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Task force on women revives old concerns

Editor's note: This is the last 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 released in July.

by Cynthia Beckwith
Staff Writer

Recommendations made 15 years ago on the status of women at the University of Maine have not been fulfilled, members of The Task Force on the Status of Women say.

In fact, they say, many of the recommendations in the 1988 task force report resemble recommendations made in the first report.

Evelyn Newlyn, director of Women in Curriculum at UMaine and member of the 1988 task force, said she was surprised at how little was done

after the first report was released.

"Many of the things in (the 1973 report) are in this year's," she said.

Sharon Jackiw, chair of the 1988 task force, said she was not surprised that many of the same recommendations were made, adding that she was disheartened that many of the same problems exist.

In 1973, the report of the Task Force on the Special Educational Needs of Women found that more women needed to be in faculty and administrative positions, on committees involved in university policy decisions, and invited to be guest speakers on campus.

Fifteen years later, the 1988 task force found that women are still underrepresented in many of those roles.

More female faculty needed

One of the short-range goals of the 1973 task force was the immediate addition of women in key administrative positions.

The 1988 report recommended that the university recruit women to positions in which they are underrepresented.

The percentage of women professors at UMaine has increased from 2 percent in 1975 to 4 percent in 1987, according to the 1988 task force report. The total percent of female faculty has increased from 12 percent to 18 percent since 1975.

Task force members agree that more increases in female faculty are needed.

In addition, there are no female vice presidents at UMaine and before the 1988 (see WOMEN page 8)

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report was released in July, there were no female deans.

One of the task force's long-range recommendations calls for the establishment of women's centers on the Orono and Bangor campuses.

The 1988 task force recommended "a Women's Center with a staff, an operating budget, and secure, hospitable space for meeting rooms, offices, child care; a library, and a kitchen."

Questions remain

People who were at UMaine during the 1970s say it is difficult to determine why many of the recommendations weren't implemented.

Winthrop Libby was UMaine president when the 1973 task force was established. But Libby left the university just months after the report came out. Many believe some of the recommendations may have been misplaced in the shuffle of a new administration.

"(Libby) was perceived as being very supportive," Jackiw said.

Sherman Hasbrouck, a member of the 1973 task force, said he is not sure why some of the recommendations were not followed.

"Various presidents maybe had other priorities," he said.

Women's center needed

Next to recruiting women to higher positions on campus, establishing a women's center is of primary importance, Newlyn said.

She said a women's center with a meeting room was established following the task force report.

The group still exists, but the space is no longer available for that purpose. Newlyn said she is not sure why the

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room was taken away from the women.

Marisue Pickering, executive assistant to UMaine President Dale Lick, said no decisions on implementation of the 1988 task force recommendations have been made because the president and his vice presidents are still discussing them.

But Newlyn is confident changes will be made.

"I think the bottom line to me is that there has to be commitment from the top administration," she said. "I think the president is supportive.

'A long struggle'

Ann Schonberger, associate professor of developmental mathematics at University College, was working within the University of Maine System following the 1973 task force report. She credits Joanne Fritche, former equal employment opportunity director, with many of the advancements in women's issues made at UMaine.

Fritche began a "long struggle to get search procedures formulated so women would have a fairer chance of being hired," Schonberger said.

She said it is difficult to say which advancements were the result of the first report and which were the result of Fritche's efforts.

Differences in the reports

Some of the differences in the two reports are the specificity of the recommendations and the number of issues addressed.

Jackiw said she was very surprised at the number of issues that were not addressed by the first report. Rape, sexual harassment, discrimination, and sexist language were not even mentioned. Jackiw said one of the 1973 task force members said she thought affirmative action would solve many of these problems.

The 1988 report had many recommendations concerning these issues.

Schonberger said the new report did a much better job of making recommendations.

"The sophistication with which the task force was able to approach the problem was much higher" this time, she said.