

March 5, 2002

Donna R. Leff
Medill School of Journalism
Chicago Campus

Janet S. Stevens
The Feinberg Medical School
Chicago Campus

Dear Donna and Janet,

Thank you for the 2000/2001 Report of the Committee on Women in the Academic Community.

The committee undertook a task of considerable magnitude in updating the data tables contained in the 1994 Report of the Task Force on Women in the Academic Workplace, and deserves thanks from the entire Northwestern community for its work. I am pleased to note growth in the numbers of women faculty and staff at more senior levels, and was encouraged by the increase in the number of women serving as department chairs. These achievements, while gratifying, also serve to remind us that we need to continue to carefully monitor our performance and seek to improve it.

The committee has made a number of recommendations in its report, which I address specifically in the text that follows. I will communicate my response to the University community, as has been our custom in the past.

We appreciate the committee's work on this report, and its commitment to working toward our shared goal of making Northwestern a better place to work and to learn.

Sincerely,

Henry S. Bienen
President

**President's Comments
on the 2000/2001 Report of the
Committee on Women in the Academic Community**

Recommendations on child care

The first five of the Committee's eleven recommendations (below, in italics) address various issues related to child care for faculty, staff and students.

- *Add fundraising for the construction of day care centers on both campuses to the goals of Campaign Northwestern.*
- *Hire a child care consultant to write a detailed proposal for onsite child care.*
- *Send a delegation to look at child care facilities at other institutions.*
- *Determine whether it would be beneficial to offer a system of subsidized daycare for the children of graduate and professional students and whether existing resources could be tapped to support such a system.*
- *Rule out alternatives to onsite child care, such as contracting with local providers to reserve slots for Northwestern children or expanding the current subsidy program, as substitutes for onsite child care.*

As you know, the General Faculty Committee, working in conjunction with a number of faculty, staff and student organizations (including COWAC), submitted a report to Provost Dumas and me in May 2001 that specifically recommended that NU establish on-site child care.

Following this meeting, Provost Dumas and Senior Vice President Eugene Sunshine convened a committee to advise the University on what concrete steps it might take to increase the availability and affordability of child care for members of the University community. This committee is chaired by Katherine Faber, professor and chair of Materials Science (and former co-chair of COWAC); other members include Charlotte Crane, professor, Law School; Robert Decker, professor, Department of Medicine, Feinberg Medical School; Meg McDonald, director of finance and administration, Office of the Vice President for Research; and Suneetha Vaitheswaran, project manager, Office of the Controller.

The committee presented us with its recommendations in late February 2002. The recommendations include some very attractive and practical steps to address the issues of availability and affordability of child care. I would not want to rule out any possible alternatives, as one of COWAC's recommendation suggests, since I believe that there is no "one size fits all" solution that meets the differing needs of faculty, staff and students. Whatever the University does to address these issues will necessarily include a range of actions.

We appreciate the urgency of the problems, and, during the next several months, we'll be working with the committee to determine priorities and to further assess the feasibility and cost of the various recommendations. We expect to be able to talk more specifically about our plans at the end of this time.

Recommendations on staff issues

The remaining six recommendations (in italics) address various issues related to staff; each recommendation is followed by our response.

- *Make every effort toward reducing the continually high turnover rate in all positions by making recruitment for current vacancies a top priority.*

Several years of a robust economy built a demand for labor that was not met by the supply, resulting in high turnover for all employers. In 2001, our 13.8 percent turnover for exempt staff compares very closely with the Chicago market median rate of 13.9 percent. Northwestern's 2001 turnover of 17.6 percent among the nonexempt staff was just above the median of 15 percent turnover for Chicago employers. For additional comparison, the 3-year rates discussed in the COWAC report translate to annual averages of 14.5 to 17 percent for Northwestern.

The recent turn in the economy has enabled us to fill many open positions so that at this writing we have 100 fewer openings than COWAC was seeing when the committee wrote its report, somewhat relieving the problem. Our improving pay competitiveness contributes to the reduction of turnover, and the University has taken steps to address the pay issue.

While recruitment to fill current vacancies does not in itself reduce turnover, it can address other issues such as completing work that is missed when jobs are vacant. To expedite the recruiting process, the Human Resources department has developed and is piloting a new employment process that engages the employing department more actively in the steps of recruiting. With appropriate training and the identification of the steps that the department wants to take on for itself, the new employment process is filling jobs faster than in the past.

- *Institute a strong and consistent program to address historically low staff salaries*
- *Direct Human Resources Department to develop a plan to re-evaluate the current nonexempt and exempt grading practices for new positions and earmark additional funding necessary to correct the deficiencies in the current grading system.*

These recommendations involve two compensation issues: market comparison and job grading. External market comparison examines the relationship between University pay and pay levels among other employers, while job grading establishes the relationships of jobs to each other in the University.

Competitiveness in pay is being addressed with funding directed toward the areas needing competitive improvement, in a program under way for the past several years. For fiscal 2001-2002, in addition to the salary increases funded to keep pace with the competitive market for all jobs, additional funds were provided specific to grades in which pay scales were under the market rates; these additional salary funds were awarded in the individual case only where job performance warranted the extra increase. In this way, we have been directing special salary funds so as to support more competitive pay in those grades where improvement is most needed.

These measures address some long-standing needs, which the job grading system has revealed in our salary administration. The grading system has been an effective tool to identify competitive needs and develop remedies. Further competitive improvement for some job grades is still a goal for some departments, and earmarking funding for this improvement as recommended continues to be part of our compensation planning.

- *Eliminate unclassified exempt staff positions (presently in grades 1 and 31) by appropriately reclassifying the positions currently appearing in those grades*

Grade 31 has been used to allow a competitive salary to be paid in an individual circumstance where the normal job grading might prevent it. It is a method of addressing a specific market issue, enabling us to hire a candidate with unique skills or in an occupation with a small, highly competitive market. In the rare circumstance where a grade's salary range does not accommodate a competitive pay rate, an exception may be made to the grade. This compensation practice is common among almost all employers. Elimination of this flexibility would prevent our addressing exceptional circumstances, and the continued use of this grade is needed for these cases. However, while the COWAC report shows that less than 3 percent of the 3,600 University staff members hold jobs with this grade designation, a review of the jobs in this category is appropriate to assure that this classification continues to be justified for each job having this status, with the assigning of another appropriate grade where called for.

The exempt and non-exempt salary plans do not use grade 1. Positions in grade 1 are in salary plans for librarians and staff physicians, which are shown separately in the committee's statistical tables. The review of job classifications is also needed for grade 1 jobs to assure that the classification is justified in each case.

- *Institute a career-planning program in Human Resources*

I have asked Human Resources to examine the development of a career-planning program by the Training and Development Division.

- *Set goals for recruiting women into unionized positions*

Increasing the representation of women in the trades at Northwestern is a need that Human Resources will address with the management of the Facilities Management Department. While the availability of women in the trades is low, we still should make progress in improving the representation of women.