

10-2006

## Voices of Women in the Field--I'm Glad No One Told Me . . .

Misty Schwartz

*University of Nebraska-Lincoln*, [mistysch@cox.net](mailto:mistysch@cox.net)

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/jwel>



Part of the [Educational Administration and Supervision Commons](#), and the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

---

Schwartz, Misty, "Voices of Women in the Field--I'm Glad No One Told Me . . ." (2006). *Journal of Women in Educational Leadership*. 207.

<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/jwel/207>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Educational Administration, Department of at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Women in Educational Leadership by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

# Voices of Women in the Field

---

I'm Glad No One Told Me. . . .

**Misty Schwartz**

Prior to beginning my current position, I'm glad no one told me that many women find the academy unappealing, with a chilly environment that can be biased and hostile toward women. I'm glad no one told me that I may suffer from intellectual and social isolation that is brought about by the masculine principles of competition and individualism that often occur in institutions of higher education. I'm glad no one told me that I will have little guidance from my peers due to a lack of mentors and that I may be expected to compromise my personal values and beliefs to fit into the white male dominated academic culture. I'm glad no one told me that, as a woman, I will be less likely to pursue a tenure-track position and if I do, I will be more likely to leave before advancing through the review process. I'm glad no one told me that I would probably report lower satisfaction than white males on relationships with colleagues, professional development, and overall career experience. I'm glad no one told me about the barriers that I may face as a woman faculty member because I may not be in the position that I am in today. I love what I do and I believe I do it for the right reasons and NOW that I am here, I have the opportunity and the responsibility to DO something about these issues with women in higher education specifically related to the promotion and tenure process.

Trower and Chait (2002) found the most accurate predictor of success for female undergraduates is the percentage of women faculty members at the institution. We, as women, owe it to one another to be here. There is some irony that many colleges and universities have a mission of social justice and yet women are still generally underrepresented in the faculty ranks when compared to the percentages of women entering institutions of higher education and pursuing doctoral degrees. We have made great strides to increase the overall numbers of women but these accomplishments may be overshadowed by the fact women are still not present in positions of leadership and often have less opportunity to participate in significant institutional decision making (Shavlik, Touchton, & Pearson, 1987).

## About the Author

*Misty Schwartz* is an Assistant Clinical Professor in Nursing at Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska. Currently, she is the Coordinator for the School Health Program in the School of Nursing and a Ph.D. candidate from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in Educational Administration.

---

Institutions of higher education have always had the freedom to decide who may teach, what may be taught, and how it will be taught. As a result, courts have been reluctant to become involved in academic matters. One initiative that has stimulated progress in gender issues in higher education is affirmative action. Specifically related to the promotion and tenure process, affirmative action seeks: to eliminate the effects of an institution's present or prior discrimination against women, to remedy discrimination that has been imposed by society, and to increase the representation of women on college campuses.

One of the most significant determinants of those achieving promotion and tenure is research. The more "pure" the research, the more valued it is in this process. Men and women tend to be very different in the area of research productivity. This can be explained by women's structural position in the university. Women tend to be in positions that have heavier teaching loads, greater responsibilities to undergraduate education, and more service commitments. Research is often valued more because of the traditional notion in higher education that anyone can teach, therefore teaching is assumed to be uncreative, unskilled and requires little effort. When teaching, women tend to spend more time preparing and are in the lower levels that have larger class sizes and younger students who need more personal and intellectual guidance.

Women also spend a greater percentage of their time in service activities. They are more likely to volunteer their time and expertise in order to be positive role models for other women. Often they are asked to represent their "group" to symbolize affirmative action and the achievement of diversity goals.

So, as women, what CAN we do to advance up the career ladder and be granted permanent positions? We need to make sure the promotion and tenure policies at our institutions are explicit, specific, and consistent and these policies clearly articulate how tenure is to be acquired. We should obtain as much information as possible to prepare for the promotion or tenure review process.

Women who are in positions of authority need to provide strong leadership that provides flexibility that will contribute to satisfying careers. A

nonsexist and equitable climate needs to be established by educating faculty about gender issues, by dealing with sexist behaviors and by offering support and mentoring for women. Advancement processes need to have independent stages, that incorporate a “checks and balances” system so that if bias does occur at one level it can be corrected at another. We need leaders who will advocate for changing the current rigid structure of traditional tenure-track career paths and the culture that makes it so difficult for women to succeed. Special attention must be given to recruiting and retaining women faculty.

Specific and valuable policies tailored for the campus, may include: stopping the tenure clock for women in certain situations such as the birth or adoption of a child, moving to part-time for a defined period of time, providing opportunities for re-entry after time out of the workforce, providing services that support families, establishing clear criteria for what is expected in teaching, research and service, having time, encouragement, and rewards for the professional activities they find most compatible with their talents and interests, and redefining scholarship as discovery, integration, application and teaching (Boyer, 1990).

The final point regarding the current criteria for promotion and tenure that is significant for women is, at most institutions, research, teaching and service are not equally weighed. One reason for this is research has been the primary way of evaluating because it is easy to quantify and it is too difficult to objectively evaluate the quality of teaching and service. This position can ultimately devalue what women do well. There is a double standard of predominately measuring the quantity of research and the quality of teaching and service because women are not rewarded for carrying higher than average teaching loads and performing many service activities and are penalized for having shorter publication lists. It is possible and necessary for academia to also look at the quantity and the quality of all three and make promotion and tenure decisions based on the big picture.

I wish someone had told me how rewarding my job would be and how I can make a difference in the lives of others. But that is what I plan to tell others now.

## References

- Boyer, E. L. (1990). *Scholarship reconsidered: Priorities of the professoriate*. Princeton, NJ: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.
- Shavlik, D. L., Touchton, J. G., & Pearson, C. S. (1987). *The new agenda of women for higher education: A report of the ACE Commission on Women in Higher Education*. Washington, DC: American Council on Education.
- Trower, C. A., & Chait, R. P. (2002). Faculty diversity: Too little for too long. *Harvard Magazine*, 104(4), 33-37.