

THE STATUS OF WOMEN AT YORK UNIVERSITY:

PROGRESS REPORT ON THE
FIRST DECADE*



EQUITY FOR WOMEN:

*A Report to the President of York
University on the Status of Women at
York University: An Update of the
1975 Senate Task Force Report on
the Status of Women at York
University.*

Johanna H. Stuckey

L' "Introduction" qui suit est extraite du Rapport au président de l'Université York sur le statut de la femme à l'Université York, publié récemment. Ce rapport, préparé par Johanna Stuckey, qui était alors conseillère auprès du président sur le statut de la femme, est une mise à jour du Rapport du comité spécial du Sénat, de 1975, sur le même sujet.

En examinant les recommandations contenues dans le rapport de 1975, la professeure Stuckey et son conseil consultatif furent déçus en découvrant combien peu d'entre elles avaient été introduites. Elle conclut que les réussites de l'Université York dans le domaine du statut de la femme sont loin d'avoir eu un impact de grande portée sur la situation des femmes à York.

The following 'Introduction' is excerpted from the recently-released Report to the President of York University on the Status of Women at York University, entitled Equity for Women: The First Decade. Prepared by Johanna H. Stuckey, then Advisor to the President on the Status of Women, it is an update of the 1975 Senate Task Force Report on the same subject.

The "Preamble" of the 1975 Senate Task Force Report on the Status of Women stated that the Task Force presented the Report in the expectation of "expeditious action on most, if not all," of its sixty-four recommendations. The members of the Task Force worked for over three years on their report, which was at the time the most complete and far-reaching of all reports on the status of women in universities in Canada. The Report soon became the model for later reports, and the Office of the Advisor to the President on the Status of Women (created in 1975 as a result of the Report) is frequently asked for copies of the Report and advice on issues relating to the status of women.

Indeed, since 1975, York University has become a model in status-of-women matters. The Office has prepared detailed reports on Faculty Salaries, Professional & Managerial staff, Mature Students and, most recently, Sexual Harassment. The establishment of the York Women's Centre, the three Women's Studies programmes, the Sexual Harassment Education and Complaint Centre, the opening of the Nellie Langford Rowell Library (formerly the York-YWCA Women's Resource Library), and the move to York of the prestigious journal *Canadian Woman Studies/les cahiers de la*

femme, all have made York University a leader in status-of-women matters.

Yet, in examining the recommendations of the 1975 Report, the Advisor to the President on the Status of Women and her Advisory Board were disappointed to find how few of the recommendations of that Report have been implemented. The following sections [of the current Report] outline the status of the 1975 recommendations.¹ In addition, they demonstrate that York's very real accomplishments in respect to the status of women have fallen far short of significant impact on the situation of women at York University. The bulk of the university's women employees remain in the lowest-paid jobs, with little chance of advancement and little in the way of on-the-job training. Despite the salary awards made by the Presidential committee of 1976, the salaries of full-time women faculty are, on the average, lower than those of their male colleagues. Women are only a very slightly higher percentage of full-time faculty than in 1975. Women students, now the majority of York's undergraduates and an increased proportion of graduate and professional faculties, still often face sexism within the classroom and sexual harassment both within and outside it. Women and children still have to walk in fear on campuses that are ill lit and insufficiently patrolled. Budget constraints have restricted or endangered essential services, with counselling badly affected and daycare facilities struggling to maintain themselves.²

Under these circumstances, it seems appropriate to move to a system of more actively supporting changes in the status and situation of women of the York community. Such a programme is usually called "affirmative action."

Unfortunately, the term "affirmative action" has been subject to a number of unfavourable and inaccurate interpretations. It is widely misunderstood to mean quotas in admissions, jobs, and promotions. Instead, what is at issue is a wide range of possible "programs of positive remedies for discrimination . . ." This is the definition provided by Judge Rosalie Silberman Abella, reporting in 1984 for the Royal Commission on Equality in Employment.³ Judge Abella coins the term "employment equity" to cover such measures in the workplace. She writes, "No great principle is sacrificed in exchanging phrases of disputed definition for newer ones that may be more accurate and less destructive of reasoned debate."

Adopting her perspective and adapting her term, we propose accordingly to speak of an Equity Programme for Women at York, to encompass the range of positive measures needed to compensate for systemic barriers to equality for women within this university.

We thus agree with Judge Abella in focussing on behaviour and its consequences for disadvantaged groups. We do not wish to accuse any of the members of this university of bias against women or of deliberate measures of discrimination. Instead we are concerned with the problem of "systemic discrimination." To quote Judge Abella again: "The impact of behaviour is the essence of 'systemic discrimination.' It suggests that the inexorable, cumulative effect on individuals or groups of behaviour that has an arbitrarily negative impact on them is more significant than whether the behaviour flows from insensitivity or intentional discrimination." The recommendations that follow amount to an agenda for eliminating systemic discrimination.

An equity programme such as we suggest must begin by establishing the existence of actual differential treatment. Such treatment was clearly demonstrated by the 1975 Task Force Report, amplified by the findings of the follow-up committees established by successive Advisors to the President on the Status of Women. During the years since 1975 the university has in effect experimented with a system of voluntary provision of equity – voluntary affirmative action. The data summarized in the current report suggest that this system of voluntary compliance has failed to make a significant impact on the conditions noted before it was in place.

When affirmative action proves to be ineffective on a voluntary basis, it is likely to seem necessary to move to a mandatory version. That is, at some point in time an institution may need to decide formally and explicitly to enforce the measures necessary to eliminate systemic discrimination. In the opinion of the Advisor and the Advisory Board, York is now at such a point. We therefore urge the university to adopt a rigorous programme of affirmative action, a mandatory Equity Programme for Women.

The Advisor and the Advisory Board are convinced that a successful Equity Programme must involve all sectors of the university community in its design and implementation. It will then be possible to respect the traditional autonomy of the teaching and research areas of the uni-

versity and the role of the campus unions. Consequently, the Advisor to the President on the Status of Women and her Advisory Board present to the President for prompt attention the following recommendations, and they urge immediate action:

1. That the President establish a university-wide standing committee on equity for women at York University. This committee should represent *all* concerned constituencies, including the Office of the Advisor on the Status of Women.
2. That this committee, with appropriate financial and administrative support, develop a comprehensive mandatory equity programme for women at York University.
3. That this standing committee examine all the material available on the status of women at York, particularly this update report, and consult with such experts as can advise it.
4. That this standing committee supervise and monitor the progress of the equity programme and report annually to the York community.

The Advisory Board wishes to thank President Emeritus H.I. Macdonald who has given staunch and enthusiastic support to the Office of the Advisor on the Status of Women and its activities. He has contributed substantially to improvements in the status of women at York. It is much to his credit that York is seen by other institutions as being at the forefront in status-of-women matters.

The 1975 Task Force's expectations that its efforts would be "rewarded by action" and its assertion that "generally the situation of women in universities has been thoroughly investigated and . . . the time for study is over" have both proven premature. If in 1975 "corrective action [was] long overdue," how much longer overdue is such action in 1985? Now is the time for York University to take the lead in implementing, as it initiated, equity for women in the university.

¹We also deal with a few additional areas which were not perceived as important and indeed did not exist as issues before 1975: Mature Students, Sexual Harassment, Professional and Managerial Staff, Women's Centres.

²Statistics used are mainly those of 1982-83.

³Judge Rosalie Silberman Abella, *Report of the Commission on Equality in Employment* (Ottawa: Supply and Services, Canada, October 1984); quotations from pp. 7 to 9.

*This Report was prepared for the President of York University by Johanna H. Stuckey, Advisor to the President on the Status of Women, assisted by the Assistant to the Advisor on the Status of Women: Catherine McWhinnie; and the Members of the Advisory Board on the Status of Women: Ellen Baar (Social Science, Arts); Janette Baker (Educational Development); Naomi Black (Political Science/Women's Studies, Arts); Pam Broley (Counselling & Careers, Glendon);

Joan Carruthers (Reference, Scott Library); Dyanne Gibson (Admissions/Liaison); Jane Banfield Haynes (Social Science, Arts); Sharon Jowahir (York Women's Centre/Coordinator); Louise Mahood (York Women's Centre/past Coordinator); Sandra Pyke (Counselling and Development/Psychology, Arts); Ann B. Shteir (Humanities, Atkinson/Women's Studies); and Joan Stewart (Counselling and Development/Psychology, Arts).

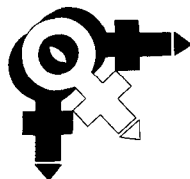
Johanna Stuckey is Associate Professor of Humanities/Women's Studies, Faculty of Arts at York University and is ex-Advisor to the President of York University on the Status of Women.

YES, THERE IS A WOMEN'S CENTRE IN EDMONTON!

EVERY WOMAN'S PLACE

- Facilitating greater interaction between women's groups and individual women in the Edmonton area.
- Opening avenues of support for all women.
 - Information & resource centre
 - Meeting space for women
 - Formal & informal networking
 - Support groups
 - Educational activities
 - Workshops & seminars
 - Discussion groups
 - Film nights
 - "Coffee house" nights
 - And lots more!

**ALL WOMEN ARE WELCOME
TO DROP IN AND
HELP TO SHAPE OUR
FUTURE AND OUR PRESENT!**



**EVERY WOMAN'S PLACE
9926 - 112 Street
Edmonton, Alberta T5K 1L7
Phone: (403) 488-2748**