and impartial;
- Increasing external recruitment of women in senior positions;
- Ensuring the promotions process is effective and accessible;
- Promoting internal career development for general staff women;
- Providing effective mentoring, training and support for women;
- Implementing Work, Life and Family provisions;
- Monitoring processes to ensure bias is eliminated and equity policy is implemented.

The paper describes initiatives for advancement including the University's Women in Leadership programme, the Promotion Policy, a website for General Staff Career Development, Work Life and Family opportunities, and an advertising strategy to attract senior women general staff. These are not 'affirmative action' strategies in the nature of the University of Wisconsin's pay equity reforms (see appendix I).

1. Women in Leadership Programmes

The Centre for Professional Development provides opportunities for academic and general women staff to develop the skills of leadership, and to increase the representation of women in identifiable leadership positions within the University. While individual career advancement is a benefit of the programme, the overarching goal is for institutional culture change.²

'Leadership' is broadly defined within the programmes and encompasses a range of models. There is an emphasis on women taking responsibility for their own advancement and a belief that academic and general staff women benefit from joint participation

The programme has been launched and consistently promoted by the most senior staff which has given it a high profile and removed any association with a 'remedial' or 'deficit' model.

One programme caters for one or two mixed groups of around 20 selected academic and general staff who participate in a range of activities for a period of one year. Ideally these women should be at a point in their career where they are looking at taking on increased responsibilities or applying for promotion. They will be above the position of tutor and below the level of associate professor.

² The programme was based on a model from the University of Western Australia and their convener, Jennifer de Vrie, provided advice and gave support in establishing The University of Auckland programme.

There is also a more flexible programme open to all women who have positions of responsibility and/or hold senior positions (either senior management or associate professor and above). As the women in this category already occupy leadership roles their goals are more tuned towards enhanced skills than advancement. Their priorities are developing a collegial base to work from, increasing institutional knowledge and skills, and a being able to carry out their roles and responsibilities more effectively.

General Activities

- An off-campus overnight introductory retreat for the women to get to know each other and set their goals for the programme and for the mentoring relationship;
- Mentoring by a senior staff person;
- A reading group to discuss current research relating to gender and leadership theory;
- Relevant seminars and workshops (offered both within the group and to the wider University community) some focusing on specialised topics to meet specific goals of the women such as confidence building, assertion and negotiation skills;
- Informal forums for senior women on current organisational issues;
- Social and networking opportunities;
- Guest speakers (open to all University women to attend);

(The senior women's programme does not include the first three activities)

Outcomes for Participants

- Enhanced skills and strategies to contribute more fully as leaders in the organisation;
- Access to a women's peer support network and introduction to senior women;
- Increased awareness of the University's structures and systems and recognising aspects that may hinder women's career progression;
- Increased awareness of the need to be more active in establishing career goals;
- Increased confidence in their job role or place in their department; and in expressing their views and opinions in a public forum such as meetings and committees;
- Increased application and success rate in academic promotion.

A third informal network for Early Career Academic Women ECAW is supported by the Centre for Professional Development but convened by volunteers. That group caters mainly for women holding their first academic position, often temporary or part-time tutoring, and post-doctoral research positions.

2. Promotions Policy

One strategy to increase the numbers of women in senior academic positions has been to eliminate structural gender bias in the promotions policy.

In 1997 a Review of Promotions at the University of Auckland analysed past, present and international trends in academic promotions.

The Review took into account a commonly held belief that promotions criteria tended to focus on research productivity, to the exclusion of other skills. This had systemically weighted promotions against women who often excelled as teachers, and for various reasons, provided disproportional support and mentoring for students. (Whether or not this was correct it was a disincentive for women to apply for promotion).

A key equity issue which came out of the Review was that

If the areas in which under-represented staff excelled, were rewarded more highly, then there would be a corresponding increase in the proportion of women, Maori and Pacific Islands staff who were promoted.

Accordingly teaching and service contributions were given an equal weighting with research in the senior promotion criteria to adequately reward excellence in teaching, mentoring students, and maintaining bridges between the institution and indigenous communities.

This approach could be consistent with European Court of Justice case law. In 1989 the **Danfoss** decision, which many of you may be aware of, was about merit pay equity (while this is not identical to promotions they both involve performance assessment and financial rewards). The court established the principle that:

“...the quality of work carried out by a worker may not be used as a criterion for pay increments where its application shows itself to be systematically unfavourable to women” (Merit pay, performance appraisal and attitudes to women’s work. The Institute for Employment Studies 1992 Report 234 p5)

It was established that if women on average were on a lower level than men, the burden of proof was put onto the employer to show that their systems of merit-based pay were not discriminatory.

This can be interpreted to mean that the criterion should reflect what women excel at and not merely expect that women should be ‘more like men’ if they wish to succeed.

This policy development was not without controversy among women academics. There was concern that emphasising women’s skills in teaching and service could lead to gender stereotyping of women into minor roles of ‘academic

housework' and student welfare. There were risks in suggesting that aptitude in teaching and mentoring were 'innate skills' in women. [A Māori academic woman commented that her students thought it was acceptable to call her "Auntie" but they would not have called Māori male academics "Uncle"].

Making part-time staff eligible for promotion and staff who did not yet have permanent tenure, was another important provision to support women staff.

Outcomes of Promotions

- Slightly lower percentages of women apply for promotions, but they have a higher success rate than men
- Women's success rate in promotions has increased from 25% of all applicants in 1996 to 48% of all applicants 2003
- In 2003, 88% of all women who applied were successful (as compared with 59% of all men who applied)

Between 1996 and 2003 the percentage of women academics applying for promotion steadily increased from 24% to 38%. In 1996 36% of all women who applied were successful and by 2003 the success rate had risen to 88% of all women applicants.

The lower female application rate is sometimes identified as a 'problem' but it may be quite incorrect to regard the slightly higher male application rate as 'normal' or advantageous. Male academics' tendency for 'premature application' appears to have caused their lower success rate.

It is important to monitor the current process to ensure that rewarding teaching and service should not reduce support for women academics' research.

Women's success in promotions has been attributed to an inclusive criterion, rigorous monitoring, intensive training provided through the Women in Leadership Programme.

3. Work, Life and Family

The University of Auckland has conducted surveys to determine what are the relevant issues for staff with family responsibilities.

- Academic staff members were more likely than general staff to report that they had regular family responsibilities.
- Respondents with higher incomes were more likely to report work-family conflicts, maybe suggesting that more seniority and responsibility means longer work hours.
- More academic staff (almost 40%) reported conflicts than general staff (19%), which may relate to the nature of academic jobs, which often do not conform to fixed hours.
- Māori, Asian and especially Pacific respondents reported the greatest percentages of regular family responsibilities (and conflicts).

- Some academic women reported a severely reduced research capacity while parenting small children.

Some Australian colleagues have developed very exciting initiatives to ensure women careers as researchers are not compromised by time out having children. these strategies could no doubt be modified to suit other organisations.

Monash University

Monash University found that women's career progression was handicapped because their research programmes fell behind when they took maternity leave. As an intervention they introduced the \$15,000 *Populate and Publish Grant*, which can be used to hire a research assistant to ensure research projects continue and to provide supervision for the academic's postgraduate students.

University of New South Wales

The University of New South Wales provides grants of \$10,000 (for any legitimate purpose) to women returning from maternity leave. They can include research assistance, purchase of equipment or consumables, expenses for conferences and courses, or employment of casual teachers to ease the workload.

They also provided scholarships for highly successful post-graduate women students who have left university to care for a child and have not re-enrolled for three years. The aim of the scholarships is to encourage these women to enroll in doctorates and then continue into careers as academics.

4. Advertising for Senior Women

Recruiting senior women is an important way of developing a 'quantum mass' of high ranking women and providing alternatives to masculine leadership cultures.

Anecdotal evidence suggested that few women were applying for positions at the most senior levels such as directors of large units. Solutions were sought through surveying Australasian EEO practitioners in tertiary institutions to collect examples of best practice. Examples they provided included:

- Using visual material in that depicts women in the advertised role;
- Sending individual application invitations to potential candidates who may not be actively seeking a job but may consider a change;
- Referring to flexible policies in advertising and advice to potential applicants;
- Extending searches outside the education sector and into broader public (and private) national women's networks;
- Using EEO Trust logo on all advertisements.

5. General Staff Career Development

As noted earlier in this paper, general staff who aspire to higher positions may seek professional development and apply for more senior positions within the organisation.

The Women in Leadership programme encourages general staff women to plan career development and make use of a Centre for Professional Development website which outlines a wide range of developmental options.

The Centre for Professional Development Web site
<http://www2.auckland.ac.nz/cpd//persprof/careerdev.html>

Suggested activities:

- Internal workshops/ course offerings
- Attendance at external courses or conferences
- Mentoring
- Shadowing
- Job rotation
- Staff exchanges within the wider University, as well as with other tertiary institutions
- Secondments
- Job enrichment (review by the employee and management with a view to changing in the level of responsibility, skill requirements and decision-making involved in the job)
- University study
- University scholarships and awards.

The website also contains a very comprehensive 'self help' guide 'Applying for Internal Positions' <http://www2.auckland.ac.nz/cpd//persprof/careerdev.html#afip> This covers all steps from assessing personal goals to CV writing and 'coping with rejection'. This was developed with generous assistance from Clair Webb, University of South Australia.

Conclusion

Quoting unsubstantiated data or data that is so generalised it can be misleading, can only weaken the credibility of the drive for pay equity. Equally, implementing strategies that do not deliver the desired outcomes merely serve to entrench systemic disadvantage.

Strategy based reforms depend upon accurate data analysis and clearly identified causes of disparity. Once strategies are identified the processes for rectifying disadvantage needs to be carefully monitored and followed by evaluation.

There needs to be joint responsibility for management to remove barriers to progress and for women to take advantage of the initiatives available.

Recommended process

1. There should be rigorous data collection and analysis.
2. Specific disparities should be identified and strategic planning decided.
3. Effective communication should take place with management, and management support secured for strategic intervention.
4. Training provided as appropriate both for both target groups and staff who have responsibility for implementing employment processes.
5. Policies should be developed/updated in keeping with strategic planning.
6. Relevant processes such as recruitment and promotion should be monitored.
8. Effective evaluation should take place on an annual basis.

Appendix I

University of Wisconsin

A 1992 study found a significant gap between men's and women's salaries that could not be explained by merit, accomplishment, or years of service, the university gave pay raises totaling \$830,000 to 372 female faculty members.

When salaries were re-examined in 1995, and again in 1998, no aggregate difference was found but an outside consultant who reviewed the 1998 study pointed out that a large statistical analysis could mask salary-equity problems.

The provost asked the deans and department 'chairmen' to nominate women whose salaries ought to be reviewed. Faculty members could also nominate themselves. As a result, the salaries of 117 female faculty members were reviewed, and in 2000 pay raises were given to 42 women faculty members. The raises ranged from \$1,000 to \$14,500 per year and are retroactive to the 2000-1 academic year. The median raise was \$5,000.

Jennifer K. Ruark, The Chronicle of Higher Education February 2002.

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