**CommuniTea\_March 26, 2021**

**See slideshow, “2021-03-26\_CommuniTea\_Slides” in google docs**

**54 participants as of 1:10pm on zoom, breakout groups of ~8 people**

Breakout rooms were randomly mixed, with some occupied only by technical staff and others by a mix of scientists/engineers/admins/students/etc.

**Format:**

15 minute introduction to CommuniTeas, background (Maryam Mirzakhani movie and Rebuilding the Academy paper), and discussion points, followed by 30 minute breakout groups, with 15 minutes for groups to report back

**Discussion Points:**

- What kinds of issues have women at WHOI been experiencing during the COVID-19 epidemic?

- How can we better support women right now (as individuals, mentors, supervisors, and an Institution)?

- What should WHOI do (or keep doing!) to support women working at home, returning to campus, and returning to field work?

- The challenges mothers are facing now will impact their careers for many years to come. In what ways can WHOI prevent the loss of women with children from the institution?

**Compiled notes from breakout room report-out:**

**What issues have womxn at WHOI been experiencing during COVID?**

* Overwhelmingly participants reported anxiety and stress over the intersection of work and home life
* Some reported a dramatic increase in workload with a decreased capacity to do that work, due to lack of time, space, separation from family, access to campus resources, etc. For those with a workload similar to that before COVID, maintaining a usual pace of work has been difficult
* Many report concern over time lost in their long-term careers, especially those on short grants or who have lost field work opportunities
* COVID has been a “Career staller” -- no reprimands are expected, but no advancement is expected either, as groups reward those who have been able to work throughout COVID over those who have been hampered by dependent care, illness, etc.
* ***These issues are especially exasperated for womxn, who are most likely to bear the brunt of child care and elder care***
* Specific issues experienced by womxn related to child care include:
  + Dealing with the uncertainty of available care, including in-person schools that have intermittently closed and lack of summer daycare options
  + Responsibility of caring for the mental health of themselves as well as their children
  + Responsibility of suddenly becoming full time teachers on top of their day jobs, and concern for the long-time social and learning impacts of COVID on dependents without reliable school and day care options
  + Difficulty conducting field work, which can now include significant quarantine time (additional weeks) away from home in addition to field work time away from dependents
  + Stresses of supervising other WHOI employees who are in turn facing all of their own family problems

**How can we better support womxn? What has WHOI done well? What should WHOI continue to do?**

* Individually, we need to be mindful of those under emotional/ mental stress
* More supervisor training is needed across WHOI
* More mentoring opportunities are needed across WHOI
* 2020 brought many societal focuses to the forefront for WHOI employees, especially issues in diversity, equity, and inclusion. Women have been disproportionately involved in community and committee service roles, but many do not have hours to charge for these roles. What can WHOI do for this?
* Can overhead or other forms of funding be found for those who cannot charge participation in events like CommuniTea to grants?
* Several participants expressed gratitude for maintaining their jobs throughout COVID, and appreciate WHOI explicitly addressing parents’ needs. Some felt WHOI was generally supportive of parents; others felt very unsupported.
* Flexibility of working from home could help parents in a lot of ways
  + Extending virtual conferences and lectures can help caregivers attend events that they might not otherwise be able to attend
  + Some participants expressed their successful transition to working from home, and hope that continued support for this style of work is available after COVID.
* Some discussed parallels and differences between maternity leave and COVID, particularly focusing on the stigma and career goal compromises of those on leave. Bringing these issues to attention is valuable. Several attendees expressed a seminar from HR about the new PFML State Act.
* WHOI’s flexibility with part, ¾ time, and emergency time has been appreciated, but how do you get the work done that you’ve paid people to do when they were out? How will this disproportionately affect those who have job security vs those who need it for job promotion?
* Accountability in job performance was addressed several times-- some departments (MC&G) have written this into annual performance reviews so there is a record of disparate impacts of COVID on employees. Can this be implemented institute-wide?
* On-site daycare: this idea has been pushed around for years, but maybe COVID can actually bring it to reality? What can be done over the summer?

**Individual Breakout Room notes (edited to remove identifying information):**

**Breakout Room 1:**

What Kinds of issues have women at WHOI been experiencing during COVID-19 epidemic?:

* Hard to balance work/life. It’s hard to make sure kids are able to get what they can out of school while also getting work done.
* WHOI has been supportive.
* It’s hard to take care of own mental health, let alone children and family’s

Do people worry about productivity and staying funded down the line?

* WHOI has been good about moral support but productivity is down and promises/commitments aren’t being met.

Do you think that you have felt you have had a different experience?

* As a student worried about timeline to graduate, not as connected as a community. Forming a bubble when you can’t form a bubble because community living. Not as clear a gender distinction for younger people than older people.

What are the parallels/differences between hiatus for maternity leave and covid

* Longer than maternity leave? but maybe easier because they can’t go to sea with children etc
* Covid might be easier on men too if women are the ones that are checking on the children and beyond that
* Covid might be easier than maternity leave and the resulting "consequences” of having a child.
* less stigma with covid than for maternity leave, less rush to get back to work. More of an acceptance of low productivity.
* more compromises in career goals with maternity leave to have a better work/life balance with family

When are families supposed to have children with tenure and other work obligations? How will covid change this?

* Working from home allows more opportunities for family/house
* Flexibility is hard to implement with different needs from different departments
  + supervisor training can help this
* Some WHOI supervisors have shown that there is value in helping the family throughout the work day as needed

**Breakout Room 2:**

Nature of issues women at WHOI are confronting:

* A challenge that was common to all of us has been dealing with the breakdown of boundaries between work and home life. This has been especially acute for families who have been confronting uncertainty about school and daycare services, needs for their families.
* One member of our group with a toddler noted the challenge of she and her spouse trying to return to work before daycare was available. A lack of daycare options was also discussed as a long standing problem that has been severely exacerbated by COVID.
* Several expressed ongoing anxiety regarding what may be available and possible for child care this summer. Also, what will be expectations for transition back to campus with reopening
* With restructuring of workloads to accommodate at home work, some of us have seen dramatic increases in work load in absolute terms even while capacity to complete tasks has been diminished.

What is WHOI doing (or should be doing) to support women?

* Several of us hope WHOI can continue to support work from home after campus reopens and more generally to remain flexible as staff collectively re-adjust.
* Even as WHOI has supported work from home, more can (and needs to) be done. As an example, teams working on data intensive projects have been relying on home internet service, sometimes paying a premium for adequate service without grant support.

How can WHOI mitigate impacts on women’s career development?

* There was strong desire within our group for more forceful/top down expressions of support for mentoring across WHOI departments (scientific, tech, administrative, facilities, etc). Several of us feel strongly that all staff will need forums to explore how they can best navigate challenges associated with or arising from the COVID pandemic.

Daycare update?

* Finally we spent some time on discussing the status of WHOI’s investigation into providing on campus day care. This is a long running need, emphasized by members with high school and college age children. We know that HR has been looking into increasing support and/or establishing an on campus option. What is the status of this effort? How can we make it a reality?

**Breakout Room 3:**

* Issues with stresses/time management with kids at home and/or hybrid and changing schedules and children’s mental health needs. Also stresses from sea-going spouses and extra time away due to quarantine when there are significant childcare responsibilities.
* Sometimes coupled with caring for aging parents, and juggling childcare responsibilities when visiting elders.

Coping mechanisms:

* Using emergency leave (greatly appreciated!) and/or going less than full-time.
* Flex-time – also appreciated - working late and working early so can care for kids during day. Has been working, but is not sustainable.
* WHOI and supervisors have been supportive, but is not yet clear what long-term consequences will be both to funding and to merit increases/having hours to charge, etc.

Stresses from:

* Managing others who also have stresses due to childcare/aging parent responsibilities.
* Missing deadlines, falling behind, feeling like not being as good a mentor as usual because there is not enough time in the day, and concern of longer-term consequences (e.g., missed proposal deadlines).
* Providing funding for people from grants when the field or lab work was not done as proposed (could not get into lab, could not go into field, paid hours when people were dealing with home responsibilities) – how will this work out in the long run with projects (e.g., supplements or not?)

Disproportional service of women on committees/community service.

* Could have service release, but then there would be no female representation. Would help if excess service load was paid at a rate to truly compensate for time spent that is above and beyond what male/non-minority peers are doing.
* Need for recognition of limits on women’s time (particularly if have childcare/aging parent/family responsibilities) to participate in activities.

Stresses on technical staff to fill gaps, with no grant to charge for the time spent looking for the supplementary hours. Need for effective methods to spread word of people with given skills being available. Some depts do a good job on this – of helping find the best fits. Doing this networking has been much harder during COVID-19.

**Breakout Room 4:**

General Concerns

* Trying many jobs and not performing was well as they can
* Pile-up of missed tasks and not being able to do 5 days of delayed work on one day
* Domino effect of stress coming from kids. Kids are stressed from school, lack of peer interaction, etc, and that adds another burden to parents
* What is end timeline, when will this end? Not having an end date in sight is draining and stressful.
* Zoom fatigue. It is real.

Schooling/Day Care

* Particularly init
* Last-minute rearrangement of schedule due to exposure
* Young families
* Quarantine period before a cruise means kids+family all have changed schedules. Daycare or school can’t happen unless the quarantined parent isolates away from the house.
  + Also adds a layer of going from all-work cruise prep to 100% mom time during quarantine, then back to 100% work for the cruise itself.
  + Adds stress to family unit. Other parent needs to take on all responsibilities

Work

* Missing opportunities to do science due to lack of family support
* Extra burden of quarantine (month disruption for 1 week of work b/c children quarantine)
* Field-based jobs no longer feel viable
* Thoughts on getting a promotion are on hold. Not enough time to even contemplate putting together the paperwork.
* Everyone on internet has been rough. People had to upgrade their internet and buy extensions.

What can be done to help?

* Need to know if WHOI kids program is going to happen. Would take some significant pressure off.
  + Summer is a challenging childcare time anyway, this year is extra bad
* Consider long-term plans with WH Day-care Co-op

**Breakout Room 5:**

* Concerns over scheduling time at WHOI-- being flexible enough to do evening work alone in lab spaces is very helpful for some, but inaccessible to others, especially those with families
* COVID has been a “Career staller” -- no reprimands expected, but no advancement either, as groups reward those who have been able to work throughout covid
* Various outlooks-- some haven’t had many changes at all
* Learning how to do remote school, especially with intermittent in-person closings
* Revelations on disparities between how parents have worked through COVID (gender, presence of children, ages of children). Some haven’t seen many changes in their work/life, others have experienced great upheaval, including those without dependents.
* Mentoring at WHOI and sense of community has really suffered
* Group mentoring meeting for new tech staff seems to be going well, formed right before covid
* Among student community, imposter syndrome concerns have been taken over by the idea of everyone else being more productive than I am during covid
* Unique experiences to women: family units often rely on mothers to deal with emotional baggage, mental load, planning work

Solutions moving forward:

* Letter to administration from working mothers including self-help mental health resources from HR
* Semi-organized voluntary peer groups (collective of women scientists in chemistry)
* Concern over increased percentage of female students vs faculty, pipeline
* Issues of tenure and retention-- especially at WHOI for 2 body problem
* Ongoing flex scheduling and remote living moving forward? As a good thing from covid. Fast-tracked teleconferencing

Returning to the new normal:

* Flexibility in scheduling important for parents-- no after school program to extend work day, no riding buses, daycare and opening household up to new pod, summer camp
* Push for WHOI summer camp
* Advertised “Full day care” can often be only 9-3pm. This isn’t terribly helpful for the work day.
* Support for background reading article figure 1-- agreed across the board on all suggestions
* This is not a temporary thing-- do we want to go back to normal or make a better normal?
* WHOI has been kicking around the idea of child care-- for decades? Where does it go, liability issues. Investigate established YMCA and other groups instead