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The Daily Maine Campus

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Daily Maine Campus survey results

Students not offended by sexist language

Editor's Note: This is the third story in a four-part series dealing with events that have occurred since a report by the Task Force on the Status of Women was made public in July 1988.

by Rhonda Morin
Staff Writer

The majority of female students who responded to a recent *Daily Maine Campus* survey said they are not offended when sexist language is used in the classroom and they have not been victims of sexual discrimination in class.

Students from the departments of geology, forest biology, journalism, computer science, business and philosophy participated in the survey.

Sexist language

Contrary to a report on the status of women that was released July 22, which states that "sexist language is damaging to both men and women," 74 percent of the 96 females polled said they are not offended when a professor or instructor uses "he" or "mankind" when referring to both sexes.

From the male perspective, 94 percent

of the 137 surveyed said they were not offended when gender-biased language is used in class.

"I think that as a male I have been taught by society to use so-called 'sexist' terminology," one male student responded. "I do not do so intentionally, nor do I make a habit of it.

"I become extremely offended though, when a woman jumps down my throat for not using the correct terminology," he said.

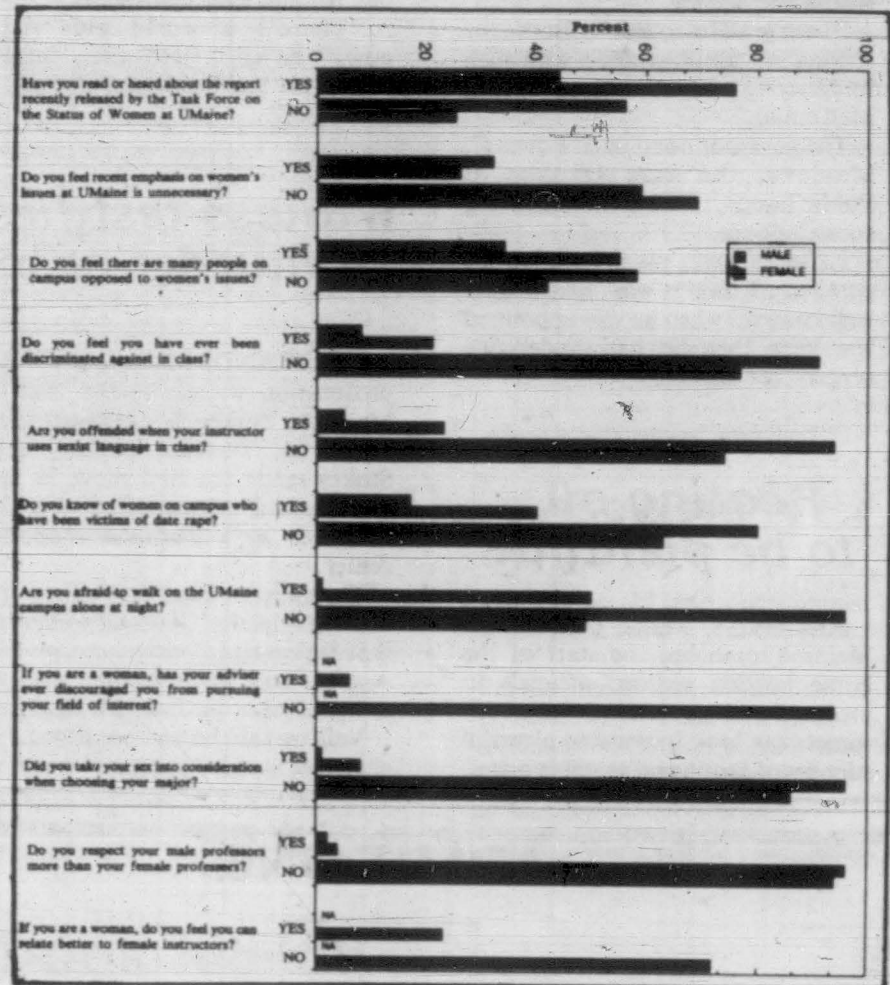
To a question that asked students if they had been discriminated against in class, 77 percent of the women responded no.

"Classes are nonsexist as far as I have observed," a female student said.

Classroom harassment

The Task Force on the Status of Women, which was commissioned by University of Maine President Dale Lick in 1987 to investigate the inequality of women on campus, stated in a public report that the classroom is an environment that can potentially taunt and belittle women.

Some women polled supported the report's conclusion, saying they have



been victims of ridicule by their professors.

"There have been snide and patronizing remarks by male professors to

women but not to men," said a non-traditional female student.

Furthermore, the report on the status

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• Survey

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of women states evidence from the testimony of female students indicates that there are cases of "crude, blatant and persistent forms" of sexism in the classroom, in which faculty members have ridiculed known or suspected feminists.

One female student who participated in the survey upheld this evidence.

"(I have been) harrassed by a professor — humiliated because of my feminist beliefs and my desire for the professor to use generic language," she said.

When the women surveyed were asked if they had been discouraged by their advisers from pursuing their field of study, 94 percent responded no.

The task force reported that advisers are more accessible to male students than to women, which discourages a woman from pursuing research and possibly her field of interest.

To a related question, 94 percent of the women surveyed responded that their level of respect for their male professors does not exceed that of their female professors, while the male students agreed by a 96 percent margin.

Respondents angered

In fact, some surveyed participants are angered by the emphasis that is being placed on women's issues.

"I feel that this has been blown way out of proportion, as so many things are in this day and age," said one male student. "Now, thanks to hundreds of thousands of dollars that have been spent on this silly survey, we will have some new female faculty (members), regardless of the fact that they may or may not be qualified."

But 59 percent of the men and 69 percent of the women polled said that a concentration on women's issues is necessary.

Women were equally divided on questions relating to campus violence. Fifty percent said they are fearful of walking alone on campus at night, while 49 percent said they are not.

Ninety-six percent of male students responded that they are not afraid to walk on campus after dark, while 1 percent said they are afraid.

Task force diverse

The 1987-88 task force committee included a diverse UMaine population. Heading the committee was Sharon Jackiw, associate director, Sponsored Programs Division.

Terri Kosoff, undergraduate in the College of Arts and Sciences and Diane Bowman, graduate student of human development were the only student representatives.

Also participating were: Suzanne Estler, director of Equal Opportunity; Ann Schonberger, associate professor, Developmental Studies Program; Thomas Patterson, reference department head at Fogler Library; Evelyn Newlyn, director, Women in the Curriculum Program; and Alan Kimball, associate professor, Department of Forest Management.

In addition: Nellie Hedstrom, human development specialist, Cooperative Extension Service; John Halstead, vice president for Student Affairs; Robert Cobb, dean of College of Education; John Alexander, professor and chair, Department of Civil Engineering and Jeffrey Sosnaud, instructor, College of Business Administration.

Also included were: Carolyn Forget, supervisor of accounts in sponsored programs division; Lea Accord, director of School of Nursing and Charles Chandler, assistant director of Public Safety.