



Faculty Senate Archives

Faculty Senate

Academic year 2019-2020

Attachment 6 to Faculty Senate Meeting October 21, 2019

Remarks for Faculty Senate Regarding the Gender Pay Gap

REMARKS FOR FACULTY SENATE, OCTOBER 21, 2019: GENDER PAY GAP

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I read a very interesting article not long ago. [“Balancing Act,” *The Economist*, September 7, 2019.] The subject of this article is the gender pay gap.

A study by the National Bureau of Economic Research finds that the gender wage gap is almost twice what it would be in the absence of the large premium paid for working longer and longer hours, and that “labour markets disproportionately reward those willing and able to work all hours - who are mostly men.”

Their conclusion is that “women [are] swimming upstream in terms of achieving wage parity,” and they even predict that the wage gap is likely to grow.

One of my friends, who, like me, is swimming upstream, told me this about her own department. She said, “It’s like when they hire, they really hire two people - the faculty member, and the support person in the background.”

Now, as an illustration of what it’s like to swim downstream, another friend of mine was really bent out of shape one day, because his wife had told him that she expects him to be home at six o’clock every day to eat dinner with their two year old child. There was real outrage in his voice as he told me, “Thalia, I cannot do mathematics with one eye on the clock!”

How am I supposed to compete with that? I mean, all she was asking was that he be home at six o’clock to eat the dinner. What if he had to be home at five o’clock to help make the dinner? Or three thirty, to shop for ingredients with which to make the dinner?

Date: October 21, 2019.

Another study cited in this article said that in a typical household of a heterosexual couple, that once the man was working sixty or more hours a week, it became three times more likely that his wife wasn't working at all.

That number leaped off the page at me, because what I'm hearing around here is that as teaching and service requirements balloon, many faculty members are compensating by working sixty or seventy hours a week. Those of us who don't have that "support person in the background" have difficulty expanding beyond a certain point, and it's cutting deeply into our time for research.

Nor does looking at the hours spent on research tell the whole story. It's like what I tell my students. I tell them, look, if you're embroidering a tablecloth and you put in fifty percent of the time and effort, you're going to get fifty percent of the result. If you're doing a creative activity, if you're dealing with conceptually deep material, and you put in fifty percent of the time, you're going to get ten percent of the result out.

If what it takes to make partner at a certain law firm is working eighty hours a week, is that law firm practicing overt discrimination?

Probably not. It's a free country. Any woman is free to go out and look for that marvel who is willing to subordinate his career to hers, maybe even abandon his career entirely. Perhaps the future father of her children can be found standing around a trash fire somewhere.

But, maybe I'm wrong. In guessing that this isn't discrimination, I'm not as confident about that as I was a year ago. A year ago, when I walked into the classroom and wrote and drew on the chalkboard in front of a room of normally-sighted students, I had no idea I was discriminating against the blind.

Even so, even if it's not discrimination, at least the aspiring law partner would probably spend those eighty hours on the endeavor for which she was hired, on the central activity. It's not like she'd be sitting in her office "putting things together with paperclips" all day and then somehow be expected to go out and try and win cases in her free time.

And even if it's not discrimination, my view is that if this university is serious about diversity, if this university is sincere about hiring and retention of women, then we need to get a grip. We need to develop a sense of perspective, we need to develop a sense of proportion.

For the most part, our only answer so far has been to come over here and talk about role models, and then maybe we'll go over there and have a discussion about mentoring,

and we'll talk about everything under the sun except the real problem, and we'll look everywhere for a solution except in the mirror.

The Soviet Union voted itself out of existence, but here at Wichita State, have you ever seen a committee dissolved? In the past several weeks, I was unwillingly appointed to two or three committees that previously didn't even exist. Right here in Faculty Senate, last year we formed a committee to intervene if students are caught smoking in the parking lot, and a few years before that, we actually debated whether face-out parking might be acceptable after all.

Three or four years ago, I had a really bad headache one day and had to go home, but someone has now made an active decision that we must fill out leave reports every time period even if we have no sick leave to claim.

How many lost afternoons start with the words, "Just go on-line!" One of my colleagues described precisely such a wasted afternoon spent trying to deal with some travel receipts. I said, "Let me guess, the only form of help offered was to send you for more training;" she said, "That's right." You used to just hand those things to a secretary.

Speaking of secretarial work, when I became graduate coordinator, one of the secretaries told me, "I work for you." The other day she said that she can view applications but she can't print them. So she wants me to print and photocopy that stuff for her. In other words, I'll be performing secretarial duties for her.

And then of course, there's the Big One, the new requirements on accessibility. Well, we're going to meet these standards... we have no choice, we have to meet these standards.

But everything I'm describing here, taken together, is hitting women really, really hard. For most of us, equality is the best we can hope for. Most of us don't have that "support person in the background." Most of us don't have someone at home picking up the slack. Most of us are not able to transfer many of our personal responsibilities to someone else.

It's very discouraging. This isn't my imagination. This study confirms what I am seeing and what I am experiencing, which is that things are getting worse instead of better.