

# Gender Equity in the Academic History Workplace: A Guide to Best Practices

By the AHA Committee on Women Historians

These standards are intended to guide decisions and inform practices of deans, department chairs, and senior administrators within colleges and universities and serve as a resource for all historians, regardless of their rank.

The bullet points are intended to suggest examples and prompts to action rather than provide an exhaustive list.

## Producing a Workplace Culture That Ensures Gender Equity

Department chairs and administrators should take a positive and proactive approach toward creating a supportive workplace culture. The onus should not be upon women to point out problems or make complaints, but instead, those in authority should take responsibility for the tone of departmental life. Workplace culture can be made more supportive by:

- Creating inclusive networks of collegiality and sociability.
- Avoiding venues and activities for departmental gatherings that may exclude women or men, or make them feel like interlopers in their own departments.

- Ensuring that formal and informal decision-making processes are transparent and inclusive.
- Taking active steps to ensure that the workplace is free of unprofessional language and conduct.
- Taking a proactive approach in combating sexual harassment, discrimination based on sexual orientation, and/or a hostile environment by publicizing institutional policies and enforcing them.
- Insisting that staff, students, and administrators address and treat male and female faculty and students equally, i.e., avoid addressing male faculty as Dr. or Prof. and female faculty as Mrs., Ms., or Miss (or first name).

## Creating Gender Equity through Mentoring

Mentoring is crucial for women's success in navigating their way within a profession that still remains male dominated and, within some departments, colleges, and universities, still remains rooted in sexist ideas about gender. No single model of mentoring is applicable to all settings. At some institutions, a

formal system of assigned mentors chosen from senior faculty within their departments may work best, while in others, women benefit most from informal mentorship by senior colleagues in their own or other departments or in the wider academic community. The most effective mentors see themselves as colleagues rather than teachers. Many (though not all) younger women report having particularly benefited from the advice and support of senior women in the historical profession.

Ideally, mentorship will be a natural extension of a supportive and collegial workplace environment.

Effective mentorship includes:

- Sharing information about institutional knowledge, memory, and culture.
- Recognizing that mentorship is an important aspect of service to departments and colleges.
- Sharing and critiquing work, and doing so without regard to gender.
- Facilitating contact with conference organizers, journal editors, and publishers to provide venues for disseminating scholarly work.

## Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct 2005 Edition

The Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct is the AHA's most important single document promoting ethical practice in the discipline of history. This wholly revised version of the Statement is the most comprehensive revision of the document since its development. The text has been streamlined to impose a more uniform voice and consolidated to integrate AHA guidelines concerning professional conduct as they have evolved over the years. In addition, the 2005 version is inclusive of the full range of professional historians working in many different institutional settings. Two new introductory sections speak to common values of the profession of history and the shared values of historians.

Read the online version of the 2005 Statement on Standards at <http://www.historians.org/pubs/free/professionalstandards.cfm>.

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## Creating Gender Equity by Producing a Workplace Culture Amenable to Family Life

A workplace culture that better supports family life will benefit men and women both but will be especially important to women faculty members. Although societal norms are changing, parenting and elder care—and gendered expectations about them—fall disproportionately on women and affect their experience of the workplace. In addition, younger women faculty and graduate students feel acutely the combined pressures of the tenure and biological clocks. Likewise, mid-career advancement is often hindered by family obligations that still fall disproportionately on women. These problems can be alleviated by:

- Recognizing that meeting family obligations does not mean diminished professional commitment.
- Supporting flexibility in the scheduling of teaching, departmental meetings and gatherings, and other professional obligations to ensure compatibility with the demands of work and family.
- Allowing new parents the option of stopping the tenure clock.
- Where they do not exist, working to establish provisions for parental and family leave beyond those required by the Family and Medical Leave Act, partner benefits, child-care, etc.

### Ensuring Gender Equity by Recognizing the Impact of Gender on Perceptions and Evaluations of Women Faculty

Evaluation of research, teaching, and service should be based on standards of the profession and should not be based on the gender or sexual orientation of the researcher or teacher or the subject of academic inquiry. Women must be viewed as equal colleagues and equal members of the academy. Departments also need to appreciate the centrality of research and teaching on gender, women's studies, and related inquiries in assessing the scholarship of faculty working on these topics.

Even in evaluations that appear to be gender neutral such as standardized teaching evaluations, gender can powerfully shape results. For example, departments should be cognizant of students who may bring their own ideas about gender to bear on the way they evaluate faculty: thus they may praise male faculty for being "brilliant" and female faculty for being "nice ladies." Similarly, colleagues may label women as "difficult" for being assertive when the same behavior in men is unremarked. Women faculty report that they have to work harder to be viewed as competent by both students and colleagues and are often dismissed as lacking objectivity because they are women. Gender equity may be assured by:

- Paying attention to and correcting for "invisible" gender biases in mechanisms used to evaluate women faculty members' performance of their jobs.

- Recognizing the centrality of research and teaching on the history of women, gender, and sexuality in assessing scholarship and teaching.
- At the same time, acknowledging that not all women study or teach the history of women and/or gender.
- Evaluating research on the basis of the standards of the profession and not the gender of the researcher or the subject of inquiry.
- Evaluating collegiality without regard to gender.
- Working to eliminate all forms of discrimination based on sexual orientation.
- Adhering to the AHA's *Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct* (available online at <http://www.historians.org/pubs/Free/ProfessionalStandards.htm>).

### Ensuring Gender Equity in Recruitment and Hiring

Hiring is critical to all departments, and even more so, in ones in which women and minorities are underrepresented. Recruitment of women and minorities must be aggressive and continuous. Departments should develop strategies for ensuring recruitment, hiring, promotion, and retention of women and minorities. Wherever possible, departments should place women on search committees, even if that means violating the principle that women should not be overburdened with committee work. Service on search committees and key policy-making committees may take priority over other sorts of service where gender may be a less important factor. Gender equity in hiring and recruitment may be achieved by:

- Ensuring that all search committees actively consider women and minorities at all stages of hiring.
- Ensuring that hiring procedures and interviewing are equitable, professional, free from inappropriate behavior, and are conducted in accordance with AHA's Hiring Guidelines (available online at [http://www.historians.org/Perspectives/eib/hiring\\_guidelines.htm](http://www.historians.org/Perspectives/eib/hiring_guidelines.htm)).
- Ensuring that departments consider the AHA guidelines concerning spousal/partner hiring (available online at <http://www.theaha.org/perspectives/eib/spouse.cfm>).
- Explaining university policies on all forms of family, parental, and maternity leave and child care, partner benefits, etc. as a normal part of the hiring process and thereby relieving job applicants and junior faculty of the burden of asking questions about these policies. For an explanation of terms such as maternity, family, and parental leave, see AAUP's "Statement of Principles on Family Responsibilities and Academic Work," issued in 2001. (online at <http://www.aaup.org/statements/REPORTS/re01fam.htm>).

### Ensuring Gender Equity in Assignment of Duties and Academic Service

Expectations about women's supposedly "natural" gift for nurture often lead to significant inequities in the kinds of duties and academic service expected of men and women, which in turn are associated with very different rewards. In

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departments and colleges in which women remain underrepresented, they are sometimes disproportionately expected to perform service. Many women report being placed in a kind of "double-bind" in which they are expected to represent a "woman's" perspective, and then criticized for always representing a gendered point of view. This reinforces gender inequities, which in turn hinder women's advancement in the academy. Gender equity can be fostered by:

- Working with faculty regardless of gender to develop teaching schedules compatible with ongoing research.
- Clarifying expectations of tenure and promotion and developing service assignments compatible with meeting these expectations. For example, in some settings, service on a university-wide committee may be important for getting tenure; in others, such service may be viewed as a distraction from the "real" work of publishing articles in refereed scholarly journals.
- Placing women on committees strategically, so that they are in a position to advance gender equity.

- Recommending women for prestigious and key policy-making institutional committees, not just ones related to gender or race.
- Recognizing that certain departmental duties such as inviting and introducing distinguished guest scholars bring visibility and prestige and should be distributed to women and men alike.
- Distributing service assignments that may be less prestigious at some institutions, such as taking notes at meetings, advising the history club, advising students, and teaching introductory courses, equally among faculty without regard to gender or race.

#### Ensuring Gender Equity in Compensation and Access to and Distribution of Institutional Resources

Gender discrepancies in compensation as well as access to and distribution of the institutional resources persist within the academy. Compensation affects retirement income, and access to institutional resources affects career advancement with the academy. Sometimes this process is deeply structural, as when an

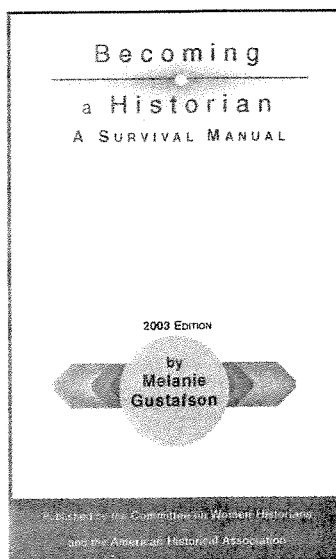
institution awards summer money exclusively for travel, when what parents of young children may need most is childcare. Departments may wish to take a proactive stance when the criteria for grants contain implicit or explicit gender discrepancies. Gender equity can be fostered by:

- Engaging in regular equity reviews of salaries, pensions, promotions, merit increases, and endowed chairs.
- Encouraging the procurement of grants from within and outside the college or university and facilitating their acceptance without regard to gender.
- Allocating resources such as office space, equipment, and facilities without regard to gender.
- Providing secretarial and staff support without regard to gender.
- Awarding reduced teaching and workloads and submitting nominations for prizes and awards entirely on merit, not gender.
- Encouraging institutional flexibility in designating allowable research expenses, for example childcare.

*Approved by Council at its June 4-5, 2005, meeting.*

## Thinking about entering the history profession?

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