“Johns Hopkins’ Lost Vision: Investigating Gender Inequities among Homewood Faculty”

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Twelve years ago, in 2002, University President William Brody decided to take action against patent gender disparities at Johns Hopkins, mostly unabated since they were thoroughly documented in 1985. He and then-Provost Steven Knapp established a Committee on the Status of Women, tasked with investigating the obstacles between female employees of the University and senior academic, administrative, and executive positions, their root causes, and their proper means of rectification. In 2006, the Committee’s 38 members published Vision 2020, a 163-page report recommending gender parity in senior leadership positions by 2015 and in senior faculty positions by 2020.

Today, as these dates loom closer, neither Brody nor Knapp works at Johns Hopkins. Among current students, there is virtually no knowledge of the Vision 2020 report. It is without question that, except for in a few academic departments, students are exposed to far more male faculty than female. And with only a brief mention of commitment to female leadership in Ten by Twenty, President Ronald Daniels’ initiative to improve specific aspects of the University by the end of the decade, it appears that the University has mostly lost sight of its Vision 2020.

The institutional problems contributing to gender inequities at the University, Vision 2020 found, were wide in range and systemic. Regularly facing lower promotion rates than men, and, in some departments, receiving less in salaries and benefits, women were effectively barred from most leadership positions. The report also documented that due to the tacit, cultural emphasis on the “ideal worker model,” a reference to people willing to devote constant attention to work, those who required time for childcare and family felt marginalized by the University. Vision 2020 described the gender culture as “pernicious” and “subtly hostile,” and even found that about 22 percent of women at the University had endured sexual harassment. 14 percent of female faculty members had received “demeaning remarks based on gender.” Other documented female experiences included feelings of exclusion, isolation, and of being undervalued in the male-dominated institution.

So, where are we now? Of the eight academic divisions, male deans are in charge of six (female deans lead the School of Nursing and the Krieger School of Arts and Sciences). Male directors head the University’s remaining three divisions, including the Applied Physics Laboratory, the Peabody Institute, and Libraries and Museums. Within the President’s Cabinet, there is slightly more gender parity, with seven women out of total 17 staff members. Although not employees of the University, the gender makeup of the Board of Trustees is indicative of gender inequities across Johns Hopkins. Of the 44 members, 11 are female. It should be noted that, five years ago, before Daniels took
office, 19 of the trustees were women. As reported in *The Baltimore Sun*, the most recent election resulted in the appointment of five new members, all men.

While Krieger has seen some improvement toward gender parity, there is still a long way to go before the University can make any claims of equality. In an examination of faculty statistics between 2003 and 2012, the earliest and latest years for which data was available, 30.9 percent of professors on the tenure track were female in 2003; this figure rose to just 33.9 percent in 2012. Women comprised just under a quarter of tenured faculty in 2012, a small increase compared to 2003, when they accounted for 18 percent.

The Whiting School of Engineering lags far behind Krieger in terms of gender equality. One exception to this rule is the tenure track, of which women comprised 38.9 percent in 2012, whereas they accounted for only 16.7 percent in 2003. Yet, to be clear, the percent of tenured female professors increased negligibly over that nine-year period, from 7.1 to 8.2. In absolute numbers, tenured female faculty rose from three in 2003 to no more than seven in 2012. And on the non-tenure track, the percent of women grew from 8.2 percent in 2003 to 24.6 in 2012. In other words, of Whiting’s 37 female professors in 2012, 16 of them were essentially ineligible for tenure.

Both divisions have seen increases in the absolute number of full-time faculty members since *Vision 2020* was commissioned. In Krieger, there were 50 more full-time women in 2012 than in 2003. Whiting saw a net increase of 24 women over the same period. However, comparable increases in full-time male faculty have accompanied both of these increases, undermining the overall gains in parity. Eight years before the recommended deadline for gender parity among senior faculty, there were still significant disparities in the gender breakdown of tenured and tenure-track professors.

There is no system that pressures departments to hire or promote female faculty. These choices are made at the discretion of individual departments, which then submit their final nominee to the Academic Council, the body that oversees appointments and promotions. The departments also submit an Affirmative Action report stating the gender, race, and ethnicity of the person in question. However, these reports seldom play a role in the Academic Council’s final decision, according to Professor of History Mary Ryan, who sits on the Council.

In 2008, the Office of the Provost announced an incentive called the Mosaic Initiative to encourage departments to hire women and underrepresented minorities. Over the next five years, the University committed $5 million in matching funds for departments seeking to improve their diversity, whether through hiring or retaining faculty. The Initiative, which the University has touted as “extraordinarily successful,” resulted in over 20 appointments of female and underrepresented minority faculty across the institution, according to its website.

Targeted opportunities, which allow departments to circumvent the normal recruiting process to appoint new faculty positions, have also been tactics for increasing academic gender diversity. However, Professor of History Judith Walkowitz has heard of instances where departments have at times used targeted opportunities to hire the preeminent male scholar in a given field rather than women or minorities, for whom the recruitment tactic was originally intended.
In the immediate wake of Vision 2020, a number of Krieger faculty members proposed a list of recommendations that they deemed both important and implementable, such as a mentorship network. They established their own standing Committee on the Status of Women, which continues to serve as a contact point between Krieger faculty and deans, in order to keep the latter informed on gender-related issues that arise among faculty.

In response to the recommendation for a mentorship network, then-Dean of Faculty David Bell spearheaded a system that provides junior faculty with the opportunity to receive counsel from two senior faculty members, one of whom is from their same department. History of Science and Technology Professor Sharon Kingsland, who served for three years as Chair of the Krieger School Committee on the Status of Women, explained that this system helps to protect faculty members from some of the feelings of isolation that they might experience at the University.

Recognizing lack of childcare as a key issue, Krieger’s Committee on the Status of Women supported a faculty-sponsored petition toward the effort of bringing a childcare facility to the Homewood campus. The petition, circulated in early 2013, garnered 257 signatures. As a result of these efforts, a childcare center is now due to open in late 2015. While this development is a promising step toward supporting faculty members with young families, the need for a childcare facility has been discussed for decades. A University report from 1994 identified the lack of childcare as a “pressing problem for many faculty and staff,” and a 1971 article in The News-Letter indicates that at least one female professor had been requesting that the University provide childcare services at that time. Forty years later, the University has finally moved forward with its plans for a facility.

Today, Krieger’s Committee on the Status of Women most commonly hears complaints related to the low number of female faculty, spousal hires, and parental leave policies. There have also been reports of gender-based harassment from faculty and graduate students, according to Professor of Biology Karen Beemon, who recently chaired the Committee.

Hostility toward female faculty is still very much a feature of Whiting, where there has not been the same surveillance of gender issues as in Krieger. One professor, who wished to remain anonymous, said in an interview that Vision 2020’s description of the gender culture as “pernicious” and “subtly hostile” resonated with her. She described the Whiting School’s environment as “toxic.” Another professor, however, said that she had not experienced any overt gender-based discrimination, but nonetheless described Whiting as a “boys’ club.”

One female professor of engineering was optimistic about the appointment of T.E. Schlesinger, the new male dean of Whiting. She hears that he is “very aware” of gender issues, and believes that he will work to address them. However, he has not confirmed any such commitment in a formal statement.

Still, it is indeed encouraging to hear that an incoming administrator might devote himself to examining Johns Hopkins’ gender problem. But for the University to change its gender culture requires not just words or individual hires, but a systemic commitment to action – action that is long overdue.
Percentage of Tenured and Tenure-Track Faculty Who are Female

Krieger School of Arts & Sciences

Whiting School of Engineering