

Reflecting on the Status of Women 30 Years Later

UNH Women's Commission Holds Public Hearing, Celebrates Anniversary

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UNH News Bureau
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October 25, 2002

DURHAM, N.H. -- Twenty-two years ago, when members of the UNH President's Commission on the Status of Women held their first "Take Back the Night" to expose violence against women on campus, they were greeted by truckloads of young men who threw water on them, shouted obscenities at them and told them to go away.

"We were taken by surprise, but we kept on going," says Kate Hanson, one of the first members of the UNH Women's Commission who now serves as its chair.

More than 30 years after the first hearing on the status of women in New Hampshire, the UNH President's Commission on the Status of Women will examine the issues faced by women today as it celebrates three decades of work.

The UNH Women's Commission 30th Anniversary Celebration will be held from 11 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., Thursday, Oct. 31, 2002, in the Strafford Room of the Memorial Union Building. UNH President Ann Weaver Hart will speak at noon as part of a public hearing that will reassess the status of women at UNH. The celebration will include art, music, literature and information displays that will be available throughout the day.

The public hearing will address a number of questions, among them:

- How, as a woman, have you gotten to where you

are today? What forces have shaped you? What barriers and stereotypes have stood in your way? What opportunities have helped you reach your goals?

- What types of inequity or discrimination are women with whom you have contact, facing today?
- How can we better serve women on campus?

Following a state public hearing on the status of women on campus in November 1971, the UNH Women's Commission was established Feb. 15, 1972, to explore conditions and attitudes within UNH related to the mobility and functional equality of women, and to encourage movement toward the goal of full participation of women.

"We have witnessed substantial changes since 1971. You only need to learn about the issues discussed at that first public hearing to see the accomplishments," said Mary Taylor, coordinator of presidential commissions at UNH.

At the public hearing in 1971, women brought up a number of issues:

- The student health center did not have any women doctors or gynecologist, and birth control information, materials and prescriptions were not usually available to unmarried women.
- Women students testified that being married had cut them off from financial aid, even when their husbands were also students.
- A woman faculty member told a story about her suggestion to rotate the chore of acting as secretary of the department. The chair of the department said in response, "I couldn't ask a man."
- A woman told a story about a colleague who had two years experience and a comparable educational background, but a man with no experience applied for the same position as a computer programmer. The man got the job.

"Despite the hard work and accomplishments of these women pioneers, we still have a lot of work to do. Women continue to be underrepresented in math and science, both as students and faculty," Taylor says.

Other priorities include advocating for family friendly policies, including paid maternity and adoption leave; exploring consensual relations policies; and continuing the efforts to eliminate violence against women on campus. For more information, visit the UNH Women's Commission online at www.unh.edu/womens-commission.

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