

# Retrospective on Progress made since the Equity Climate Assessment Study of 1988

By the Gender Climate Assessment Advisory Committee\*

January 8, 2002

One recommendation of the 2000 Gender Equity Report was that the Institution should study the “intangible issues that directly affect the gender climate in the workplace”. These were among the types of issues first examined in the Equity Climate Assessment Study of 1988 (ECAS) and are those issues most difficult to quantify and address. In considering whether another Institution-wide formal gender climate assessment similar to the ECAS should be conducted, the [Gender Climate Assessment Advisory Committee](#) (Committee) suggested we first examine the recommendations from that study to evaluate whether it had been an effective tool for stimulating progress with regard to gender equity. This report summarizes the changes at WHOI that have occurred since 1988, and the apparent connection, if any, to the ECAS. It concludes with the Committee’s recommendation for a comprehensive program to address enhancing the climate for women at WHOI.

Immediately following release of the ECAS in 1988, the Directorate agreed to a plan addressing the issues identified. Although not always gender specific, many of these issues often tend to impact women more than men. The broad areas of concern were:

1. Attracting and retaining more women to the Scientific, Technical and senior Administrative Staffs;
2. Providing career related training and education for all employees and educating all employees with regard to discriminatory behaviors;
3. Hiring, promotion and salary oversight with regard to gender equity;
4. Child care;
5. Internal committee governance;
6. Clarifying the role of Education Coordinators; and
7. Overall communication within the Institution.

Based on the ECAS, the Women’s Committee issued a report of its recommendations to the former Staff Council. Their recommendations were very much in line with the action plan. Together with the items in the action plan, virtually every recommendation made by the Women’s Committee with regard to gender related issues was addressed by the Institution.

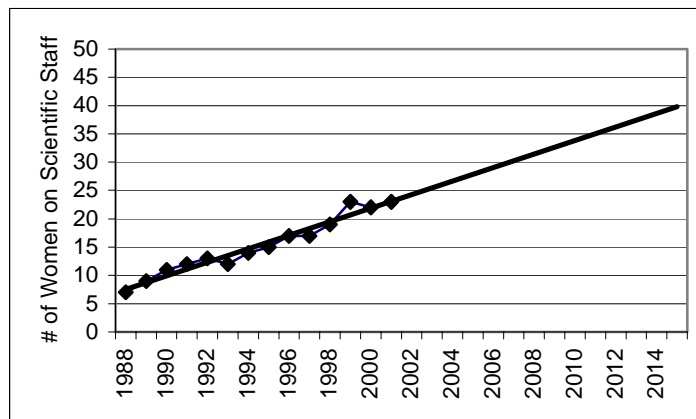
Details about each of these areas and the general approach to addressing the ECAS recommendations are discussed below. Specifically:

1. With respect to overall success in **recruitment and retention of women** in all types of positions and educational programs, the Institution has made significant progress. As the [attached](#) statistics illustrate, the population of regular employees has grown by approximately 9% over the 13-year period, but the percentage of women has grown by slightly more than 27%, while the percentage of men has grown by only about 1%. In 1988, women comprised approximately 30% of the WHOI workforce and in 2001, they comprise nearly 35%. More important than the increase in numbers and percentages of

women at WHOI, however, is where this growth has occurred. At the time of the ECAS in 1988, there were two women with tenure on the Scientific Staff and one woman in a senior administrative position. Today there are seven women with tenure and numerous examples of senior women in administration, including two current members of the Directorate.

In the area of the **Directorate, senior and middle management (including licensed officers) and other exempt administrative staff**, the number of women on the staff has grown from 24 in 1988 to 74 in 2001—an increase of more than 200%. Whereas women comprised approximately 37% of the Exempt Administrative staff in 1988, they now comprise slightly more than 61%. Similarly, although the numbers are small, the number of licensed female officers on WHOI research vessels has tripled (from 1 to 3). Where there were no women at the Associate Director level in 1988, there are now two: one in a regular position (appointed in 1997) and another in an acting role. In addition, with regard to senior administrative positions, one woman was appointed Associate Dean and another was appointed an Institute Director. We have yet to appoint a female Department Chair, however, and that is a critically important goal to retain.

When looking at the **Scientific Staff**, the entire staff has grown considerably (from 100 to 135 members or 35%), but the most significant growth again is in the population of women on the Staff—from 7 to 23, an increase of more than 225%. In contrast, the male population on this staff has grown by about 20%. In 1988, women comprised 7% of the Scientific Staff; in 2001 they comprise 17%. If the population trend continues for the next fifteen years, the number of women on the Scientific Staff could exceed 40.



The **Technical Staff** has grown in similar patterns. The overall staff has grown by approximately 54%, the percentage of women by over 240% and the number of men by 32%. The Exempt Technical Staff included approximately 11% women in 1988 and now incorporates nearly 24%. Simultaneously the **Non-Exempt Research Staff** (formerly “graded” staff) has declined by about 21%, with 29% fewer women and 15% fewer men. The result is that the combined exempt and non-exempt research staffs have grown approximately 12%, nearly 15% for women and slightly more than 10% for men, with an overall shift towards the Exempt Staff.

**Marine crew** employment varies by pay period due to ship activity. At this particular point in time, the number of marine crew (including licensed officers) in “regular” status has declined, but this has affected the women to a lesser degree than the men with one less female employee in 2001 than in 1988, but 28 fewer males.

In the **Education** arena, overall growth in the programs has been about 24%, with some programs expanding more than others. The percentage of women in these programs has grown significantly (72%), while the percentage of men has decreased slightly (about 6%). At this point, the education programs are nearly equally balanced with regard to gender. This is not true for individual departments, however, and while we recognize that this is a nation-wide issue, the Institution needs to continue its efforts to attract and retain more women into those areas of research where they have been traditionally underrepresented.

2. In the area of **employee training and development**, a Staff Training and Development Administrator was hired in 1989 to design, develop and conduct in-house training and arrange for continuing education programs. This program met with mixed results due to the inability to attract many Scientific or Senior Technical Staff members and with the push for more technical computer training. As a result, the position was eliminated after six years and training efforts focused on establishing a computer training lab, contracting for outside instructors to teach the most popular software programs and sponsoring in-house instructor led short courses. Effort continued in the area of management training by sponsoring supervisory training programs conducted by outside vendors.

The computer-oriented courses have been tremendously successful and the training lab is well utilized. In-house led courses have included several offerings of various operating system and software program short courses as well as an Introduction to Oceanography short course. In 1991, the Institution also began sponsoring on-site courses taught by instructors from UMass Lowell. Some employees attained UNIX certificates through this program, but its popularity waned with the advent of distance learning and the growth of other higher education opportunities in Southeastern Massachusetts. We understand that the desire for other types of technical in-house training was expressed recently in the Technical and Graded Staff Study conducted by the Tenured Scientist Executive Committee (TenSEC). Supervisory training also remains a difficult concept to sell, especially to those who could really benefit from it. Although outside of our purview, it seems to the Committee that some innovative approaches to providing more training opportunities could be undertaken and would be a positive step for WHOI to take.

In a related area, in 1989, the **Employee Education** (tuition reimbursement) policy was amended to provide for significantly higher reimbursement levels for employees who wish to pursue undergraduate and graduate programs.

3. With regard to **hiring, promotion and salary oversight**, although the person responsible for Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) and Affirmative Action has traditionally reviewed and approved all hiring decisions, in 1987 the (then) Special Assistant to the Director began attending the (then) Staff Council meetings to observe the actual appointment and promotion deliberations for Scientific and Technical Staffs. When Staff Council was changed to Appointments and Promotions Council, the Special Assistant

(now the Ombuds/EEO Officer) officially became a non-voting member of the Council. In addition, beginning in 1989, the Ombuds/EEO Officer began participating in the annual salary review process of the Scientific and Technical Staffs as well as the review of the administrative staff that reports directly to the Directorate. A significant part of the Ombuds/EEO Officer's role is to identify apparent salary inequities, investigate the situation and recommend remedies, if appropriate. As a result of the 2000 Gender Equity Report, these efforts are now being aided by a new statistical analysis being conducted by Dr. Andrew Solow, a statistician and Director of the Marine Policy Center.

4. Although not exclusively a women's issue, the ECAS recommended that **childcare issues** needed attention, as they traditionally have impacted women more than men. A Child Care ad hoc committee was established in 1989, and charged with developing recommendations for viable WHOI approaches to childcare. As a result, the Institution implemented its flexible working hours policy and the Child Care Subsidy and Dependent Care Reimbursement programs (including elder care), all of which continue in place to this day—72 employees participated in the Child Care Subsidy program and 36 in the Dependent Care program in 2001. The Child Care Ad Hoc committee evolved into the Dependent Care Committee, which subsequently became the present Committee on Work and Family Life. The Committee is charged with “monitoring the child, elder and other dependent care and family needs of the Institution's employees and students”. They recently conducted a survey dealing with dependent care needs and will be publishing the results soon.
5. With regard to **governance**, in 1989, the four elected committees in existence at that time (Staff, Women's Graded and Marine Personnel Committee [GMPC] and Joint Program Student Reps) formed a group called the Assembly in an attempt to coordinate, but not duplicate, efforts and activities across the Institution. In 1990, the Assembly conducted a follow-up survey to the ECAS, the results of which were shared with the WHOI community. Those results were quite positive with 68% of the respondents characterizing WHOI's attention to and resolution of equity issues as having improved since conducting the ECAS.
6. The roles of the **Education Coordinators** (a relatively new position in 1988) have become clearer and better defined over the ensuing years. They are now well-recognized, departmental resources with regard to the various education programs.
7. Maintaining effective means of **communication** within the Institution, as in any organization, was, is, and probably always will be a challenge. While the issue impacts everyone to some degree, if a subset of individuals (such as women or other members of underrepresented groups) is out of the traditional informal information loops, the problem can be magnified for them. With the growth of technology, communication can be easier, but it can also be overwhelming in quantity. Some direct results of the ECAS included the establishment of the monthly Information Exchange Group (IEG) which continues to this day; the establishment of a Director's Advisory Council (formerly Policy Advisory Council) which deliberates and recommends Institution policy as needed; and the aforementioned Assembly which has been inactive for several years. Similar efforts to communicate among the various elected committees at WHOI do

continue, however, as evidenced by recent meetings and discussions among Staff, GMPC, Women's and TenSEC committees.

In addition to the above identified action items, the 1988 ECAS supported the need for having a variety of role models at the Institution to benefit junior staff members and students. There was also an underlying desire to recognize and reward women who have made a difference to the Institution and to the larger ocean science community. These beliefs supported three initiatives:

- The continuation of the Visiting Scholar Lecture Series sponsored by the women on the Scientific Staff, which had begun earlier in 1988. This program's goal was for the Institution to host successful women from various fields of research for the benefit of both staff and students. Over the years, the Institution hosted nine Scholars under this program, and it was very successful in bringing the women on the staff together to network. The program has been inactive for a few years and consideration should be given to re-instituting it.
- The Women Pioneers in Oceanography Award and honoring women in general during Women's History Month each March. In 1994, the Women's Committee began to observe Women's History Month with a program honoring Women Pioneers in Oceanography. The Women's History Month programs have continued but the Women's Committee felt the award for pioneering women should be a prestigious Institutional award, which led to the recommendation for the Mary Sears Award.
- The Mary Sears Award. Through the Women's Committee's efforts, the Mary Sears Award was established by the Director and Board of Trustees. The first award will be presented to Dr. Mary Wilcox Silver, Professor of Ocean Sciences at the University of California, Santa Cruz, in the spring of 2002.

Other initiatives and changes relating to gender equity have few or no ties to the 1988 ECAS, but bear discussion as they do relate to the overall objectives.

A separate program recognizing WHOI women was the establishment of the Linda Morse-Porteous Award in 1991. This award was established through the generosity of John Porteous and is presented annually to a female on the exempt or non-exempt Technical Staff who embodies the characteristics that his late wife, Linda, exemplified: leadership, dedication to and quality of work, abilities as a role model and/or mentor for junior women, and involvement in the WHOI community.

Also not directly related to the ECAS, the reorganization of the Technical Staff into three distinct ladders (Research, Engineering and Information Systems) began in 1989. The reorganization was completed early in 1991 with about 12% of the Technical staff being reclassified to the Information Systems ladder and about 30% to the Engineering ladder. By defining the Information Systems positions, career opportunities were opened up to a whole new specialty, which was largely populated by women. In 1998, the Technical Staff structure was further refined to bring all three ladders into coincidence. Indirectly, this entire effort impacted women in a significant way as the information systems oriented employees now had a clear career path to follow as did those employees primarily engaged in research or engineering.

In 1994, the Director of Research chaired a Task Force on Diversity. This group made recommendations to the Director in December of that year. These recommendations were shared with the women and other members of underrepresented groups on the Scientific Staff, but unfortunately, there was insufficient follow-up or discussion in the departments. As a result, few of the recommended projects were completed. Many of the ideas discussed at that time were reiterated during the 1999-2000 Gender Equity Review.

As a result of the 2000 Gender Equity Review, the Director issued an Institution-wide response and made specific charges with regard to action items designed to address each of the issues raised. Although the Report initially focused on the Scientific Staff, several of the issues raised apply to Senior Technical Staff (space allocations, internal award programs, committee participation, and level of development activities) and a number of other issues are relevant across the board. As such, they are being dealt with as Institutional issues, not exclusively Scientific Staff concerns. It is our understanding that the Director is disseminating a progress report on the various action items.

### **Conclusions and Recommendation**

The Committee has concluded that progress has been made in the status, population and influence of women at WHOI since the 1988 ECAS. We must emphasize, however, that most of the recommendations made then are still valid and require consistent attention and additional effort to address. The significant accomplishments include:

- Population of women at WHOI, particularly Scientific, Technical and Administrative increased
- Staff training and development opportunities increased
- Salary oversight measures implemented
- Child/dependent care assistance program implemented
- Assembly to assist with communication issues formed (although since disbanded)
- Education Coordinator's role in assisting students clarified
- Information Exchange Group (IEG) to help increase information exchange and dissemination formed
- Women's Visiting Scholar Program designed to expose students and staff to senior researchers from other institutions implemented
- Programs honoring women's contributions to oceanography initiated

The notable areas still needing attention and improvement are:

- Appointing a female department chair
- Attracting/retaining more women on the Scientific Staff, particularly at the senior levels
- Educating and training supervisors, management, and advisors, especially in the area of discriminatory behaviors

In summary, the Institution has made significant progress in several areas identified in the Equity Climate Assessment Study of 1988. The action items outlined in the Director's Response to the Gender Equity Report of 2000 will go a long way towards resolving the "tangible" issues

raised in that more recent review. Issues identified such as space allocation, salary levels and career development/mentoring concerns are currently being addressed and monitored (see [gender.html](#).) In the area of “intangibles”, however, much still needs to be done. The longer-term, sometimes subtle changes involved with educating or raising the consciousness of the WHOI community are more difficult to address directly. Many of the “micro-inequities” (a concept originally articulated by Mary Rowe, Ombudsperson at MIT and described in her 1990 article, *[Barriers To Equality: The Power of Subtle Discrimination to Maintain Unequal Opportunity](#)*) are the result of totally unconscious behaviors—in order to change the behaviors, people need to be educated, hopefully enlightened and then held to a higher standard. This seems to be the one significant area not adequately addressed following the 1988 ECAS and is the one gender related concern most often described to and discussed with the Ombuds/EEO Officer.

This Committee has carefully considered conducting another climate assessment similar to the one conducted in 1988 and sees value in that exercise. It has also discussed the need to educate all parts of the Institution with regard to the more subtle impact certain behaviors and attitudes have on women. We recognize that an assessment, especially by an outside expert, would take many months to a year to conduct and complete. Rather than conduct an across the board separate climate assessment, we believe that it would be far more beneficial for the Institution to bring in a professional educator/ trainer experienced in gender issues to conduct a preliminary needs assessment (including data gathering and targeted interviews) and to use the data gathered to design, implement and conduct a customized on-going education program. In order to proceed with this program, we recommend the Institution immediately begin considering and selecting the appropriate person or persons to assist in this effort. As a Committee, we would be pleased to provide input and feedback on the process and to continue being involved on a regular basis as the project progresses.

## [Attachment](#)

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