No Talent Left Behind

The Future for Women in Science and Technology

At a time when our nation cannot afford to leave any talent behind in meeting the global competition in science and technology, a seminal invitational conference was held on April 27th. Organized by the Center for Women and Work and funded by the National Science Foundation, the conference—“Intergenerational Voices on Women in Science and Engineering”—was designed to create an action agenda to address issues facing women working as scientists and engineers in academia, industry, and government. The 1-day gathering welcomed a diverse group of participants from across the nation, including representatives from industry, government and the academy; from various racial and ethnic backgrounds; and from a wide range of STEM fields and social science disciplines.

Working in intergenerational, interdisciplinary groups, conference attendees identified what has changed for women in the STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) fields and developed specific proposals for future research, public policy, and workplace action. Four themes guided these discussions: 1) educational pathways for women entering STEM careers, 2) discrimination in the workplace, 3) work-life balance, and 4) job and organizational factors which lead to success in these fields.

Who Cares? We Care!

CWW Forum Addresses Issues of Carework

In a country where nearly 75 percent of impaired older adults receive care and assistance from family and friends, one could ask, “Where are the careworkers?” The UML Center for Women and Work (CWW) celebrated their 9th Annual Gathering at the Well Forum with “Who Cares? The People, Policies, and Politics of Carework” to address eldercare, with specific emphasis on concerns for the careworkers. The forum opened with a presentation by Susan Thomson, which provided a thorough and comprehensive look at the many faces and facets of care-giving; her talk was made even more poignant by the sharing of personal stories of caregivers in the greater Lowell community. Expanding on Deborah Stone’s “triangle of care,” Susan introduced “the tetrahedron of care,” tangibly demonstrating the connection between and among the person receiving care, the careworker, family members, and the community.

A panel comprised eminent speakers including Alice Wolf, Massachusetts State Representative; Rebecca Gutman, SEIU 1199; and Marian Weisenfeld, Greater Boston Interfaith Organization. The panel discussed the needs of the elderly—including feeling connected with their community—and the needs of careworkers in general. According to Weisenfeld, “Careworkers are paid very low wages—around $10.84 per hour—with no insurance coverage, no health benefits, and no paid leaves.” CWW Associate Mignon Duffy (Sociology) chaired the panel.

The discussions shed light on how our society has no systematic way to deal with aging. Most fundamentally, our elder-care system does not support the emotional,
CWW Co-Sponsors Events During Lowell’s Women’s Week

As part of its commitment to community involvement, CWW co-sponsored a public hearing that focused on advancing women toward wage equality and a luncheon that spotlighted women’s issues in the workplace. The public hearing, lead by the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women, sought to collect stories from women who have been negatively impacted by discriminatory wages. Along with CWW’s sponsorship, the public hearing was co-sponsored by American Association of University Women, Massachusetts Coalition for Women’s Wage Equality, UMass Lowell Council on Diversity and Pluralism, UMass Lowell Labor Extension Program, Merrimack Valley Central Labor Council, and YWCA of Lowell.

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CWW Associate Spearheads Efforts to Build Care Movement

Mignon Duffy, CWW Faculty Associate, has received a seed grant from the University Research and Scholarship Council to complete an interdisciplinary analysis of recent state-level policy initiatives related to care in Massachusetts. This project, entitled “Building a Care Movement in Massachusetts,” is an effort to connect the work of academics studying the paid and unpaid work of care to organizing strategies used by activists.

The first phase of this effort will focus on a limited number of care-related policy initiatives that have recently been on the state-level agenda within Massachusetts, such as health care reform, paid family leave, and collective bargaining proposals for personal care attendants. The second phase will be focused on developing a strategy to engage care scholars in the state policy arena.

Interested in Becoming a CWW Associate?

The CWW Associates Program is a critical component of CWW’s role as a hub for innovative scholarly and action projects on the gendered conditions of work. The primary goal of the program is to foster an interdisciplinary, intellectual community at UMass Lowell that supports new projects on women and work, fosters collaborations across disciplines, and builds partnerships between community and university members to address shared concerns. We welcome visiting scholars and community associates as well as resident faculty. If you are interested in exploring an affiliation, please contact Director Meg A. Bond (Meg_Bond@uml.edu).

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An edited conference volume will summarize results and be distributed widely to academic, industry, and public policy audiences.

Keynote speaker at the conference was Dr. Evelyn M. Hammonds, professor of the history of science and African-American studies at Harvard University. Hammonds serves as Harvard’s senior vice provost for Faculty Development and Diversity.

Members of the team that organized the conference are Professor Paula Rayman of the Regional Economic and Social Development (RESD) Department, principal investigator; Psychology Professor Meg Bond, co-principal investigator; Assistant Professor Maria Brunette of the Work Environment Department, co-principal investigator; Jody Lally, project manager in the Center for Women and Work; and graduate research assistants May Elewa and Padmaja Sistla.

Labs for Interdisciplinary Design Launched

The Laboratory for Interdisciplinary Design (LID) is a new learning and teaching space adjacent to CWW (B7 in Coburn Hall). CWW Faculty Associate Sarah Kuhn created the Lab, with help and support from the Center, to facilitate faculty experimentation with new and better ways of engaging students in exploration of critical social and environmental issues. Looking like a cross between a seminar room and an artist’s studio, the LID promotes the active, problem-oriented, service learning that has been shown by research to best promote student learning. Women and minority students, in particular, are more likely to be attracted to, and retained in, courses with engineering and computer science content if the curriculum also stresses these disciplines as a means to address important community and global problems.

CWW Reaches Milestone in 2008

In 2008, The Center for Women and Work will celebrate its 10th anniversary. Since its inception in 1998, CWW has demonstrated a strong and unwavering commitment to both the UML community and the greater Lowell community, and we look forward to advancing our mission over the next 10 years. Planning is underway for several events and initiatives to celebrate CWW’s accomplishments.
Who Cares? We Care!

CWW Forum Addresses Issues of Carework

Physical, and economic needs of careworkers. The impact of this neglect is that there are few incentives to take up carework professionally, which results in family and friends being more concerned and worried about their loved ones and, more saliently, having to shoulder more of the burden in this area.

The keynote speaker was Lisa Dodson, a noted research professor at Boston College, who delivered a forceful and passionate look at the gross inequalities that tear at the fabric of women caregivers’ lives. Dodson expressed dual concerns about caregivers’ perception of themselves and also the carework they do—issues that she is all too familiar with because of her field research, which focuses on the lives of low income careworkers in the expanding care labor force. According to Dodson, “Being individualistic or independent is looked at synonymously with being a complete person, and not being independent is looked at as being incomplete.” She said we need to be a society that highly regards interdependence and that recognizes that we all need to give and receive.

The morning's events also included table discussions where over 80 forum attendees discussed issues such as the concerns of the elderly, government interventions or the lack of it, and how difficult it is for family to care for their loved ones when they live far away. Each group had to list their suggestions for improvement, which were then displayed throughout the hall. Also, as part of CWW’s mission to advance change, participants were encouraged to write down, and commit to, their own personal resolutions for advancing change in a care movement.

Protestant Campus Minister and Forum Planning Committee Chair Imogene Stulken ended the session with a call-and-response reading. After each statement of need, Stulken asked, “Who cares?” The audience shouted together, “We Care!”

In addition to Imogene who served as Chair, the Forum Planning Committee included Heather Norcross, Susan Thomson, Mignon Duffy, and Meg Bond.

Partnering Against Rape

During Lowell Women’s Week in early March, CWW Faculty Associate Sharon Wasco and collaborators convened an open community meeting entitled, Partnering Against Rape: A Visioning Session to Build a Community Coalition, with support from CWW, UMass Lowell’s Department of Psychology, and the Council on Diversity and Pluralism. The purpose of this meeting was to form an alliance among those who provide care to rape survivors in the Greater Lowell area. Participants comprised a multidisciplinary group of community leaders and represented a broad range of perspectives and a great deal of dedication to the topic of sexual assault.

Over the course of the meeting, some aspects of a common vision for improving the Lowell area community response to rape emerged. These visions emphasized comfort, safety, and freedom from blame and fear for survivors—as well as the importance of increasing reporting rates and providing information about the existing resources in this community that are, in many cases, misunderstood or underutilized. Several themes—“connecting with others,” “accompaniment,” and “strength in numbers”—were noted to be key not only to rape survivors’ recovery, but also central to the community’s ability to support rape survivors and prevent future incidents of sexual violence.

On April 11th a second session, Partnering Against Rape II: Defining Our Relationships and Goals for Working Together, identified both short- and long-term objectives. Long-term objectives include: a focus on education, prevention and awareness training, and the formalization of relationships between major systems serving sexual assault victims via a SART (Sexual Assault Response Team) or SANE (Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner) program. Short-term objectives include bringing additional partners—especially from the medical/nursing professions—to the table.
CWW Senior Associate Advocates for Anti-Discrimination Treaty

This spring, Senior Associate Jean L. Pyle has been advocating that the United States ratify the ‘Treaty for Rights of Women’—officially entitled The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The United Nations adopted this treaty in 1981. As of November 2006, it has been ratified by 185 countries: the United States is the only industrialized nation to have not ratified it.

The goals of CEDAW are to reduce violence against women and girls, ensure their access to education, health care, and employment, provide equal protection before the law, and guarantee women the same human rights and basic freedoms as men.

This is an opportunity for the U.S. to take a positive role globally. This treaty has been in the hands of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee for years. Massachusetts Senator John F. Kerry, a member of this Committee, could assist in moving it forward and bringing it to the Senate floor. Other New England members of the committee—Christopher J. Dodd (D-CT) and John E. Sununu (R-NH) could be prevailed upon to support it.

As a result of her letter, the Florida Times-Union took a public stand March 31, 2007, suggesting “The US should step into its role as a global human rights advocate by accepting this treaty. It won’t mean any changes in the laws. It will mean millions of women around the world can point to our country as a supporter, thus gaining leverage to assert basic human rights. It’s time to act.” If you are interested in the passage of this treaty, you are urged to contact your senators.

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The UMass Labor Extension Program and CWW also co-sponsored a Lowell Women’s Week luncheon, which was primarily designed to bring together UMass women employees. The luncheon had a broad focus, and featured discussions not only on the economic disenfranchisement of women, issues of work/family balance, lack of leadership roles for women, ergonomic issues, but also on personal themes familiar to women: the stress of constantly multi-tasking, lack of appreciation for work done, and performing work outside the scope of one’s job description.

Both events sought to advance change by calling for specific action steps that empower women and reconfigure structural policies that perpetuate these inequalities.

CWW 2007 Working Papers

