

To: Chancellor Gearhart and Provost Gaber

RE: Commission on Women, Year End Status Report, 2011

I am very pleased to report to you the status of the commission's progress thus far. We have had a very active year, and now have an ambitious agenda to pursue next year. This is the first full year that the commission has been in place, and we addressed the issues we had identified last year as pressing concerns. These issues are discussed below, followed by a list our new agenda items for next year.

- 1) The first issue we focused our efforts on this year is campus childcare. The commission had identified this as a major concern, and the timing was fortuitous in that the university has taken a large step forward in making this a reality. We invited Mark Power and Vernice Baldwin to speak to our commission to educate us regarding the current plans for the center before we began research on facilities at other SEC institutions in order to learn what our peers are providing. We have generated a preliminary report summarizing the services, costs and missions of these programs. A sub-committee will work throughout the summer to complete the report. The goal is to use the data generated by the childcare survey that the Staff Senate will administer along with what we have learned from our peer institutions to help inform the University of Arkansas as we move forward. I have a graduate student in the department of economics who is now helping to design the survey and will be analyzing the data in depth. From that research we hope to identify the strengths of the current plan as well as to identify areas in which gaps may remain. Our goal is to provide this report to those who may benefit from this information as designs for the center move forward, and as plans for the future of the center are considered.

While this report is being finalized, the commission would like to ask if there is any other area that you would like us to research in order to provide the greatest level of service to the university community and academic opportunities for students and faculty.

- 2) The second issue that the commission is very interested in addressing is maternity leave. Janine Parry and Debbie McLoud from the benefits committee presented us with information and concerns of staff and faculty members. The University of Arkansas currently does not offer any leave other than accrued sick leave or annual leave (the latter of which 9 month faculty members do not accrue). According to a study by the Center for the Education of Women¹, 78% of universities and 75% of all employers offer some form paid maternity leave beyond the use of accrued leave. It is thus apparent that the University of Arkansas lags far behind. Not only does the commission consider

¹ University of Michigan, 2005. "Family-Friendly Polities in Higher Education: Where Do We Stand?" http://www.cew.umich.edu/sites/default/files/wherestand_0.pdf

this to be woefully inadequate support for our employees, this also is a serious attraction and retention issue for our campus. This is not an issue that solely affects female faculty and staff. For many of our male colleagues this can create questions regarding the commitment of the university to its employees while unfortunately furthering the stereotypes many employees or potential employees we are trying to attract may hold about Arkansas.

Recommendation:

We recommend that the university address this issue given that the costs of not addressing it are significant.

It is our recommendation that the university implement a standard six week paid leave which is the standard minimum that most employers offer (Please note that 25% of all colleges and universities offer paid leave beyond that level).

It has been mentioned that making the catastrophic leave bank available for maternity is one option. This however comes with some complications. However, the commission feels that that is at best a solution of the last resort, and that a straightforward leave would be by far the best solution.

Lastly, we would like to mention that ideally there would be a policy offering leave for other caretaking situations, such as elder care and adoption, which unfortunately affect women employees disproportionately. However, we feel strongly that maternity leave is a minimum benefit that the university should provide, and we would like to make this an action step for next year's work. We are interested in knowing what, if anything, we might do to facilitate a conversation regarding the possibility of the university addressing this extremely important issue.

- 3) The commission believes that it would be very beneficial if we could create opportunities to bring women on campus together to address concerns, provide support and mentoring and share information. We are reaching out to the Women's Resource Society which has hosted a forum and has plans to host speakers and some round table discussions. Such partnership will further both of our organizations' goals to bring women on campus together. Currently we have a subcommittee that will work over the summer to begin planning an opening event, the goal of which would be to gather information from women on campus regarding what the university is doing that is helpful, and what barriers may be holding them back. This will then inform future workshops and the initiation of a speaker series that might include speakers on issues of mental health and stress, caregiving or a number of other topics of interest to both men and women.

It is our hope that with a modest amount of seed money we can launch such a program and could lay the foundation to reach out to the Women's Giving Circle for further support.

- 4) The commission has identified several additional agenda items for next year, including:
 - a. Urgent need for the development of a website for the commission to share our activities and be a resource of information for the university community;
 - b. Develop a logo for our group for use on our website, materials we produce and events we host. We believe this would help with the visibility of our commission as a resource for women on campus;
 - c. As part of our outreach mission, we would like to host a booth at fall faculty and staff orientations.
 - d. Explore the feasibility of a publication that highlights University of Arkansas women, along the lines of that produced by the Walton College.

Finally, we would like to request a small working budget of around \$5,000 to facilitate some of these goals. Our plan is to use such funds for the development of a website, hosting workshops and a speaker series, the creation of a pamphlet of information to be distributed at orientation and research assistance for the childcare data analysis. We feel that we can accomplish a great deal with a very modest budget, and have hopes of leveraging that budget through channels such as the Advance Grant and the Women's Giving Circle.

This is an ambitious agenda, but we are hopeful that we can make significant strides toward reaching these goals. We greatly appreciate your continued support of the commission and for providing us the opportunity to work on such important issues facing our university. I am happy to meet with you if you think it would be helpful at any point.

Thank you.

Amy Farmer