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### Opinion

#### Nannerl O. Keohane: Update on Duke's Women's Initiative

President Keohane says data collected by the women's initiative will lead to important new policies affecting women's lives at Duke

**Friday, April 25, 2003** | *The following is a draft of a talk presented by Duke President [Nannerl O. Keohane](#) at the Administrative Women's Network (AWN) April 24 luncheon meeting.*

Thank you to the officers of the AWN for inviting me a second time to address this body. I appreciate the work of the organizers and the chance to catch up with you almost exactly a year since our last conversation.

Of course, several AWN leaders are members of the Women's Initiative Steering Committee, and they have been very active; any one of them could ably address today's topic. Many of you beyond the Steering Committee have been intimately involved in the Women's Initiative, too. It has been very much a group effort, and untold hours of work have gone into the data-gathering, analyses, proposals and conversations which have moved us forward.

So at the risk of going too fast for new listeners and too slow for my most involved colleagues, I will pick up where I left off last April, when this group asked me to speak on "The Status of Women at Duke." I'll briefly summarize what happened since and give you a sense of what our next and final steps will be.

#### Background

When I brought together an intrepid group of Duke faculty and administrators last May to begin the formal work of our newly appointed Women's Steering Committee, I was not prepared for the overwhelming response. There was an eagerness to be part of the work that reinforced my own desire to take up the topic of gender more systematically; I found an atmosphere receptive to discussing even the toughest issues and a willingness to examine the core values of our University. Literally hundreds of women -- and a number of enlightened men -- came forward to offer their enthusiastic help and support. University leaders, including all the deans, vice presidents, and the provost, showed a readiness to turn knowledge into action, jump-starting the collaboration and

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data-gathering efforts of the Steering Committee's various constituencies.

I created the Women's Steering Committee to provide guidance for the initiative proper. I chair it, and its 16 people represent all the constituencies on campus. Members have not only a commitment to the cause, but also the ability to make a difference; they are in positions of top responsibility and can make change happen. Our goal is to gather information, asking a carefully considered set of manageable questions, share information with constituencies, make policy proposals and policy decisions, and help with implementation of those changes. Our steering committee is responsible for shepherding, directing and keeping track of multiple efforts across the university, both in groups that we have as a committee created, and in others that spring up because people have been eager to make their voice heard.

The work of the committee includes activities relevant to undergraduate students, graduate and professional students, faculty, house staff, post-docs, employees (both monthly and bi-weekly), trustees and alumnae. We tried to think broadly about where we want to go as an institution, and how we as a steering committee could ensure that we get there. As you have gathered, Susan Roth chairs an executive group which provides ongoing coordination and suggests appropriate agenda items for our larger group.

We try to be alert to important differences among women within constituent groups. For example, we launched separate studies on faculty in Arts and Sciences and the Medical Center, given the particular (or peculiar) challenges and opportunities women face in these venues. With students, priority status, racial and ethnic background, sexual orientation and athletic participation are important markers of diversity. Among staff, people of color are a unique and particularly important group at Duke whom we felt should receive special attention in our studies.

### Employees

Let me begin with employees, a critical, large, and very diverse constituency. Of the administrative and support staff and service employees at Duke, 12,581 of 17,917 are female—about 70%—mostly in our health system. Our Steering Committee staff work group has created a profile of the Duke workforce, and naturally AWN has done a lot to facilitate those focus groups and other sessions used to gather employee data. AWN people led the discussions and hosted the gatherings, and the Women's Initiative could not have proceeded without you.

Specifically, one hundred five employees participated in eight informal public Gender Discussion Forums last fall, held at different locations for the convenience of attendees. In addition, AWN orchestrated four formal Roundtable Discussions where invitees were selected by demographic sampling. Two groups were composed of Duke managerial employees and two of service, clerical, and technical employees, with over 80 people participating all told.

The standardized set of questions discussed in the Roundtables yielded a list of the top five concerns for women, though most are not limited to traditional "women's issues"—they affect men too. Top-five issues did *not* include maternity benefits or campus safety, although those were mentioned. The biggies were, in no particular order:

- Pay Equity
- Flexible work options, especially flextime
- High quality child care
- Professional development (and job advancement)
- Work climate

Although these five did not track precisely with the findings of the Work Culture Surveys in the health system, which were worded a little differently, there was considerable overlap. Instead of flexible work options, respondents to that survey focused more narrowly on flextime; instead of work climate they specifically cited lack of respect; and pay equity was subsumed under development.

On this issue of work climate—in some ways our most fuzzy and hence most intractable—let me add that vice president for institutional equity Sally Dickson also initiated many conversations with groups of women of color, mostly bi-weekly staff, from departments throughout the university and health system. In these discussions, as in my own conversations last spring, and as in the Roundtables, women very often spoke about patterns of patronizing and demeaning treatment by their bosses (including professors), with little recognition of their professional skills or contributions. Individually and collectively, we must be firmly committed to finding ways to address this fundamental and pervasive issue of disrespect—which is partly a matter of communication. Perceived disrespect extends to such apparent no-brainers as whether employees are informed on how and when decisions get made that affect their job.

The employee working group of the Steering Committee is developing recommendations for dealing with such issues—but where the rubber meets the road, this is one area where the members of AWN can be particularly effective as advocates and role models.

In regard to salary equity, the university had already been doing a lot of work for some years, gathering information and quietly making adjustments. We had failed, however, to publicize that work and convince our employees that problems had been or were being addressed; so there's in part a perceptual lag. Nevertheless, of course there is still more to be done, and we are now working on charting our next steps toward the goal of conducting systematic, regular, and on-going reviews of Duke's pay practices.

Recognizing that 85% of all American workers have family care responsibilities, and 25% have elder-care responsibilities, Mindy Kornberg and her human resources colleagues have drafted guidelines for introducing "flexible work options" in Duke departments to enhance existing practices, and support career development, community service and family activities.

Duke's organization is too complex to permit of one-size-fits-all solutions; but these guidelines will help managers and employees think more carefully and creatively about how flextime, telecommuting, compressed or abbreviated schedules, and job sharing could support institutional goals and improve employee satisfaction.

This touches on a larger quality-of-life issue. The data are clear that women employees, like women faculty, place a high priority on the *quality* of our personal and work lives. Quality of life beats out money, power, and position as a reason for coming or staying, according to the work of our own Dr. Ann Brown, who has done extensive research on the subject.

Yet the world is not organized to support this attitude. Mothers believe that having children slows their career, or that the absence of children accelerates it, and they're probably right. That's not just sad: it means the system is broken.

MIT, a leader in this area, tells us that junior women faculty, at least, do not regard gender *itself* as a barrier to career, and the Duke data bear this out: participants in our 1997 focus groups emphasized that many of the issues they were raising were generational rather than gender-based. Yet those same women made it clear that gender-related differences in how hard it is to live a balanced life affect women disproportionately.

The same is true for staff. We make it impossible for men *and* women to lead balanced lives when our work culture includes consistently holding meetings outside normal business hours, when departments routinely frown upon flexible work options, when we offer very limited child care and structure our rewards to favor those with an unfettered commitment to career.

This brings us to child care, the third of the top-five issues for Duke women. As you have no doubt already heard, the Duke Children's Campus announced a major expansion, and the slots filled instantly. The graduate school recently announced a generous contribution to our yearly subsidy pool earmarked for grad student parents of kids at the Children's Campus. We will also provide community center grants to enhance the provision of childcare in the wider community, and may, among other tradeoffs, provide further subsidies. We are not going to be able to make every Duke parent happy, but we will try to be a good citizen.

Employees in their child-bearing years are rightfully concerned about the current absence of paid maternity leave. The Steering Committee is considering a number of options, and we are optimistic that Duke will be able to put forward a benefit in the very near future that significantly improve the flexibility of those who want to spend more time with their newborns. It is too soon to say whether paternal leave and adoptions can be covered; it is not that the philosophy behind such a benefit is arcane, but coming up with the required dollars requires many conversations and of course some trade-offs.

The last bogey was professional development, which *is* inherently complicated—not least because the phrase subsumes a wide range of desirable outcomes all the way from taking a free online course on your own time, to having your department send you to a distant weeklong conference, to being promoted. Then too, the problem (and the ways employers address it) is two-pronged: on one hand, employees must accept individual responsibility for their own development; on the other hand, Duke also benefits when you develop your skills, and the organization can instill a culture that values education and provides resources to facilitate it—something Duke, ironically, is not uniformly good at.

With that in mind, we are considering an enhanced Tuition Reimbursement plan covering courses taken at other institutions besides Duke, enhancements to the three-day Managing at Duke course, and other changes. Surveys of our peers suggest that professional development is highly decentralized, as it is here, and that most of it occurs at the department level through in-service training, conferences, and the like. Noting that 75% of

Duke employees at level 13 or below are women, we think the underutilization of our current program—only 1% of employees tap into it, compared to 5%-10% for all employers—indicates a need for change.

### Undergraduates

I turn now to undergraduate students.

Women are a comfortable 50% of the Duke undergraduate student body. To find out what their lives are like, we collected information on both social and academic climate issues through focus groups, campus-wide forums, and a project website. The response from a wide variety of student groups, from sororities to cultural organizations to international students, was incredibly enthusiastic. Three of our faculty are also tackling an ethnographic study of the climate for women students at Duke. We likewise conducted focus groups with alumnae of different age cohorts in Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, the Triangle, San Francisco, Atlanta, and Washington, DC.

All those results are due in a June report.

The problems we're hearing about are mostly not unique to Duke but devolve from our common culture. Suffocatingly complex codes tell college women what to wear, how to act, what to eat and drink, which weight machine is for guys and which for girls, how many hours they are "allowed" to study, whom they may have sex with, how they should treat their younger peers.

I am concerned about their high level of conformity to harsh norms and the resultant problems of self-esteem. Some of this, of course, is what all young adults go through as they're trying to find their identity, but structures and expectations in place in Duke and elsewhere are channeling many women into a very narrow notion of femininity. We need to amplify the counter-message.

Many claim they want the freedom to talk about academic and intellectual matters in social realms, but that they are constrained or choose not to. At the same time, they are unwilling or unable to take responsibility for bucking the system, changing the environment, demanding something different.

But it's not all doom and gloom. Some student groups, such as Asian-American women, were mystified by the questions about body image and conformity that so quickly rang a bell for others. Women's athletics teams and the first year FOCUS program, where students live and study together in small groups with close

interaction with faculty members, came in for special praise as oases of cheerful equality. I have heard about other undergraduate experiences that are similarly liberating—field trips by the Geology Program, the Marine Lab, and the pre-freshman year programs called Project BUILD and Project Wild. One might add certain features of traditionally African-American sororities, who stress leadership and connections with successful alumnae.

It is clear, then, that we cannot generalize too readily, and that we need to learn from the best aspects of the experiences of some groups to address problems raised by others.

As you know from the recent piece in the *Dialogue*, about the Women's Initiative, recommendations on undergraduate life have not been finalized, yet a working group of staff and faculty has already been meeting for a couple months, and I will quote a memo they recently sent me suggesting that we must find a way to reach out to a broader constituency of women students than we have been able to do through Women's Studies and the Women's Center. They write:

"We would like to develop a curricular and co-curricular program for women at Duke that would encourage and nurture them to set their own norms and standards and assume positions of leadership in an environment where the undergraduate men still predominantly define and control social and academic engagement. In our view, leadership can take many forms, but rests most significantly on the notions that one must think critically . . ., have the courage to make choices that may not conform to normative pressures, and have the confidence to speak out . . . For women, leadership additionally requires an awareness of the significance of gender in everyday life. . . There is not sufficient opportunity [at Duke] for close relationships with peers or adults in the environment that would bolster resiliency to conformity pressures, and help create experiences affirming women's autonomy and self-determination.

Hence their proposal for an undergraduate women's leadership program. I will be interested to hear the thoughts of this group on the matter.

Faculty, graduate and professional students

In November, the provost and I charged a Women's Faculty Development Task Force with proposing strategies to address recruitment and retention issues. They began, of course, with the data already gathered by the initiative—some of which indicate that the numbers of women faculty in many areas at Duke are stagnant or declining. Excellence requires a diverse faculty, and improving the gender balance touches on many other aspects of Duke life.

The task force completed its report in March and will present it to the Academic Council in May. Its recommendations will allow Provost Lange to develop, in his words, "measured and effective, specific policies for implementation." It confirms that women are not well enough represented among regular rank faculty despite some areas of progress. The most recent data, from January, suggest that although neither gender nor race affects salary differentials at any rank, distinguished professorships and named chairs continue to be held mostly by men.

A larger percentage of women than men were denied tenure from 1994 to 2002, although women were not promoted at a lower rate to full professor. In Arts and Sciences, though, women took 6.3 years on average to achieve such a promotion compared to 5 years for men.

Women are well-represented in Duke's Ph.D. programs in most disciplines, yet there are painfully small numbers of women in the applicant pools for departments such as chemistry, computer science, and physics, and those departments are going to have to cast a wider net. We have asked the deans for their help in establishing the availability of talented women faculty in all disciplines, and thus the realistic hiring opportunities faced by individual Duke units.

Faculty interview data brought forward six key issues overall:

- the fall-off in the number of women Ph.D.'s choosing to pursue academic research careers—the "leaky pipeline" syndrome
- narrowly defined searches that effectively restrict the pool of eligible women
- the sense of isolation among women faculty
- the faculty desire for peer mentoring around women's issues
- the need to recognize extraordinary service by tenured faculty women; and



- the problem of partner hires in recruitment and retention

Task Force recommendations will include

- better longitudinal data collection to track and understand trends
- forming a Standing Committee on Faculty Diversity to serve as a resource to the schools, and to represent the interests of women as well as racial and ethnic minorities
- the creation of standardized procedures for mentoring, search committee protocol, women's community, faculty recognition, parental leave and tenure-clock relief, partner hires, exit interviews, and deans' reports; and
- accepting the goal of creating a critical mass of regular rank women faculty, and tenure track women, in all departments.

Grad students are faculty in the making. We have a complete set of quantitative data on the effects of gender in Duke Ph. D. programs, including information on composition, completion rates, time to attainment of degree, and job placement. In the majority of disciplines at Duke, women are well represented, with an overall rate of 44%. Percentages of enrolled women range from lows of 26% and 30% in Engineering and the Physical Sciences, respectively, to highs of 50% in the Biological Sciences, Humanities and Social Sciences.

In the fields of Math, Computer Science, and Mechanical Engineering, the proportion of women enrolled in Ph.D. programs appears to be decreasing. Fortunately, there are no overall gender differences in completion rates in the Physical Sciences or Engineering, which include those departments; nor do we see significant gender differences across all fields in time to attainment of degree and job placement.

Duke's eight graduate and professional schools have been studied using a web- based survey, focus groups and interviews that center on mentoring and the academic support system for

both male and female students, including those that have left their program before completing their degree. Almost 800 students participated in the survey, and another 100 in the 16 focus groups.

The results are still being analyzed, but it is clear that at least in some of our graduate and professional schools, students perceive a "sink or swim" culture and a paucity of role models that make education especially difficult for women. It is also clear that too few of the best choose a career in higher education.

At Duke, as is true nationally, despite the reasonably good balance of women and men in many Ph.D. programs (with variations among disciplines, as I have mentioned), the dropoff in women faculty ranks, or women who intend to become faculty, becomes worse the higher up you go. Somewhere along the line for virtually any program you can name except nursing, it becomes not a leak but a flood.

The difficulties that make young women drop out, or choose corporate life over academia when they do survive the rigors of graduate school, are cumulative. There is no one overwhelming cause, yet we must try to address the phenomenon.

### The Vision

I can imagine Duke as a truly co-educational institution where the numbers of women in both the faculty and the senior administration would be proportional to the number of women in the population. I can imagine these women having at least equal chances of getting promoted, taking positions of leadership, and occupying named chairs. I can imagine that whatever career a young woman aspired to as a student, she would see impressive role models every day at Duke.

Our institution would recognize that individuals have unique gifts, and not pattern or channel women and men into specific slots. If it turned out that women and men have some genetic or temperamental differences of interest or ambition – for example, that women in general care more about spending time with their infant children – this would not become the basis for regarding them as less clever, less interesting people, or for assuming that they will never make it to the top of their professions.

In such a university, men would no longer harbor some of the unthinking prejudices about the intellectual capacities of women that have marred our experiences for so long. Neither the classroom nor office climate would ever be "chilly" in the sense that the contributions of women were downgraded and men dominated the conversations. If women had distinctive voices in

these conversations, those voices would be valued—and they would be heard.

The campus would be a safer place for women in every sense of the word. Duke women would share the self-confidence of our women athletes: pride in their abilities, comradeship with other women, appreciation of the values of teamwork, and friendship with men who share their commitments and understand their lives. Women would receive career development support and good counseling, being urged to go after their ambitions even as they were given thoughtful advice about the obstacles they were likely to face.

We can imagine that Duke—but can we get there from here? The Women's Initiative has engendered specific ideas about how we might, and I have outlined some of the steps we plan or envision. But they are *first* steps, and there is one more I want to talk about, because more than any of the others it depends on you, and it is long-term.

### Mentoring

You already know you are important players in the areas of professional development and mobility, flexible work options, and improving the work climate. I have been asked what else AWN members can do to help. Mentor.

Mentoring remains a problem at Duke. There are too few female mentors in the first place, of course, because there are too few female senior managers, tenured faculty, and full professors. We have been at it long enough now to know that this imbalance is *not* automatically going to resolve itself.

We need not assume that only women can mentor women; many male mentors are dedicated and successful. However, a paper by Janet Bickel and her colleagues in *Academic Medicine*,<sup>(1)</sup> which Dr. Snyderman pointed out to me and which Dr. Brown cites in her study, reminds us that the styles and advice that worked for male mentors once upon a time may not work for their female protégées today. Although the subject of the paper is women physicians, I want to quote it because all the evidence we see suggests that this analysis tracks well for employees, too, including those at Duke.

Bickel writes:

"Many studies have found that women gain less benefit from the mentor relationship. One internal medicine department found that mentors more

actively encouraged men than women protégées to participate in professional activities outside the institution and that women were three times more likely than men to report their mentors' taking credit for their work. Among cardiologists, women . . . commonly noted that their mentors were actually negative role models. They were also less likely than men to negotiate for salary, benefits, travel, space, support staff, and administrative duties—reflecting a combination of naivete and under-use of their professional network."

Dr. Brown also cites a 1999 study(2) showing that mentors were six times more likely to help a young faculty member chair a conference if that faculty member were male; almost three times more men than women had been invited by their mentor to submit a manuscript for publication or a conference; and twice as many men as women had received advice on promotion from their division director.

These are facts. If nothing else, such findings imply that we need to be more explicit about what we as an institution expect from a mentoring relationship. Duke data from all levels underscore these conclusions, and certainly focus group participants from undergraduates on up repeatedly cited the need for more effective mentoring. Mentoring *can* be done by both sexes, given the right attitude, a caring spirit, and a willingness to learn and adapt—yet some issues that come up really *are* gender-related.

Mentoring can be time-consuming—and it is absolutely critical. If you are doing it, thank you. If you are not, please consider it. Remember too that mentoring can be a collective or communal activity, and is often better when done this way. The stakes and the difficulty are doubled when the mentee is African-American or Hispanic because of ethnic stereotypes and challenges in communicating about and across cultural divides.

Let me close by noting some very good near-term news. Professor Susan Roth, who as you recall has chaired the executive committee of the Women's Initiative Steering Committee, has agreed to join my staff full time through December to help us institutionalize the results of the initiative. For example, Susan will ensure that the processes are in place to continue gathering the internal longitudinal data that will enable future administrations to monitor, closely and routinely, the numbers for staff, faculty, and students. I am tremendously grateful to her—and sorry that we have worked her so hard.

I reported to you last year a general sense among Duke women

that there was an "absence of conversation" about these issues on campus. That has changed. The enthusiasm of individuals and groups in every corner of Duke to participate in this dialogue shows a pent-up demand to be heard. Pandora's box is open, and it contains treasures as well as headaches. We are finding ways to perpetuate and deepen the conversation, to make the intervention last, to mine those treasures.

I am grateful to all of you for giving me this chance to bring you up to date on this work, and for your organization's networking and support of each other, and of all women at Duke.

*Footnotes*

1 Janet Bickel et al., "Increasing Women's Leadership in Academic Medicine: Report of the AAMC Project Implementation Committee," *Academic Medicine* 77:10 (October 2002), p. 1044-1061.

2 In *JAMA*.

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