

# **Understanding Women in Universities Around the Globe**

A Concept Paper – Yale and Cambridge Universities  
Revised April 2006

## **Summary of Objectives**

We propose a comparative study of the nature and shape of challenges to women in the academy. The study would include an analysis of how the intellectual agendas of universities have been advanced by the study of gender and the inclusion of women as students and faculty. This project is particularly timely; only recently in many countries have women joined, in any numbers, the faculties and administrations of leading universities or been admitted as students to the full range of institutions of higher education. We hope to document a) successful implementations of programs that increase women's equality in academic environments; b) the challenges yet unmet; and c) the role of government and laws in bringing about change.

The project will build on prior research, as detailed below, but will expand upon it in two dimensions. By studying policies and practices in the countries represented by the Alliance, we hope to understand when, how, and why women are participants in higher education. We also want to learn about the role women play in altering curriculum, pedagogy, and scholarship. Given the import of globalization, we propose considering the effects of gender on universities and the effects of universities on the opportunities of women and men in key countries around the world as well as in joint university or academic projects that cross national boundaries.

## **Purpose/Need/Background**

On many dimensions, the changes in women's roles in universities in the last decades have been extraordinary. From virtual absence at major research universities, women have become in some countries and in some institutions about half the student body and a small but significant percentage of faculties. Women have become university leaders, including presidents, deans, and department chairs. Indeed, women have recently retired as presidents of two distinguished U.S. universities (Duke University and University of Pennsylvania), as another, the Alliance's own Alison Richard, became the first to lead Cambridge University in England.

Yet during the past few years, several prominent institutions in the U.S.A. have produced reports offering critical examinations of the status of their own women faculty, students, and staff and making recommendations for change. One groundbreaking report, done at MIT in 1999, analyzed the status of women faculty in six departments in its School of Science. As that institution concluded, senior women faculty did not fare as well as senior men. In 2000, the University of Pennsylvania's Gender Equity Committee completed a comparable report, but it focused on the entire faculty. More recently, Princeton University has examined the status of women in the university's science departments, and Duke University has reported on conditions affecting women students, faculty, and staff. In each instance, the findings indicated that women were not yet equally treated on all dimensions. Out of this work has come annual meetings of university presidents or provosts at several U.S. campuses; the purpose of those sessions is to share information about how to intervene to ameliorate these problems.

Other inquiries have considered women's status across institutions. In their widely cited article from *Academe* entitled "Do Babies Matter?" Mary Ann Mason and Mark Goulden examined the career paths of Ph.D. recipients over a 20-year period and found that having a child within 5 years of one's Ph.D. is associated with a substantial decrease in a woman's chances of gaining tenure in the U.S., but with a slight increase in a man's chances of doing so. In January 2004, Donna Nelson and Diana Rogers released "A National Analysis of Diversity in Science and Engineering Faculties at Research Universities," examining the numbers of women students and faculty in fourteen disciplines at the top fifty research universities in the United States. Nelson and Rogers found that in most disciplines the proportion of women beginning as faculty members was significantly lower than the proportion of women earning graduate degrees. Even more striking, across all fifty of the top departments, only 3 percent to 15 percent of all full professors in the 14 disciplines are women. It would be important to compare experiences in different higher education settings.

In the UK, there has been government concern about the loss to the economy of under-utilizing the human resource that women represent. In 1994, The Rising Tide report resulted in the establishment of a Unit for women in science, engineering and technology (SET) in central government. Recognizing that this was too small to do more than focus attention on the dearth of women in senior positions and in policy making, another report, SET Fair, came out in 2000, with the resultant setting up in 2002 of the UKRC – the UK Resource Centre for Women in SET with four partner HEIs. This has had more government resource and has succeeded in providing returner schemes and databases for women in SET along with many other initiatives.

Dedicated specifically to higher educational institutions (HEIs), the UK-wide Athena Project was also set up in 1999, the same year as Cambridge established its own *Women in SET Initiative* (WiSETI). These have collected gender disaggregated data and developed a range of best practice policy examples. Recently, the Athena SWAN awards were developed to identify those HEIs that were employers of choice, by virtue of having much good practice in place for women in SET. Both the IOP (Institute of Physics) and the RSC (Royal Society of Chemistry) in the UK have published data on the position of women in Physics and Chemistry in Great Britain.

This topic is of concern for the European Union, which has made "gender mainstreaming" a focus of study and action. This approach has also been adopted by the Commonwealth Secretariat, as the countries in that consortium also understand that the project of equality has yet to be realized. Similarly, the United Nations and its development programs, focused on human capabilities, has put the problem of education of girls and boys and of women and men at the forefront. And many learned societies around the world have special task forces and commissions on these topics.

There are also studies that indicate that women's access to higher education may have significances with respect to broader indices of social and economic well-being; for example links have been demonstrated between increasing women's literacy rates/access to education and decreasing poverty rates in countries around the world.

This account only begins to describe the breadth of research now underway in universities across the world as they contemplate how, in the 21st century, to move forward -- in a world reconfiguring on many dimensions of which gender is one. We expect that the leading universities represented by the Alliance have been considering these same issues.

Our hopes are broader, that given the stature of the universities in this Alliance, together we can play a productive and meaningful role in compiling the extant information and analyzing the trends not only at each member's own institution but in higher education in each country. Thereafter, and particularly because of the globalization of higher education, we hope to review possible structural responses that would facilitate further progress.

### **Project Description**

The project would look at both women's successes and at the challenges for women in many roles at postsecondary institutions. The concept would be to develop a work plan that could be followed by each participating institution. In the first months of the project, the data already available would be compiled. Questions for a baseline inquiry are listed in the attached Research Template (Appendix A). Yale's Office for Institutional Research will coordinate the effort to decide how best to present the data.

To undertake this shared, interdisciplinary project, we suggest that a sequence of conferences occur. Cambridge is hosting the first where we suggest bringing together scholars and administrators involved in improving women's roles in universities. Yale is willing to host a subsequent gathering.

The goal would be a series of papers that would be published in an edited volume, with a wide range of contributors. It would review the data, and also describe the nature of challenges to, and the prospects for equality for, women and men in the academy, locally and globally.

### **Proposed Structure**

It seems likely that each Alliance institution that chooses to participate might have a team that includes not only the appropriate faculty leader(s) but also the administrator who is responsible for the University's Office of Institutional Research. That office would likely be poised to prepare the quantitative data and the longitudinal studies. Collectively they can form a working group once the data are collected to compile it for comparative study.

### **Proposed Funding**

Each university would contribute its staff's time and provide for their support. Yale President Richard Levin believes he can secure funding for the (1) publication expenses of the resulting volume, and (2) support for a post-doc to coordinate the work of the teams at the participating universities.

## Appendix A: Basic Research Template

In an effort to move forward, we have created this template for baseline inquiry. Yale's Office for Institutional Research will coordinate the effort to decide how best to present the data. We recognize that this template will not cover the nuances of each University's unique circumstances. Where necessary, we ask you to make the appropriate changes with explanation.

We invite you to send subsets of data collection to Kim Bottomly as they are completed. This will assist with timely collation and summary efforts.

Please indicate the name, title, and email address of the person at your institution who is providing the data below.

### Part I Factual Questions

1. Size (Full-time enrollments, Full-time faculty, Annual budgets, Size of endowment, Age of University)
2. Single sex, coeducational, religious, military, other (specify)
3. Private vs. public
4. Research/teaching/technical/professional
5. Types of degree offered (two-year, four year, graduate)
6. Dominant institutional culture (Research, teaching, other (specify))
7. Structure of faculty ranks
  - Number/type of ranks
  - How many women, men, and total in each rank
  - Rules for hiring to rank
  - Movement across ranks (process)
  - How many people entered/exited the ranks this year
8. Structure of Post-doctoral/Research ranks
  - a. Number/type of ranks
  - b. How many women, men, and total in each rank
9. Structure of administrative ranks (dept chair or equivalent vs. higher administration)
  - a. Number/type of ranks
  - b. How many women, men, and total in each rank
10. Structure of students ranks (undergraduates, graduate students, professional)
  - a. Number/type of ranks
  - b. How many women, men, and total in each rank
11. Structure of other ranks (please add based on individual institutional structure)
  - a. Number/type of ranks
  - b. How many women, men, and total in each rank
12. Structure of academic divisions [social sciences /sciences /humanities /other (specify)]
13. Structure of the curriculum (degrees and certifications offered for both undergraduates and post-baccalaureate)
14. For each of the categories in 7-11 above, how has the distribution of women in your institution changed in the last 5 years? In the last 10 years?
15. Have the opportunities for women in your institution changed in the last 10 years? If so, please list the most significant changes.

## Part II Analytical Questions

- A. Current factors influencing the distribution of women within your institution. (Disaggregate by faculty and students when possible.)
1. What are the legal regimes influencing gender access (prohibitions, equity mandates, etc)?
  2. What are the social structures of education that influence access at your institution (tracking and testing hurdles, social class structuring, feeder organizations, military preparation, etc)?
  3. What are the economic structures at your institution (source of budget, funding opportunities available, who funds education)?
  4. What are the admissions structures influencing gender access and who determines the admission criteria?
  5. Comment on the cultural framework (practices and beliefs) that influence access to your institution.
- B. Factors influencing the distribution of women in higher education on the national level in your country. (Answer for the past 10 years and disaggregate by faculty and students when possible.)
1. Have there been any changes in the legal regime (type of change/nature of impact)
  2. Have there been any changes in the social structure of education (type of change/nature of impact)
  3. Have there been changes in the economic structure of higher education (type of change/nature of impact)
  4. Have there been changes in the admissions structure
  5. Have there been changes in specific cultural practices and beliefs that influence access of women to higher education? (type of change/nature of impact)
- C. Factors associated with gender equality in the academic setting (disaggregate by faculty, students, and administrators/staff when possible) e.g. flexible working/job share arrangements; childcare and eldercare support; maternity, paternity and adoption leave; women's development opportunities; mentoring; networking; positive/affirmative action programs; dual career interventions.
1. Does your institution have a drive toward gender equality and what contributes to that drive (middle management intervention, grassroots movements, top leadership championing, some variation of each, or other)?
  2. What policies/changes in work structure have been implemented in the past 10 years to support women in the academy?
  3. What methods of recruitment and devices to support women in the social sciences, sciences, and humanities have been implemented in the past 10 years?
  4. What specific programs have been implemented in the past 10 years to contribute to retention and promotion of women in the academy? (e.g. mentoring)
  5. How are these activities evaluated and monitored to determine if they are successful?
- D. Please indicate other questions that are relevant to your institution but are not listed above.
- E. Please provide any national studies about gender equity in higher education in your country that may have been published by a governmental organization or an entity like the National Academy of Sciences

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