Women in Michigan: Academic Sexism under Siege

In a tasteful oval frame hanging in the office of University of Michigan (UM) president Robben Fleming is a hand-painted, flower-embellished sign that reads: "Take a woman to lunch." The sign, presented by women employed at UM, is a whimsical reminder of the women's movement at UM that began perhaps a decade ago and that has been gathering significant visibility and momentum in the past 3 years.

Universities have been so busy worrying about undoing racial discrimination that they have not, until recently, concentrated on discrimination affecting women. All that began to change in 1970, when WEAL (Women's Equity Action League) and NOW (National Organization for Women) began filing complaints with the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) against more than 250 institutions. These complaints are based on Executive Order 11246, signed in 1965, which forbids employment discrimination by federal contractors on the basis of race, ethnic origin, or—as amended in 1968—sex. Michigan, whose star school, UM, was subsequently threatened with a hold on federal contracts, has turned into one of the busiest forums in the nation for women seeking to eradicate sex bias in higher education.

Since then, with UM blazing the trail and threats of the federal ax curbing administrative complacency, affirmative action plans, women's commissions, contract compliance committees, salary studies, and organizational reshufflings have been cropping up around the state.

Women in academia are divided over whether any significant changes are occurring. But most seem to agree that Michigan women are better organized and more politically savvy than their sisters in neighboring states and more united in their goals and strategies than women in other big universities, where fragmentation within activist movements tends to thwart their thrust.

The nucleus of the activity in Michigan is in the southeastern part of the state, where the "Big Three" universities—UM, Michigan State, and Wayne State—are located. Operating on the knowledge that the basic problems are the same everywhere and on the belief that a mass movement is more effective than separate intramural efforts, women around the state are developing an informal network of communication and mutual aid and information.

To further this strategy, representatives of women's commissions or women's groups from seven southeastern institutions have agreed to meet on a bimonthly basis to report on progress and frustrations and to trade information. The first regular meeting of this group, held in September in Detroit, gave some indication of the long and difficult road ahead. While some of the women work at institutions that have formally recognized women's commissions and are well into systematic rectification of such matters as salary inequities, others are fighting stubborn administrations, a dim level of awareness among their female colleagues, and reluctance by personnel departments to furnish the kind of data needed to document their problems.

Focusing and Probing

The complaint filed against UM in 1970 was the work of a small band of women associated with the university called FOCUS on Equal Opportunity for Women. Campus women promptly followed up by forming PROBE, a coalition of faculty, staff, and students that set about publicizing examples of discrimination and drumming up support for changes in the multitude of issues bearing on women's lot. Nothing escaped PROBE's eye—as illustrated by the booklet "The Feminine Mistake," in which were documented everything from offensive treatment of women applicants for jobs and graduate study, to a complaint about a sexist bas-relief in the Literature, Science, and Arts graduate school building.

PROBE, which began to fade from view after the UM women's commission was appointed, might be said to be to the commission what a guerrilla group is to a recognized political party. The women's commission, appointed by President Fleming to evaluate and monitor fulfillment of the affirmative action goals, is regarded by some women as too "establishment," but it has a secure place, an influential voice, and a no-nonsense chairwoman, lawyer Virginia Davis Nordin, who divides her time between the commission and her teaching job at the Center for Continuing Legal Education.

In addition to organizational changes —the latest is the appointment of an affirmative action officer—the main advances at UM have to do with the bread-and-butter issues of salaries and promotion.

One of the first things the commission did was establish a "file review," in which a woman was hired full-time to go through personnel files and notify department chairmen of any women whose salaries were more than 10 percent below the norm for their positions. So far, this has resulted in more than 100 salary adjustments.

On a grander scale, the university last January hired a Chicago management consulting firm, Robert H. Hayes and Associates, to conduct a $100,000 study of the salary and job classifications of all of the university's professional and administrative (or P-A), that is, nonfaculty, nonclerical employees. The study's recommendations, which will go into effect by the beginning of the year, simplify the 544 P-A classifications into 21 categories, with minimum and maximum salaries for each. The accumulated increase called for in salaries amounts to about $300,000.

The study turned out to have greater implications for women than for any other group. It found no outstanding discrepancies in salaries and grades for ethnic and minority groups, but found women to comprise 70 percent of those who had below minimum salaries. Furthermore, the study showed that female representation ranged from 83 percent in the lowest of the 21 salary categories, to zero in the top three.

This is not startling news, but it does provide women with a wealth of new and useful statistics. Furthermore, the new classification puts the finger on one of the most elusive problems women have: the fact that many accrue duties and responsibilities way beyond the jobs they were originally hired for, but are not compensated with promotions or raises.

Another gain that effects primarily women is the policy of advertising available jobs in the campus newspaper. This is regarded as a major step, since the closed and informal

system of recruitment and hiring has prevented women from finding out when jobs for which they qualify become available.

These are some of the formal advances made at UM. But there are activities on informal levels as well. One group that supplements the work of the commission is the Cluster Coordinating Committee—so called because it was created by women after the commission divided up the campus into ten "clusters" to evaluate the affirmative action goals of each department. The committee has gone way beyond its original mandate and has been hard at work raising the consciousness of women all over the campus.

It puts out a biweekly, mimeographed sheet that is pinned up in ladies' rooms all over campus by 126 "information officers." "The Women's Information Bulletin," as it is called, feeds its readers solid fare, such as information on grievance procedures or an interview with Nellie Varner, the new affirmative action officer. The committee keeps track of what's going on in various departments at its weekly meetings and is encouraging the women in each department to form their own affirmative action advisory groups.

While women are concentrating on obtaining redress for real and legally definable grievances, one gets the impression that much of the fuel for their indignation is supplied by thick-headed male attitudes. *Science* met with a group called Michigan Women in Science (MWinS), who described the kinds of irritations that prevail to a greater or lesser extent everywhere. The group, comprised mostly of graduate students, got together to combat the feeling of isolation that occurs when one is vastly outnumbered by men in one's department. They also counsel undergraduates considering further study in science, because, as they put it in a press release, "One reason there are not more women in science is that young women are often told that science is too difficult for women or that it is impossible to combine a scientific career with marriage."

The married graduate students said that when they applied to graduate school or for a research position they were always asked what their husband's plans were and whether they had any children. "My husband never gets asked those questions," said one. (Single women are expected to fly away the minute they get a marriage proposal.) Other complaints are that department chairmen, when asked why they appointed a man to a particular position, reply that no qualified women were available—despite the fact that competent postdoctorals are sitting under their noses. Another woman said that women researchers are often required to take on teaching duties, but that, unlike men, they don't get the raise associated with a teaching position. Others remarked that the antinepotism rule is still invoked to explain why a woman didn't get a promotion—despite the fact that the rule was eased a couple of years ago. The members of MWinS also felt department chairmen sometimes hide behind the nepotism rule out of a misplaced sense of chivalry—they don't want to tell a woman her work simply doesn't pass muster.

The women feel that most of this behavior is unconscious—but this seems a charitable explanation in Meryl Johnson's case.

Johnson, a chemist and art historian, recently produced a paper on Italian Renaissance paint which drew considerable attention in scholarly circles. When the news got around, she says, her boss "went around for a week saying there were two Meryl Johnsons in the department"—one a woman, one the man who had made the scholarly coup. Johnson believes her appointment was rubber-stamped because of the ambiguous nature of her first name.

The condescending attitude this incident suggests is what really gets the women depressed. And when a woman begins to feel like a strange bird in her department she begins to doubt her own worth.

A well-publicized case has been that of Margaret Bryan Davis, a zoologist and paleoecologist who has been at the university, with partial support from the National Science Foundation, for the past 12 years.

Lonely Struggle

Davis started asking for a raise in 1969. When she was promoted to full professor in 1970, her salary was still several thousand dollars below the minimum for professors. Davis spent about 3 years in what turned out to be a time-consuming, lonely, and embarrassing struggle. Very few people resort to the university grievance procedure (involving much correspondence and finally a hearing before a departmental committee), and those who do are looked at somewhat askance unless they win. Since relevant public data did not exist, she had to ask other professors questions about their salaries. Despite the fact that her fight was well known, no one spoke to her about it except some students.

Finally, after delays, evasions, and threats (on Davis's part) of legal action, she got her raise. Then, in 1971, she filed for back pay from 1968 to 1970, claiming that she was discriminated against on the basis of sex, a claim specifically provided for in HEW guidelines. She says she got more run-arounds, culminating with a letter from a vice president saying that the university was "not prepared to concede" that the record showed sex discrimination. He explained that the university's affirmative action plan had not yet been accepted or rejected, that it was understood that retroactive pay would be granted only if other universities followed the same policy, and that HEW's legal power to impose this obligation was dubious anyway.

Davis finally got back pay for 1969 and 1970 on other, technical grounds. The university, she says, thus avoided opening the "Pandora's box" of sex discrimination.

Davis, a reserved woman who clearly doesn't relish the limelight, says the whole procedure gave her a "creepy feeling" and that if she hadn't had the security of tenure she doubts that she would have gone through with it. A person who is "rocking the boat" starts feeling a little paranoid when the department head looks the other way as you're coming down the hall. "You really begin to wonder if you really are of less merit than the others. It's not so much a question of salary as of self-esteem."

The Pandora's box finally did get opened with the case of Cheryl Clark, a research assistant whose demand for higher pay—based on sex discrimination—caused the university to create a new complaint appeal procedure (*Science*, 16 July 1971) as a recourse after regular management review.

The Clark case represents only a partial victory though. On the one hand, it places the burden of proof—that discrimination is not based on sex—on the university and creates a precedent for sex-based back pay appeals. On the other hand, President Fleming has decreed that the procedure, involving a three-man arbitration board, was only an experiment and will be discontinued as of the end of the year. Fleming maintains that the procedure (based on Title VII of the 1964 Civil

Rights Act) is too limited—it applies only to issues involving race or sex discrimination—to justify the expense, which, in the absense of a third party, falls entirely to the university.

There have been several attempts to unionize UM clerical and technical employees—a development that would automatically result in cost-sharing for grievances in this group—but they have fizzled. Jeanne Tashian, a graduate student in education who has been in the middle of the women's movement, says the resistance has come primarily from the clerical and technical employees themselves, whose loyalty to their bosses and unwillingness to identify with the working man, as it were, are stronger than any sense that they are being victimized or underpaid. But, she says, there has been resistance from the top too, notably in the case of supervisors in the hospital, who told hospital employees that they faced possible dismissal if they got too interested in unionizing.

The setbacks may come and go, but there is always consciousness-raising to be done. When Michigan women get bogged down in one track, they try something else, and their efforts are often marked by creativity and humor.

For example, when HEW Secretary Elliot Richardson came to town for a luncheon, he was presented with a garland, fashioned in the shape of the female biological symbol and made up of 93 dandelions and 7 roses. The roses symbolized the percentage of women in tenured faculty positions at UM. Richardson was said to be highly pleased with his bouquet.

Another creative effort, which has already made folk history at UM, is the "Fleming Follow." This grew out of a meeting between Fleming and the women's commission, where, at an inspired moment, a law student is said to have told the president: "You go to coffee with men, you go to meetings with men . . . but you never spend any time with women. You don't know anything about women! And that's the problem!" Fleming is said to have blushed for the first time in recorded history.

Thereupon was created the Ad Hoc Committee Concerned That President Fleming Does Not Meet With Women (AHCCTPFDNMWW). Every day for a week, with Fleming's permission, a woman was stationed outside his office to record vital statistics (sex, age, length of stay, and so on) of every visitor to Fleming's office. Following this exercise, the committee worked up an elaborate report, complete with tables and graphs, which, on the whole, supported the initial premise. It found that of 124 visitors, only 21 were women. All of the women were seen in groups, with the exception of commission chairman Nordin, who has a weekly meeting with Fleming. A composite visitor was described: "Male, white, 50–60 years of age . . . somewhat out of condition, balding . . . dressed in a blue suit . . . previously

Briefing

Institute of Aging Gets Surprise Veto

Much to the astonishment of health policy officials in Washington, President Nixon has vetoed a bill that would have created a National Institute of Aging within the National Institutes of Health (NIH). The vetoed legislation, which would have given new prominence to research in aging, was guided through the Senate by Thomas Eagleton (D–Mo.) and through the House by health activist Paul Rogers (D–Fla.).

Even though government officials opposed the creation of a new institute because they are against a proliferation of institutes within the NIH, they fully anticipated its approval. In fact, NIH leaders were beginning to think about who might be named to head the institute of aging, so sure were they that it would come into being. (In spite of this mild opposition to a new institute, NIH leaders concede that research on aging is not well funded.)

The President's veto was met with approval in some circles, especially because, as one official put it, "Nixon not only vetoed the aging bill, he did it for the right reasons."

By that he meant that the thrust of the explanation the President offered in his veto message would seem to put his rejection of the bill on somewhat philosophical rather than strictly financial grounds, although he did cite certain costly provisions in the bill among his objections. He said that the establishment of a separate institute would duplicate existing activity and "create additional administrative costs without enhancing the conduct of biomedical research for the aging. In fact, it could even fragment existing research efforts."

The question in everyone's mind now is just why the President took the action he did. Both HEW and NIH officials say that, although they went on record as being against the establishment of a new institute, they did not lobby actively against the bill. Indeed, particularly because this was an election year, they felt that it was inevitable that the President would approve the bill for political reasons. "Somebody came in with negative advice that was a lot more effective than ours," one NIH policy-maker said, "and we'd like to know who."

Speculation is that advice for a veto came from the Office of Science and Technology, but no one can say for sure, and officials in that office are silent on the subject. Of course, the possibility that opposition came from the Office of Management and Budget cannot be ignored.

Understandably, individuals who have lobbied long and hard for a separate institute of aging are unhappy with the President's action. Convinced that the current level of research on aging is grossly inadequate and that it should not be conducted as it is under the aegis of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, they will reintroduce legislation in the next Congress. Meanwhile, NIH leaders say they will try to capitalize on the time they've won by stepping up current efforts on research in aging.—B.J.C.

Alumni Note

Philip M. Boffey, a former member of the *Science* news staff, has joined Daniel S. Greenberg's Washington newsletter, *Science and Government Report*. Boffey is completing a study of the National Academy of Sciences under the auspices of Ralph Nader.

acquainted with Fleming, comfortable entering through the back door of the office, comfortable to the point of either ignoring the president's secretaries or joking and flirting with them, exhibiting an air of self-confidence, and likely to remove his suit coat at some point of the meeting with Fleming."

The report was presented to the president, who subsequently agreed to attend some consciousness-raising seminars. One, said to be particularly effective, included a slide show depicting how a man would be treated at the university if he were treated like a woman.

Historic as the Fleming Follow was, it may have done more for the consciousness of the women than the men. Most women regard the president as a "nice man," but he has done little to erase the feeling that he is also a hopeless male chauvinist. (Fleming, asked recently how his perceptions about women had changed during the past couple of years, replied, "I find myself mostly amused by those kinds of questions.")

Day Care

Fleming's inability to perceive the truth about women is exemplified, in their eyes, by his attitude toward subsidized day care for children of graduate students and employees, which, according to Nordin, "is the current hot issue on campus." To the women, a university's willingness to set up low-cost day-care facilities has become an index of whether or not men are willing to recognize that women, just like men, want to have both family and career. Fleming says day care would be nice, but there is simply no money for it, and since most women don't have preschool children it would be unfair to use money that might be applied for wider benefits. To some women, though, Fleming's basic attitude is summed up in his comment at a recent meeting with the commission: "You want to have your cake and eat it too."

Women around the state are making it clear that they do indeed want their cake. Wayne State and Michigan State, unlike UM, have not been threatened so far with any reprisals from the government, but they too are beginning to discover that the women mean business.—CONSTANCE HOLDEN

This is the first of two articles.

IARC: An Environmental Approach to Cancer Research

Lyons, France. When the International Agency for Research on Cancer's new 14-story building was inaugurated here last June by French President Georges Pompidou, Pompidou, a chain smoker, turned to one of the agency scientists and asked if it was really true that cigarette smoking leads to cancer. He was told that statistics show it does. Madame Pompidou wondered if the risk were less if one doesn't inhale and was told that, unfortunately, one shouldn't count on it.

"The IARC operates on the assumption that 80 percent of cancers are related to the environment and that identification of the responsible factors can lead to their 'cleaning.' The reluctance shown by both governments and individuals to accept the link between smoking and lung cancer, regarded by cancer epidemiologists as the success of the specialty, may indicate that the cleaning part won't be so easy."

Seeing to it that its findings are acted upon, however, is not the major duty of a scientific organization. While the IARC hopes to be able to offer its data to governments in the form of cost-benefit safety curves for a given carcinogen, it will not make legislative recommendations. More pertinent to the IARC, an autonomous agency within the framework of the World Health Organization, is the question of whether it can retain the freedom to investigate and publish without political interference. And, while scientists in general remain skeptical about both science as done by international organizations and the politics of fighting cancer, persons close to the IARC feel it has done well in avoiding politics.

"I have never heard of any political problems in IARC," said J. C. Pansard, a delegate to the IARC governing council by virtue of his office in the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. "This may be the only international organization that is entirely technical and scientific." By way of illustration, he cited the process of admitting the newest member, Japan. "In an organization such as the U.N., this might be a major question. At IARC it took about 20 seconds."

Raymond Latarjet, director of the Curie Foundation in Paris and current chairman of the IARC scientific council, a group that is "active, critical, and hard to please," seemed surprised that the politics of the center were even questioned. He pointed out that, in the area of environmental carcinogens, an international organization is likely to be much freer than a national one. To illustrate his point that no better mechanism exists for pronouncing on environmental carcinogens, he cited the handling of the cyclamate controversy in the United States.

IARC director John Higginson, not given to expressing himself in absolutes, believes that one of the agency's successes is that it hasn't been overly political. He attributes this partly to its small size ("too small to arouse jealousies") and voluntary nature, and partly to a conscious policy of not giving grants.

Another reason may be that the IARC's attitude toward environmental carcinogens is not a radical one. In Higginson's view, all biological phenomena must be expressed as probabilities rather than absolutes, and, while arbitrary margins of safety may be necessary when dealing with carcinogens for which the data are incomplete, knowledge of the concentrations at which a substance becomes carcinogenic for man may allow these substances to be used in lower concentrations.

Nevertheless, in incriminating contaminants in areas such as industrial chemicals or food, the potential for