

**Gender Equity Commission**  
Final Report to President Randhawa  
March 2019

**Purpose of the President's Commission on Gender Equity**

The Commission on Gender Equity provides advice and recommendations related to promoting gender equity, parity, and inclusivity related to hiring, professional advancement, leadership development, salary equity, and student success. The Commission also identifies ways to foster a more diverse, safe, and welcoming campus environment that recognizes the contributions and challenges faced by Western's female population, and by people with gender identities outside of the gender binary.

**The Commission**

Co-Chairs

- Raine Dozier
- Stephanie Bowers

Members

- Spencer Anthony-Cahill
- Deb Currier
- Carmen Dolfo
- Natalie Fleischer
- Mark Greenberg
- Kristi Lemm
- Sarah Neugebauer
- Shari Robinson
- Barbara Sandoval

**Introduction**

The Commission began its work by reviewing several documents available within and outside of the university, including examining what similar groups have achieved elsewhere, the WWU HERI report, exit interview information from WWU HR, and others. We took inventory of the topics of interest to the members of the commission which prioritized exploring Western's recruitment, onboarding and retention practices, real and perceived barriers to advancement for women at Western Washington University, and providing opportunities for people to express their thoughts around gender equity at Western. We subsequently set the Commission's inaugural agenda with the following set of projects and report our outcomes and recommendations below.

**Executive Summary**

For its inaugural year, the Commission took time to talk to many people across campus in order to better understand the community's perspectives on gender. Activities included conversations with our colleagues in Human Resources, an examination of exit interviews from the past two years, interviews with 18 current and recent leaders, and an opportunity for students to express their thoughts regarding gender equity on campus. The information we collected over about 16 months helped us focus on a few specific areas and led us to these priorities:

First: take steps to remove barriers to leadership development for women at any level. Provide more intentional opportunities for leaders to sponsor and mentor promising employees; develop more intentional strategies to identify “natural leaders” at Western among center and program directors, university committee leaders, and faculty senate leadership for potential promotion. To facilitate external hires, work to develop a more critical eye for bias in how jobs are conceptualized and described, improve dual career opportunities, and reconsider the overwork culture in top leadership positions. Revisit quality of life issues including flexibility of work schedules/locations and a review of access to childcare for employees.

Second: increase focus on promoting gender equity in male-dominated divisions and disciplines. Provide more extensive training on implicit bias and gender inequity in interactions; develop opportunities for women’s leadership in male-dominated settings by increasing the number of women employees, fostering mentors to support new leaders, considering “cluster hires” that bring in more than one woman leader in a male-dominated setting at a time.

Third: although the commission did not have time to focus intensively on the needs of transgender and gender nonconforming employees during this cycle, we found the predominant concern was to increase access to gender inclusive bathrooms.

Throughout this report we will provide many recommendations for consideration by President Randhawa and the university leadership; we encourage choosing a few to begin with so that progress can be monitored and direction adjusted accordingly.

## **Projects and Outcomes**

### Project 1: Study: Opportunities for Women’s Leadership and Promotion at Western Washington University

The most significant project for the Commission was research into two questions: What inhibits the promotion of women during their careers at Western? Do barriers differ for faculty, professional staff and classified staff?

During the course of the study Commission members Raine Dozier, Kristi Lemm, Mark Greenberg and Spencer Anthony-Cahill interviewed 18 current and former leaders and aspiring leaders. Dr. Dozier was granted a course release to analyze the data and report the findings. The research report is attached and includes more detailed recommendations.

Recommendations include:

- Find ways to promote mentor and sponsor relationships
- Increase representation of women in leadership positions, especially in male-dominated divisions and disciplines
- Offer training on how to address bias and recognize gender inequity in work settings
- Senior administration should hold guided conversations about work culture/overwork culture and how to potentially reduce hours required in senior positions
- Use women’s professional development group(s) to address setting limits to work, understanding leadership styles, developing aspirations, and addressing bias

- Find ways to encourage non-transactional interactions in department and employment-related groups in order to build positive interactions and relationships that can influence equity and communication. Develop a plan and opportunities including training and facilitated events that emphasize “playfulness,” team building, etc.
- Develop stronger dual career assistance program
- Support more flexible work schedules and work settings when possible
- Review of access to childcare

### Project 2: Salary Study

Commission members reviewed salaries of faculty within ranks and across disciplines. After controlling for discipline and time in rank, there were no significant gender discrepancies in faculty salaries. Discrepancy in average salaries for men and women at the university level are mainly explained by differential pay across disciplines.

### Project 3: Narratives Project

The Commission endorsed a project to use creative and artistic approaches to explore and raise awareness of the gender equity landscape at Western. Unfortunately, the timing of a faculty sabbatical prevented this project’s implementation.

### Project 4: Identification, recruitment, onboarding and retention of women at Western Washington University

Commission members Barbara Sandoval, Carmen Dolfo, Shari Robinson and Stephanie Bowers met three times with Chyerl Wolfe-Lee and Dennis Dashiell, from WWU’s Human Resources division, to best understand Western’s recruitment, onboarding and retention processes. We learned that HR has focused attention on a recruiter who works to expand the pool of diverse candidates for particular searches; however, that recruiter is not funded permanently and is limited in how many searches can be staffed. We learned that HR is piloting a program of staff “navigators” to help acclimatize new hires to the university. Neither of these programs were well-known by members of the commission. We learned that Human Resources aspires to increase diversity in staff hires, particularly in leadership positions, but suffers from a lack of resources. We recommend additional funding for innovative strategies developed and prioritized by the Human Resources division.

While we do not believe that commenting on specifics of the Human Resources division is the business of the commission, we request that the executive leadership of the university prioritize a culture shift, and we therefore recommend the following areas for examination:

- Take a proactive stance on search committee composition. For example, vice presidents could personally (or could delegate to an appropriate person) approve all search committees to insure diversity and set measurable goals for their divisions for the next 12 months
  - Set a benchmark for metrics for improvement to include numbers of women and people of color in the finalist pools
- Empower middle management and invest in professional development, including providing resources for conferences and/or consultants
  - Invest in supervisor training to continue the culture shift throughout the organization
- Develop an employment culture that infuses Western’s values, including equity, diversity, and inclusion into the workplace and across all employee groups.
- Explore possibilities for increased flexibility in work schedules and other strategies to promote work-life balance

### Project 5: Leadership Development, Mentorship/Sponsorship Program

Based on the research study as well as conversations around retention, the Commission recommends ongoing opportunities for mentorship and sponsorship programs.

#### Recommendations:

- Develop both mentoring and sponsorship programs; begin with a small pilot and expand if warranted
- Plan a conference tentatively titled, “Mentorship, Sponsorship and Networks: The Power and Value of Professional Networks”
  - The commission has examples of potential sessions for future members to consider

### Project 6: Exit Interviews

Commission members Stephanie Bowers, Carmen Dolfo, Shari Robinson and Barbara Sandoval requested Exit Survey data from Western’s Human Resources department in January 2018. We initially received **Exit Survey Data Summary: By Gender** that covered the period of January 2016 – January 2018 and included information from 98 of 316 employees who left employment during that period. (See Appendix B).

We then asked to receive qualitative data from the exit surveys and received a redacted summary of the narrative data in June 2018. We reviewed the narrative data and summarized the responses in the document **Exit Survey Narrative Comments Summary**. (See attachment “?”) Human Resources said that exit survey data is provided to vice presidents when their division employees leave Western. We would like that information shared with leadership and more intentionally considered on a regular schedule.

#### We recommend the following:

- Copies of all Exit Surveys be provided to the division vice president. Important trends and comments should be discussed quarterly with senior leadership at a VP meeting that includes the president.
- Mandatory supervisor and director training regarding identifying and addressing gender inequities. Release time for this training should be prioritized. Exit interviews suggest that employees would benefit from both content training in their specific areas as well as training in management practices. We suggest adding professional development for supervisors to identify gender inequities in their areas and staff development for those they supervise.
- Provide opportunities for flexible work schedules when possible. This would also be a way to reduce the number of trip commutes to campus, reflecting Western’s commitment to sustainability.

### Project 7: Speak Out on Gender

The Commission worked with student organizations on campus to hold a one-day “Speak Out on Gender” event. Members of the campus community were encouraged to share their views, either on white boards or in boxes provided for private comments. The event was a collaborative effort of Western’s Commission on Gender Equity, the Womxn’s Identity Center, the Queer Resource Center, and

the Student Advocacy and Identity Resource Center. Volunteers associated with these groups tabled in Academic West, the Chemistry Building, Viking Union, and Miller Hall's collaborative space.

Based on the Speak Out feedback, we recommend the following:

- Better representation and inclusion of women in male-dominated settings
  - Increase visible representation of women and people of color (e.g., photos on walls) in male-dominated spaces (disciplines, divisions)
  - Provide funding for professional meetings/conferences for women students in order to develop external networks; develop opportunities for women students to collaborate with faculty on research projects
- Increased training on bias and interactions, both faculty and students
- Address bias and foster equitable collaboration among students in male-dominated disciplines
  - Some STEM majors address interactional bias in orientation, other STEM majors could develop orientations that help students develop skills in creating inclusive work groups and collaborations
- Increase the number of gender inclusive bathrooms across the university
- Revisit the overreliance on teaching evaluations for promotion (evidence suggests they are biased against women and POC) in an effort to improve retention of women and people of color in male-dominated disciplines