

**Commission for Women
Year End Report
2013-2014**

Taken from the [2013-14 Diversity Impact Report](#)

Progress Made

The Commission recently revised its bylaws to acknowledge its relationship to the new Vice Chancellor for Diversity. In addition, the Commission revised the section on the graduate assistant in response to changes in that position recommended by the Vice Chancellor and, as well, doing some general “housekeeping.” The Commission needs, however, to make important changes in its bylaws and operations. Currently the bylaw mandate a membership of twenty-four voting members, including eight ex-officio members, the majority of whom do not consistently attend meetings, thus skewing numbers for quorums or majority rules. Further, if one adds in the non-voting ex-officio members to the required membership roll, the Commission would number at least twenty-eight members, an impracticably large number. Most importantly, the Commission needs to insure that there is a proportionate number of faculty members, exempt and non-exempt staff, and students from a selection of colleges. I will charge a Bylaws Committee to do a thorough review of the bylaws, to reconsider the number of commissioners necessary for representation of constituents, and then to work with a new Membership and Communication Committee to advertise the Commission more extensively and to invite applications from across the campus. Luckily, because of interest expressed to the Vice Chancellor for Diversity, we appear to have a proportionate membership for the coming year.

Priorities

The Commission for Women’s main purpose is to cultivate a welcoming and inclusive campus environment with special attention given to the needs of women. By doing so, it hopes to support in concrete ways [Vol Vision](#). It needs to continue to step up in regard to advocating for women on campus, be those women in student, faculty, staff, or administrative positions. As the above discussion indicates, the Commission hopes to advertise itself more prominently and to recruit energetically new members who are committed to working in a positive way on gender issues and their impact on university life, productivity, and excellence.

Vol Vision

As I mentioned above, the Commission needs to do a thorough review of its procedures and priorities and make subsequent changes in the bylaws. I see this not as simple housekeeping but as an exciting opportunity to bring the Commission into the twentyfirst century and in accordance with the university’s Vol Vision and push for the top 25. Certainly the Commission will continue to monitor and make policy that has direct impact on women, such as the Standard of Practice Regarding Faculty-Student Romantic and/or Sexual Relationships, the call for lactation rooms in all planned buildings, continued work on work/life balance, and a celebration of women on campus and in UTK history. We will also continue to offer a variety of events in

Women's History month; this year a Women's Studies class under the direction of Taryn Norman created a presentation on UTK women of the past, present, and future for the library display case; Cynthia Peterson hosted a panel focusing on being a woman in the STEM fields; Stephanie Metz organized a creative reading by women faculty and graduate students in the English department; and Rosa Thomas hosted a talk on women and sleep given by Dean Lee.

Looking Towards the Future

The Commission for Women will continue to sponsor, through funding provided by the Chancellor, outstanding women to apply for and to attend a Higher Education Resource Services Institute. This program has attracted a great deal of positive attention and helps prepare women for advancement into administrative and leadership positions. Last year, the UTK HERS participants still on the campus met to share information about the experience and then formed a reading group focusing on material aimed particularly at women who would be leaders. That group continues to meet. The Commission also provides two awards specifically for women. This year the Commission hopes to invite last year's Notable Woman awardee—and if possible the awardee from the previous year who was her student—to deliver an informal talk about gender issues in her field; the Commission also hopes to celebrate the awardee at a reception in her honor.

I have spoken recently with undergraduate and graduate students who will be invited to become commissioners this year; these students are energized and wish to reach out to other women in their fields and class, in the sciences and in the humanities and, in general, across the campus. I hope the Commission will assist them in such grassroots activities.

In addition, this year, the Commission will pursue making broader connections, first with other Tennessee schools that have similar commissions and then with those SEC schools that also pay especial attention to gender issues through a commission, organization, or office. We could learn a great deal from such meetings, such as best practices in advocating for women on campus, and would be the lead university to attempt such exchanges of information. On this campus, the Commission would like to see better attention paid to the need to recruit women candidates to Governor's Chairs and the positive celebration of women from the school's history through such venues as the naming of buildings or rooms in buildings after these women pioneers.

Conclusion

While the Commission has in the past attempted to insure that the history of UTK women was not simply erased, it would be a good if demanding project to research and begin sharing that history broadcasting of information and continuous public acknowledgement of the important contributions women have made and are making to the University of Tennessee. In all these new projects, we hope to contribute in meaningful ways to the university's drive for excellence and a campus environment and reputation that is inviting to all and hostile to none.