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## faculty shortage: women in sciences

By Patrick Healy, Globe Staff, 1/31/2001

**H**ow far should universities go to recruit more women to teach engineering and science? Give them the most coveted parking spaces on campus? Create generous fellowships for female scientists just starting out? Give professors with families more time to earn tenure than childless scholars get?

While such ideas would almost certainly be controversial, they and other out-of-the-box strategies were floated at a high-powered conference in Cambridge this week devoted to increasing the number of female professors in science departments.

Brainstorming on ways to attract and keep women in these fields, presidents and professors from Yale, Harvard, Stanford, and six other universities ended the forum at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology by calling for "significant change" at US universities to promote gender equity in the sciences.

As one goal, they said, percentages of female professors and students should be the same. One school, the University of Michigan, said it would try to meet that goal in 10 years.

The university presidents placed a similar emphasis on developing more family-friendly policies affecting benefits such as tenure, among others.

"Institutions of higher education have an obligation, both for themselves and for the nation, to fully develop and utilize all the creative talent available," said a statement issued by the participants.

The MIT conference was the first national follow-up to a 1999 report by MIT professors on the status of women in the sciences. At top research universities nationwide, women make up only a fraction of tenured science professors. For example, in MIT's physics department, only a handful of women are among the roughly 80 professors with tenure.

But for schools like MIT and Harvard, which have relatively small numbers of tenured women in the sciences, the goals will be almost impossible to reach in the short term.

At Harvard, nine women were among the 19 newly tenured appointments in Harvard's Faculty of Arts and Sciences last year. Yet women still account for only 14 percent of the tenured Arts and Sciences faculty as a whole.

"The figures are improving, but they're a far distance from where they should be," said Harvard's provost, Harvey V. Fineberg, in an interview after the conference.

Because many professors remain for 30 or 40 years, quick changes to the gender makeup of a faculty are difficult, Fineberg said. Asked whether he agreed with the conference goal of proportionality, Fineberg said such a shift would require a long-term cultural change on campuses.

"To me, the goal is to make opportunity for every talented person without prejudice or bias, and that's the thing we have not really done for women yet," Fineberg said.

Two people who attended the closed-door meeting and spoke on condition of anonymity said one popular

idea was to create national fellowships that would enable 100 women a year to get started in academic science careers. No source of money was identified for such an program.

Some university leaders also floated the idea of changing "the tenure clock" for young professors who want to start a family. Most faculty typically get seven years to earn tenure by virtue of their research, writing, and teaching. Some officials suggested that the period be extended to 10 years to make faculty demands less onerous. Others suggested shortening it to three years, to make the tenure clock consume less of one's life.

Lee Bollinger, president of the University of Michigan and a conference participant, said barriers still exist that keep women from moving from graduate school to a college faculty and then to earning tenure in their departments. He said colleges needed to identify the obstacles and find ways to knock them down.

"We need to think much more about the ways search committees are formed and the way they develop candidate pools and the expectations we have of those candidates," Bollinger said.

Those at the conference agreed to evaluate tenure rates of female professors annually and to review data on the salaries and research budgets available to female professors. The group also pledged to meet again in a year to discuss steps taken to meet the goals.

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