

2020-2021 COMMISSION FOR WOMEN COMMITTEE REPORT

[Events Committee]

COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

[Abby Sherman (co-chair), Mia Pearson-Loomis (co-chair), Natalie Feller, Arianna Banack]

Please offer a brief narrative responding to each of the prompts set forth below as it may apply to your committee's work this year.

1. Provide a summary of your committee's accomplishments in 2020-2021. Be sure to indicate the progress made in completing the specific charges provided to your committee. (Note: It is okay if you were not able to complete each charge or shifted focus based on discussions with the co-chairs.)

In 2020-2021, our committee did an excellent job responding to the charges set forth by CFW co-chairs, Joan Heminway and Catherine Luther. The charges were to organize professional development programming and programming around voting rights to celebrate 100 years since the first population of women were granted the right to vote.

In response to these charges and the "new normal" of COVID-19 pandemic life, our group organized two online events and one asynchronous activity. Our first event was "Burnout to Balance: A Conversation with Booth Andrews." In fall 2020, 120 attendees across the UT system gathered to hear the insightful, relatable, and factual words of local motivational speaker, Booth Andrews. This event was also recorded and published to the Commission for Women website, and the recording was circulated campus-wide.

Also in the fall, we collaborated with Susan Groenke, Professor of English Education and Director of the Center for Children's and Young Adult Literature to record and publish a virtual "story time" for the parents of UT to enjoy with their children. The "story time" featured the book Vote for Our Future by Margaret McNamara. This activity accomplished several objectives for our committee. The first was the initial charge to organize programming around voting rights. The second was to respond to the needs of women and families in our community in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, which abruptly made many UT parents not only remote-workers, but the full-time home educators of their children. Our hope was that this "story time" would serve to educate, entertain, and acknowledge that population. This event was spearheaded by Ariana Banack, whose professional expertise was imperative to the creation of this unique activity.

In spring 2021, we responded to the charge for professional development programming the broad commission interest in improving retention rates for

staff. The event, “Lighting Your Path: A Workshop on Cultivating Career Advancement,” provided two hours of focused professional development events designed to address the needs of UT staff. To best cater to this audience, we elected to make the event “conference style,” where attendees picked from a variety of speakers, including a representative from Pilot Flying J. The keynote speaker was Gretchen Neisler, Vice Provost for International Affairs. There were 50-60 attendees on average throughout the event. Natalie Feller was the bedrock of this event. Her professional background, connections, and skills made this event possible.

2. Provide any recommendations your committee may have for how the campus administration can help your committee in making progress in its initiatives in 2021-2022.

Our committee has two key recommendations for campus administration. First, we would like for there to be more people on the events committee in the future. As evidence by our accomplishments this year, the events committee’s work is multi-faceted and requires extensive collaboration across the Commission for Women, the UT system, and the Knoxville community. A larger committee would allow for this important work to be delegated more evenly, so as to prevent overload.

Second, we would like for a portion of the CFW budget to be dedicated to compensate event speakers. It is in line with the values of the CFW to compensate our (mostly women) speakers for their work. We were able to compensate Booth Andrews and buy gifts for our “Lighting Your Path” speakers this year, but we realize that this was an exception due to surplus in funds that may not normally be available. It is our opinion that the compensation of speakers should be a forethought in the budgetary planning of the CFW. Having a budget to work with allows clarity for committee members in the planning of these events. It also prioritizes fair compensation, and is a concrete way to show a commitment to rewarding the time and expertise of women leaders.

3. Offer your committee’s recommendations for priorities for the CFW for the 2021-22 academic year.

For the upcoming year, we have two recommendations for priorities for the CFW. The first, is that we would like to see more collaboration between commissions. It is the opinion of our committee that through targeted collaboration, we can be better allies for each other and honor the intersectionality of our work. Our suggestion is that the commission should assign a designated liaison to coordinate and facilitate a supportive relationship between the different commissions. If possible, we think the creation of a council/commission committee comprised of representatives from each of the commission and councils would further serve to enhance collaboration in a structured and sustainable way.

The second, is that we would like to see the CFW continue to include staff in important conversations. As evidence by many discussions among CFW members over the years, faculty and staff are often separated in discussions, though the women in these roles face many of the same challenges. Discussions among members have also revealed that there is often tension between faculty and staff when they interact professionally. Our committee believes that the CFW should prioritize the improvement of faculty and staff relationships via education and networking. We suggest that the CFW Host an event on bullying within higher education institutions, focusing particularly on faculty/staff, staff/student worker, and faculty/graduate assistants.

Additionally, to successfully include staff members in CFW priorities, we must improve access for staff to the CFW and other avenues for campus and community service. Many staff members are outright and systemically discouraged by their supervisors to engage with campus and community service because participation is outside the parameters of their position descriptions. Work outside of one's position description is often viewed as a luxury and not an integral part of campus and professional growth. Excluding staff reduces the diversity of the councils and commissions and limits the opportunities for staff to contribute in meaningful ways to the campus. Our committee recommends that the CFW conduct outreach to directors and provosts in staff departments to educate them on the direct benefits of their office's involvement in the councils and commissions and to look at systemic policies (tie-ins to performance reviews, HR policies, etc.) that can give unit leaders and direct supervisors incentives for encouraging their direct reports to be involved in campus and community service.