

*Annual Report: 2004-2005*

Columbia University Commission on the Status of Women

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The main focus of the Commission on the Status of Women this year was to work towards improved provisions for childcare. A secondary focus was to examine the advancement of women through the academic pipeline at the graduate student level.

***Improved Childcare:***

At the end of 2003-2004, the Commission identified childcare as an issue of importance to women across all parts of the university. During 2004-05, we examined previous reports on childcare at Columbia, researched what provisions for childcare were made at peer institutions, visited exemplary childcare centers and talked with staff, compiled and tabulated information on available childcare centers in the Morningside area. With assistance from Human Resources, we estimated how many children of childcare age were Columbia dependents. With assistance from the Physical Development Committee, we investigated what on-campus spaces might be made available for a child care center. We articulated a case statement about why improved childcare was important for Columbia in terms of recruitment, retention, productivity and morale.

Our investigations culminated in a recommendation to Provost Alan Brinkley that Columbia should contract with Bright Horizons Inc. for a childcare “needs and feasibility study.” This recommendation was accepted, and the study began last week. Phase One of the Bright Horizons study, to be completed by the end of June, will include a review of existing policies and procedures, a demographic and geographic analysis of the potential customer base (faculty, staff, graduate students, and postdocs), interviews to establish the priorities of university leaders and stakeholders, a market analysis of existing childcare centers, and a benchmark analysis of child care at organizations that compete with Columbia in recruiting. Phase Two, to be completed by February 2006, will include focus groups, a web-based survey of childcare needs, a financial analysis with cost projections, and recommendations.

***Graduate Student Attrition and Graduate Rate:***

The Commission’s 2001 report on “Advancement of Women Through the Academic Ranks of the Columbia Graduate School of Arts & Sciences: Where are the Leaks in the Pipeline?” ([http://www.columbia.edu/cu/senate/annual\\_reports/01-02/Pipeline2a\\_as\\_dist.doc.pdf](http://www.columbia.edu/cu/senate/annual_reports/01-02/Pipeline2a_as_dist.doc.pdf)) identified a possible gender disparity in attrition rate between male and female PhD students. However, the data available at the time of the 2001 report were only a snapshot at one moment, and the data from different matriculating classes seemed inconsistent. The pipeline report therefore called for gathering and analyzing data longitudinally, to track the progress of cohorts through the graduate school trajectory. Working with Lucy Drotning and John Scanlon in the Office of Institutional Research, we now have the data to examine attrition and graduation rates methodically, and have developed a methodology that allows us to compare both attrition and graduation rate across time (see attached example). We also met with GSAS Dean Henry Pinkham and his staff to discuss steps Columbia could take to better understand the causes of graduate student attrition, and researched how peer institutions are analyzing and disseminating their student attrition data.