



Task Force on Gender and the Academic Climate

Report to President David Baltimore

June 2, 2004

Submitted by John E. Bercaw, Centennial Professor of Chemistry, and Margo P. Marshak, Vice President for Student Affairs, Task Force Co-Chairs

Task Force Members

John E. Bercaw, Centennial Professor of Chemistry, Co-Chair
Jed Z. Buchwald, Doris and Henry Dreyfuss Professor of History
Janet G. Hering, Professor of Environmental Science and Engineering; Executive Officer for Keck Laboratories
Margo P. Marshak, Vice President for Student Affairs, Co-Chair
Mike Miranda, Division Administrator, Biology
Dianne K. Newman, Claire Booth Luce Assistant Professor of Geobiology and Environmental Science and Engineering
John P. Preskill, John D. MacArthur Professor of Theoretical Physics
Candace Rypisi, Director, Caltech Women's Center
Barbara J. Wold, Bren Professor of Molecular Biology, Director of Beckman Institute

The Task Force was assisted by

Karen K. Greenwalt, Associate General Counsel, Office of the General Counsel
Miriam Feldblum, Senior Director for Student Affairs Projects, Special Assistant to the President
Michael R. Hoffmann, James Irvine Professor of Environmental Science; Dean of Graduate Studies

Executive Summary

The 'Task Force on Gender and the Academic Climate' has determined that a collection of underlying behavior and attitudes concerning gender has made productive life on campus difficult for many graduate students. Inappropriate behavior is very serious and unacceptable in its negative impact on a collegial environment even if it does not meet the criteria of legally actionable harassment. As is stated in the Caltech catalog, "Harassment is the creation of a hostile or intimidating environment in which verbal or physical conduct, because of its severity and/or persistence, is likely to interfere significantly with an individual's work or education, or affect adversely an individual's living conditions."

If these problems are not appropriately addressed, Caltech and the broader scientific community will ultimately suffer from the under-utilization of talented individuals (particularly women) who are discouraged from realizing their full potential as scientists and engineers. Inappropriate behaviors inevitably dampen the enthusiasm our women graduates have for professional careers in engineering and science, reduce the scientific productivity of our students, lower the quality of scientific engagement and discourse, and impair Caltech's ability to successfully recruit the best graduate classes. The Task Force has concluded that the primary responsibility for correcting this situation belongs to the professorial faculty, who must take an active and ongoing role in educating their students and research group members concerning the kinds of gender-related behavior that can damage the individual or group.

Data Gathering, Problem Identification, and Interpretation

In response to your charge and the recent Graduate Student Council and Women in Engineering, Science and Technology (GSC/WEST) survey on quality of life issues at Caltech, the Gender and Academic Climate Task Force has investigated a general sense by graduate students of an unfavorable environment on campus with respect to gender issues. In order to evaluate the nature and magnitude of the problems, the committee gathered general information from a number of different sources on campus, including the Ombuds Office, the Women's Center, the Counseling Center, the Graduate Student Council, and selected Divisional Administrators. The Task Force has limited its scope to the graduate student population, but we believe comparable concerns extend across other campus constituencies. In the following sections, we identify a set of behaviors and general attitudes that many female and male graduate students on campus feel make our academic environment less productive than it could or should be. We have come to the following conclusions.

1. Although the major complaints of inappropriate behaviors arise from peer-to-peer interactions, broader institutional and faculty attitudes also contribute to the problem. These include:

- a. Inappropriate comments about roles, skills, talents and deficits in talent of women in engineering and science. The remarks are made primarily by men.
- b. Perceptions of negative faculty attitudes regarding the impact of marriage and family on career development.
- c. Peer and institutional pressure toward women to adopt gender-neutral behavior in clothing and personal-care styles.
- d. Unwanted and insensitive exposure to web-based pornography.

2. Some graduate student women feel that:

- a. There is major risk in bringing gender-related problems to the attention of a faculty member for fear of negative consequences with respect to their career paths.
- b. The negative academic climate produces significant waste of time, energy, creativity, and fruitful scientific communication.
- c. A subset of the gender-related problems can be traced to the low percentage of women on the faculty and relatively low number of female graduate students (e.g., very few women are available as mentors).
- d. Some female graduate students may be reluctant to consider an academic career at a “high pressure” university such as Caltech due to a lack of balance between work and home life, and the perception that Caltech is gender-biased and unfriendly toward women.
- e. Some female students are subject to unwanted and persistent attention from their male peers that arises from social interactions within the academic setting or at campus venues.
- f. There is a need for a formal maternity/paternity leave policy for graduate students. In this regard, the Task Force applauds the Caltech Maternity Leave Policy for Graduate Students recently approved by the Faculty Board on May 10, 2004.
- g. There is a need to expand the availability of affordable childcare for graduate students. In this regard, the Task Force applauds the creation of the Childcare Assistance Program on campus.

3. Faculty involvement is essential to correcting the situation. The Task Force advocates the following:

- a. Faculty should treat gender bias and harassment as major issues and address these issues on an ongoing basis.

- b. Faculty need to explain to graduate students (and all research group members) what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable gender-related behavior and set the proper tone for interpersonal interactions within the research group environment. Faculty should stress the importance of communication and point out that individuals are not always aware of the impact of their words or actions on others, and must, in such cases, be informed of the impact of their behavior.
- c. Faculty should be aware of and inform their students about the campus resources for advice and assistance with harassment issues. Confidential assistance for students is available through the Counseling Center, Ombud's Office, and Women's Center. Other resources and information are provided in the Institute Policy on Unlawful Harassment, which is printed in the Caltech catalog and posted on the web at:
<http://cit.hr.caltech.edu/policies/2003/UnlawfullHarassment02-2003.pdf>
- d. Faculty should openly discuss with graduate students and other members of the research group the real-world expectations and challenges of the academic and discipline-specific profession for which they are training. This can and should include recognition that sacrifices may be needed in order to succeed at various levels, and that dilemmas of this sort can be addressed by varied strategies that each individual will need to develop.

Recommendations of the Committee

In light of the issues and concerns that have been identified by the Task Force, we recommend the following measures:

- 1) Through their actions, both implicit and explicit, our faculty play a powerful, central role in defining gender-related attitudes and expectations. All faculty must therefore take responsibility for improving the gender climate by assuming an active and ongoing role in providing an environment conducive to productive work. This begins with educating their students and research group members in the avoidance of inappropriate gender-related behaviors. It also requires leading by example.
- 2) A comprehensive education program about gender issues and bias should be established with the input and support of the Graduate Student Council and the Women in Engineering, Science, and Technology (WEST) group. This should include, but not be limited to, programs for new student and staff orientations, programs in student housing and for lab groups, on-going training opportunities for faculty, and the development of educational and resource materials (print and web-based).
- 3) Progress on issues related to the institutional environment and harassment will require continuing attention and assessment. A mechanism for monitoring these issues, including the rate of progress on current recommendations and development of new recommendations as needed, should be established (possibly through an existing committee such as the Administrative Committee on Diversity and Minority Affairs – ACODAMA). Future assessments should

address the concerns not only of the graduate students but of all members of the Caltech community.

The Task Force fully recognizes that Caltech, and other institutions of science and technology like it, place unique demands on its faculty and students. We are all expected to work hard, indeed to place major emphasis on our vocations as scientists, engineers and scholars. This inevitably means that we will sometimes be confronted with difficult choices concerning the aspirations and demands of career and private life. Even as we recognize this, the culture of Caltech at every level must ensure that under no circumstances will these choices be made more difficult than they already are by gender-related behaviors and attitudes that create added stresses.