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“POCKETS OF AWESOME”: A NEEDS ASSESSMENT FOR THE CENTER FOR WOMEN AT EMORY

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This is a full-length needs-assessment based on five focus groups, participant observation, and an over-2000 person survey conducted across the Emory campus for the Center for Women at Emory between September 2014–May 2015.

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Overview

In the 2014-2015 academic year, the Center for Women conducted a community needs assessment. There has been no systematic and full-length needs assessment for the Center for Women since the commissioning Director for the Assessment, Dr. Dona Yarbrough, assumed office in 2001. The strategic goals of the Center for Women are to lend support to institutional transformation, education efforts and programming around the needs of gender sensitivity and awareness on campus. With this in mind, the purpose of the needs-assessment was to know the needs of women faculty, students and staff and find out whether there are any gaps in programming and services that the Center can fill. The findings of the needs-assessment will be used to build future plans and advocacy of the Center for Women.

Background

From small liberal arts colleges to big research universities, Centers for Women structure themselves around very similar goals: providing a safe space for women-identified faculty, students, and staff, developing women's leadership, promoting institutional gender equity and raising awareness about gender justice. The National Women Studies Association [published a list of articles](#) and books in 2013 on the history of Centers across the nation, highlighting their impact in higher education.

The Center for Women at Emory was established after a series of controversial events involving race, gender and sexuality in the late 1980s. On February 7, 1990 the *Emory Wheel* reported two rapes on campus that sparked the creation of the Center for Women. That month a group of graduate students wrote to then President Laney and Dean Fox to take immediate action to improve the common life of women at Emory. One of their demands included the creation of a Women's Center.

After several more petitions and letters were presented to the administration urging them to create this space, in February 1991, President Laney appointed an advisory committee charged to set up a Women's Center. After a year of planning and research, the Center opened in September 1992. The Center was housed in a trailer behind the Dobbs University Center loading dock. The modest space transformed to a safe space for students, faculty, and staff at the University. With one full time staff person, the Center's early programs focused on safety and the development of resources to address sexual violence. Following the University's development of a new strategic plan, the Center's advisory board eventually created new and broad-based goals that focused on community building.

Today the Center has 3 full time staff members who are responsible for running several programs that focus on leadership development, institutional transformation and gender-based education. To find out more details about the Center's programs, [click here](#).

Objective of the Study

This is the first full-length needs assessment conducted for the Center for Women at Emory since its inception in 1992. At a time when the Center has recently transitioned to a new position as part of Campus Life, this needs assessment brings to bear the voices of Emory students, staff, and faculty on the Center in order to influence and inform its future programming and direction.

Methodology

The needs assessment was conducted using mixed-methodology including qualitative research from targeted focus groups, and quantitative data obtained from a survey reaching out to women—students, staff, and faculty—in the larger Emory community. Broadly, our research plan was to draft a set of objectives for the assessment and identify key areas of interest; to use themes as focus groups prompts; and to draw from focus group data to conduct a university-wide survey.

We began our study by identifying the objectives of the needs assessment in a meeting with the Center for Women, including with the Center’s former Director, Assistant Director, and Program Administrator. It was conducted by the two Primary Investigators.

These objectives were then mapped out spatially by the PIs to identify the different areas of interest amongst the four primary demographics being addressed (staff, undergrad students, grad students, and faculty). These areas of interest were then translated from their map versions to concrete questions that could be addressed as discussion points at the focus groups.

Once the prompts and interview flow for the focus groups were concretized, we reached out to members of the community to organize five concentrated focus groups. Each of these groups offered us a rich set of responses from which we were able to ascertain a collective sense of the needs of that community as well as hear particular suggestions, record dissatisfactions with institutional initiatives and transformations, and hear anecdotal evidence of women’s experiences at work, in the classroom, at university events, and during interactions with each other.

We analyzed the focus group interviews using qualitative analysis in order to understand key areas of concern, themes that emerged repeatedly and with urgency, and responses to our prompts. Based on this analysis, we devised a survey to reach a much broader Emory population. We were able to group the survey into two parts: one that would reach staff and faculty, and a separate one for all students.

Our survey was designed with the help of experts from Campus Labs who worked on our draft to generate a scientific instrument. We received expert feedback on quantifying the responses and sent out the surveys to all women and girls from the student population (on April 30), and women employees from the faculty and staff (on May 1). Our surveys closed on May 10, and we received over xx responses in all.

The next few pages will detail our methodology.

i) Preliminary Meeting to Define the Scope of the Needs Assessment

The Center for Women wanted a study to understand the needs of four different groups of women on Emory's campus: staff, faculty, undergraduate students, and graduate students. The Center is transitioning into a new institutional location as part of Campus Life, an organization that is largely associated with the student body whereas the Center has historically served faculty, staff, and students. The Center commissioned the assessment in order to ask its different constituencies on campus what kind of support, mentorship, and leadership opportunities they were interested in, as well as to survey more generally their experiences with gendered interactions in their everyday life on campus, and to uncover popular perceptions of the Center.

Assessing Diverse Responses: At the meeting it was decided that women's experiences would need to be analyzed according to certain identities (namely race, gender, sexuality, nationality, and age) and institutional affiliations (whether staff, faculty, students, and with which division and school they were affiliated).

Realms of Experience: Broadly, the Center wanted to learn more about the perceptions and experiences of the community with regards to: classroom experiences, leadership and mentorship opportunities, climate around gender on campus, sense of safety at Emory, relationship with others on campus (including supervisors, professors, and colleagues), subtle forms of discrimination, awareness of Emory policies, available forms of support, and so on.

Women's Everyday Experiences of Gender: There were specific aspects of women's everyday lives that the Center was interested in understanding. These included interactions with colleagues and administrators; in classroom spaces; with professors; with nursing, child care and elder care; with teaching; with service work; attending university events and being involved in campus activities.

Public Perceptions: The Center was also interested in assessing the community perception of its work: how often do people attend events, what prevents them from attending, what demographics and constituencies do people think the Center serves, and what do people understand as the primary role of the Center?

ii) Mapping Out the Main Themes into Focus Group Prompts

Once the PIs compiled a comprehensive list of these four main themes and realms of experience that the Center wanted researched, they were grouped according to relevance in different umbrella categories. Each of these categories yielded a broad “prompt” question to initiate discussion on the given topic and related further questions. We generated focus group prompts for five different groups to be used for our different demographics, including a separate group for service staff.

We reached focus group participants by asking the Center for Women for help connecting us with friends of the Center and those who have been active participants in Center events and programs. In addition, we reached out to different on-campus communities to issue an open call for participation, ensuring that the focus groups did not consist only of those who were friends of the Center but included those who had not participated in any events and had only a preliminary understanding of what the Center does. Participants were informed that there would be lunch and refreshments following the session.

The graduate student focus group was the first one conducted, and participants were invited by reaching out to all-women student groups including Emory Women in Neuroscience and Emory Women in Business, as well as others who frequently attend Center for Women events. Eight women attended from across the sciences and humanities.

The staff focus group was collated by sending out email invites to the list serv of the Women’s Gender and Sexuality Studies department and to individual friends of the Center and members of Emory’s Lean In group who meet independently to discuss strategizing for change on campus and to share their experiences with each other.

The undergraduate focus group was invited by reaching out to sorority houses, student groups, and friends of undergraduate workers at the Center for Women. Students were invited to bring their friends along.

The service staff focus group was invited by paying independent visits to different buildings on campus and inviting staff and their friends to visit the Center for Women. A follow-up email was sent to staff supervisors requesting permission for their staff to attend the focus group.

Finally the faculty focus group was invited by sending emails to the list servs of all of Emory’s major schools (Law, Business, Laney, Medicine, Nursing, College and the Candler School of Theology). Further, personal emails were sent to faculty members who had participated in programs coordinated and hosted by the Center for Women.

The focus groups for staff, undergraduate students and graduate students was conducted by Hemangini Gupta. The focus group for service staff was conducted by

Nowmee Shehab and Hemangini Gupta, and the faculty focus group was conducted by the Center's former Director, Dona Yarbrough.

iii) Survey to the Emory community of women

Based on the insights derived from the focus group, two surveys of twenty questions and requiring a taking time of a little over five minutes each were constructed. One survey addressed all women students and had two drop down options to be filled only by those who had experience teaching, and those who had experience of nursing/child care on campus. The other survey went to all women staff and faculty across Emory and including affiliate organizations such as The Carter Center.

Several drafts of the surveys were constructed and tested by the Center for Women as well as trained staff from Campus Labs who provided recommendations on numerical gradients for survey responses. The surveys were administered near the end of the semester for a two-week period and received responses from 1025 students, and 1192 staff and faculty.

Assessment Findings

Both stages of the assessment have been summarized below, with salient themes and issues highlighted under separate categories.

1. Focus Group Results
 - a. Staff Focus Group

Nine members of the Emory staff, representing diverse race, class, education, age, and sexual preference backgrounds, comprised the staff focus group. They had been at Emory from between one year to over 15 years and represented a diverse range of opinions. In general those who had been at Emory over ten years reflected on changes in management and HR and the impact that these have had on democratic culture, collective responsibility, and the satisfaction derived from everyday work at Emory. The salient themes and issues have been grouped as under.

Lack of leadership opportunities, role models, and mentors:

Staff agreed that there was a lack of diversity at meetings, with women of color or from less elite backgrounds occupying lower institutional positions and meetings being conducted by men or by white women.

They expressed a need for mentorship programs that would serve to overcome these barriers by offering connections between women who share the same race, class, and sexual preference. One woman said that she had signed up for a formal mentor connection program—Mentor Emory—but that her needs had not been met. Finally she

reached out to someone whom she wanted to be mentored by but that person was too busy to take on this role.

Many women concurred that the lack of women, and certainly women of color or from diverse backgrounds, was so pronounced in upper-level management or faculty positions that the few women in leadership roles could not possibly be expected to respond to all the mentor requests that they received.

In the face of a lack of formal mentor availability, women said that they had informally approached others with whom they wished to undertake projects or be mentored by, asking them if they were free and willing to work together informally. However informal arrangements seemed unviable for those women new to Emory who might not be able to draw on long-term associations to develop connections. For instance, the woman who reached out to a mentor informally is a new staffer at Emory and was not able to secure even an informal mentor relationship.

Some women rely on the emergent Lean In circles at Emory to create professional bonds and networks with others, including senior staff who can offer guidance and support. Those who want to take initiative but have been unable to do so through formal channels find the Lean In circles are an opportunity to adopt additional responsibilities and cultivate meaningful professional relationships.

Informal, not Institutional, networks of support:

While some staff expressed their reliance on informal networks as with the new staffer who takes an active role in the Lean In circles (above), others felt that informal networks, while helpful, can also serve to reify and aggravate difference, as this quote indicates:

“I think HR used to take a more hands-on approach to how people moved through Emory—they are not doing that as much anymore as much as I can tell so these informal networks... they take the place of that. Those informal networks tend to give the same groups of people opportunities over and over again, and leave qualified and deserving people by the wayside. I do think there has to be more intentional effort to reach down however and be more inclusive. There was a group of women who really benefited 25–30 years ago and I don’t see that happening for much of my time here. I’ve been here a long time—17 years.”

This staffer expressed the view that a change in Emory’s management had also fundamentally altered how seriously others’ views are taken, and how participative decision-making can be in the new environment. She was both visibly hurt and disillusioned by recent management changes at Emory, which she held responsible for a feeling of exclusion and the initiation of special benefits to a select few.

Another staffer expressed the view that informal groups tend to replicate race and gender patterns to have “more of the same.” Rather than Emory developing leadership programs that could build on existing skills and talents, existing groups and networking opportunities for women tend to mould members to integrate with the preferences and needs of the dominant members of the group rather than to hear from them and devise a collaborative plan.

In general, women expressed the view that there were almost no opportunities to informally meet other like-minded women. When there were opportunities, they do not always translate as opportunities for all women, as this staffer explained: “to be honest if you don’t look a certain way, talk a certain way, do a certain thing, it’s kind of a miss.” When opportunities arise for women to meet other like-minded women informally or through service work—such as the Center for Women’s Wine Down, or becoming a Safe Space facilitator, both of which staffers named as potential exciting opportunities—there is not always time to attend. Professional and personal commitments prevent women from taking part as much as they would like to. Secondly, geographical distance leaves women feeling isolated especially when they are away from the main campus, as reflected in the opinions of women who work on Clifton Road or on more isolated parts of the main campus as on Eagle Row.

More specifically, there is a sense that institutional support such as the Center for Women that was the primary space for women faculty and staff is transitioning to a new role that left women uncertain about the impact of the Center’s integration into Campus Life. One member explained that gender issues tend to be contained within certain spaces: for instance, in her experiences, concerns about gender issues on campus are addressed by pointing to the Center for Women rather than taking them up in the particular context in which they arose. Another woman said that Emory management preferred to have a single space through which to address women’s issues rather than allowing many diverse women’s voices and opinions to proliferate:

“...I can allow nine women to come in one space to talk but I cannot allow multiple women in multiple spaces to talk.”

When asked if there were no other spaces for faculty and staff to meet, there was agreement that aside from the Center for Women there were no other such spaces on campus. As one staffer put it bluntly,

“If it were not for this institute (sic, Center), I probably wouldn’t see any of these women.”

Specifically women mentioned the shut down of the President’s Commission on the Status of Women and the impact of this closure on a prevalent sense that gender issues were not important enough to be taken seriously at the institutional level at Emory. The changes around the presence of gender-supportive spaces impacted some women

greatly. One said that change-making at Emory happened behind closed doors and marked a significant change from the leadership prior to the current one: earlier there would be focus groups and a discussion whereas now decisions were made unilaterally and conveyed late even to those directly impacted by them.

“My heart was broken. I had to go to FSAP and get on anti depressants because I was so upset and so hurt not because of me but because of my organization which was being targeted and was so much fun; we played pranks on each other and we were full of joy, and volunteerism... and its gone. Everyone’s hurt, mad, scared or gone.”

However eventually women mentioned other spaces to meet staff and faculty on campus including the Faculty Staff Connection Program, but the staffer who takes an active role in this program also expressed frustration that such programs at Emory are under-publicized.

“... I had to seek that out just like I sought out the CWE (Center for Women at Emory) so all the resources that are there I’ve had to really dig and find for myself, so now I try to share them as widely and broadly as possible because when I was new nobody knew anything about resources.”

The other new staffer who also had been at Emory less than a year shared her view that orientation and introductory sessions at Emory do not introduce women to available opportunities to meet others and to develop professionally and cultivate networks of support on campus.

A staffer who has been at Emory over ten years said she formed what she calls “pockets of awesome” at Emory. This involves reaching out to like-minded women for informal meetings; when new staff join, she makes sure to connect them with her friends. In the face of absent institutional structures for women to meet each other, this woman explained that informal networks bring women together over lunches and coffees, and yoga meetings in the lunch break. As she explained:

“There’s a lot of – obviously – palpable frustration, but there are places, I call them my “pockets of awesome” at Emory where there are these little collectives of individuals or work going on and I find you just know somebody who knows somebody. My boss is awesome, my assistant director is awesome, we have close staff and we are effective. I feel supported and I’m probably one of the lucky ones; my career trajectory has been just what I wanted. I feel like my survival, coping skills have been to find those people and places to just “glom” on to. And when I find people who need them I just “glom” them on too. That goes back to the informal networks rather than the formal structures (institutionally) that should support women equally.”

Others take time out of their schedules to volunteer on committees since when they offer their labor they are afforded the opportunities to meet others outside their departments or offices and to expand their networks and connections on campus.

To summarize the specific reasons why women at Emory feel isolated from each other, these include: perceived lack of institutional structures as with the merging of the Center for Women within Campus Life and the closure of the Committee on the Status of Women at the President's request; geographical isolation from campus; time and personal commitments precluding participation in campus activities.

To summarize how women overcome the lack of opportunities to meet other like-minded women (which everyone agreed was integral to well-being at Emory): they volunteer on service committees; create informal "pockets of awesome" through coffees, meals, and yoga sessions; make extra efforts to unearth the opportunities for women to meet each other and then publicize these.

Professional and Leadership Opportunities:

One woman staffer's view resonated with all others present when she said:

"I've had leadership training but that is all for naught if you're never given the opportunity ... that becomes a source of frustration and a sign of the failure of leadership if they send you on a leadership development workshop if there are no opportunities for leadership and you're not going to let me use it on the other end. I think there's something that needs to be improved with your leadership and you're substituting me for you. I think the opportunities are there. It's just "how can we use them?"

Others concurred with her view that there were three significant types of barriers to leadership development at Emory. The first relates to publicizing leadership programs—one woman said that, "they are not equally advertised or equally acceptable across class within all of the staff positions. It's really a matter of how tight your relationships are with the powerful people who might support your going to the training and assist or back you up – there is a huge class structure." Others agreed that opportunities were advertised to those who were favored by leadership in their offices.

Secondly the leadership programs were not only advertised to favored employees; additionally the same people were selected to take part in such opportunities repeatedly. This included instances where community leadership programs that are place-based were offered to those who do not live in the place in question even while those who do and who were eager to participate were not given the requisite opportunity. One woman explained her resentment thus:

“Even within administration there are people that they decide that ‘I want you, and I want you to go places’. But it’s not done for all women, it seems to be one offs, singular women... it is personal. I’m trying not to sound bitter too but I am... it’s hard.”

Finally, as the staffer explained, even when leadership opportunities were taken advantage of, there were no opportunities to utilize them. Hence people had technically been to leadership development sessions but were not offered the requisite opportunities to implement their learning.

When women staff are faced with situations where their opinion is not utilized in leadership decisions, they try the following options: to fill out surveys in case their opinions can be heard, to take up issues with the immediate heads including Chairs and office heads, and on occasion have approached senior management at Emory. Yet there was agreement that women’s voices are not heard while leadership decisions are being made; even though they might possess specific skills relevant to some of the many new initiatives that Emory is conceptualizing, their opinions are not sought out. As one staffer explained:

“When everybody brings a new program to the table simultaneously and no one asks ‘when you tried this last time, what was your experience?’ or ‘you’re the expert in this field, what do you think about this? And nobody ever asks that.”

In other words specific expertise is not called upon—the general sense from this staffer was that Emory management selects the same people to serve on committees and decision-making sessions rather than opening up such work to those who have undertaken relevant training and gained expertise. The same staffer explained her frustration at the sudden rise in programs and projects across campus which, she said, completely disregarded the national expertise of others on campus and were conceptualized without any input from these resident experts.

“There’s a leadership deal that if you don’t spend time listening and getting to know who your experts are and you walk in with an agenda... that’s a great way to get everybody to quit and that’s what’s happening.”

Younger staff felt quite differently; rather than be struck by the number of new projects being undertaken, they felt that their ideas for new initiatives were in fact *not* taken up or taken seriously.

Speaking Out on Campus:

In an environment in which some staff feel that their opinions are not taken into account, there are several constraints to staff expressing their views. One staff member phrased this bluntly when she explained why she felt silenced:

“There has been a shift in the environment in the last 4-5 years and anecdotally I have observed departments being eliminated and [people] losing their jobs, and there has been a lot of discontent coupled with these things happening... and it’s not a safe space to voice your discontent, because your job might get taken away and we are not tenured faculty. And there are fewer and fewer tenured faculty and so what you have is the growing percentage of people employed by the university afraid to talk because they might lose their jobs. That’s not an empty fear or paranoia because I’ve seen it happen multiple times to people I care about.”

To summarize, the staffer was describing what is acknowledged as a nationwide widespread decrease in tenured faculty jobs and an increase in staff and bureaucratic positions whose voices and opinions are not safeguarded. Staff members suggested that one way to guarantee more staff opinions being heard is to insist on “more teeth” for the Faculty and Staff Employee Council and to create more Employee Resource Groups or ERGs. Some staff were involved in efforts to institutionalize these efforts through HR, believing that would enable them to have more efficacy.

For new staff who had just joined, one barrier to their voices being heard at Emory was that they received no professional development upon entering. As a result, their efforts are concentrated on learning the ropes and understanding their everyday jobs; this prevents them from networking across campus or representing their interests to senior faculty or management since they are still understanding their work.

Relationships between staff, faculty, and students:

Social class emerged as a significant barrier in the relationship that staff have with students: some staff mentioned that they barely interact with students because their offices are not connected with students or faculty. They believe that this is related to the class background of employees and the classed nature of the work that their office performs.

Staff who work within academic departments said their relationships with students was cordial and warm; however relationships with supervisors was less so. In general there was the feeling that faculty and students are prioritized over staff.

“There is a very strong divide between faculty and staff; faculty are coddled and cared for and loved and staff get an occasional pat.”

Work-Life Balance:

Women largely spoke here about their experiences as care-givers while at Emory. In the focus group data, the experiences diverged in terms of race and for whom they were providing care and for how long. For instance a senior African American staffer explained in frustration the almost complete lack of concern, support, and care she

received from her office colleagues while she raised her son as a single mother. A white staffer described the absolute support and care she received while she cared for an elderly parent who had been hospitalized.

Another staffer was irate about being continually contacted by her office even as she had taken a day off to undergo fertilization treatment: she was unsuccessful and now wonders whether it could be related to the continual pressure she faced from work even while she was on treatment. Offices and departments varied widely on flexi-timing options, concern for those who provide family care, and how intrusive colleagues and supervisors are on days off. In general approaches to staff time off depend on individual supervisors rather than an institutionalized understanding of work-life balance.

b. Faculty Focus Group

The faculty focus group was advertised by sending out emails to list serves of all of Emory's schools, and personal emails to faculty who had participated in the Center's programs and initiatives, and finally, via emails from the Director to individual faculty. Faculty who were present at the focus group represented Nursing, Emory College, Oxford College, and the School of Public Health.

Gender Climate at Emory

Faculty expressed their understanding that the Center largely served undergraduates on campus, with one remarking that this was so since undergraduate women are the largest group of women on campus.

However they all agreed that there needs to be a Center which will serve the needs of women faculty by offering a space through which to address sexism, pay gap, faculty orientation (through which to pass down learning to new faculty) and other gender-related issues for which no other space exists on campus. One faculty member said that an emphasis on undergraduate programming needed to be accompanied by programs and events for faculty such as the Op-Ed project that she attended and benefited from greatly. The faculty member from Oxford campus said there needed to be a space for women faculty on that campus too, perhaps through the Student Center there.

Faculty laid importance on symbolic and public events that foreground women's contributions to the community such as the Unsung Heroines Awards, which they noted was better attended previously, and more visibly supported by administration. One member recommended the expansion of this award to the Oxford campus. In general faculty were agreed that administration needs to be seen as doing more to support initiatives related to women on campus.

Faculty regarded the climate around gender issues at Emory as varied: having a feminist dean or department head could result in positive changes in the department. However

in general, issues of pay gap, grant funding, work-load, faculty hiring, women in leadership positions (such as on the council of trustees) and attention given to gender were seen as needing more attention. One member said a large block to career advancement for women faculty was service work which disproportionately falls on women faculty to take on. Faculty also mentioned the termination of the Commission on the Status of Women as an issue of concern. Additionally they mentioned systemic differences on the basis of gender with regards to the issues mentioned above (pay gap, use of grant money, etc.).

One faculty member specified that—despite the system of tenure—the climate at Emory was not conducive to speaking out about gender-related discrepancies and discrimination including the need to use grant money for maternity leave. She said that she could not specify or pin-point individuals who might penalize her for voicing her anger about the pay-gap or the use of what she called “soft money” i.e. grant money for maternity. Later in the focus group another faculty member mentioned an incident in which a senior male faculty member entered her room, shut the door behind him, and lectured her for 45 minutes on what she was doing wrong: “It was haunting and kind of traumatic.” Broadly, there is the perception that speaking out about gender could invite a backlash from others in decision-making positions.

Faculty members said they received support from partners and feminist department colleagues, but mentioned that older colleagues with whom they interact—men and some women—have tended to be far more conservative with regards to gender issues.

Leadership Opportunities

Faculty unanimously expressed the need for them to reach out to, and work collaboratively with, others on the Emory campus, with one adding: “It’s a vital part of my existence, and I’ve been here 36 years.” In general faculty said they had not personally had adequate or good opportunities for leadership development, adding that these were not built into the system but had to be created: “You have to make those opportunities happen.” With this in mind, they suggested mentorship programs for junior faculty including post-doctoral fellows and new hires.

Faculty admitted that their own path toward individual advancement had sometimes cost them opportunities to participate in community leadership: one said she shied away from leadership since she was too busy. Another said that the requirements for tenure and advancement has the effect of isolating individual professors:

“To me that’s a travesty: the whole tenure process which makes me isolated from the rest of the university because you are so focused on getting money, writing and publishing articles—which isn’t bad, it just means you have to disconnect from the rest of the university and you can’t take leadership positions.”

The faculty present said they had not had the opportunities to attend leadership training for different reasons: one said the ones she had heard about had benefited younger faculty; another said that her seniors recommended others who had had less opportunities than her should attend. They mentioned specific needs which the Center could address with regards to leadership, including:

1. Imparting management skills: How to run a meeting, how to write a grant, how to do a budget
2. Create a social space for women faculty without a specific agenda
3. Cafeteria for faculty
4. Time management program
5. Facilitating a web of mentors: While this was not an explicit recommendation from faculty, one faculty member mentioned that rather than expect one program or a single mentor to impart all valuable learning, she had come to understand that a web of mentors is far more effective.
6. Interacting with undergraduate students informally: "I don't have the chance to connect and talk to students about anything other than academics. It's not as easy as it used to be."
7. Collaboration with the Center for Faculty Development and Excellence on programs.
8. *Unsung Heroines* expanded to include a discussion on gender-related issues (such as the impact of the Greek system on campus life) prior to the event
9. Faculty Writing Circle allowing women faculty to share writing and what they are working on

c. Service Staff

Facilities staff were invited to the focus group based on word-of-mouth invitations made to them at their place of work, and by requesting them to invite their friends. Those who came work at different buildings across campus, including Whitehall, Callaway, Cox, Anthropology etc. They had been employees at Emory from between five and thirty years. All were black women over the age of forty.

Nature of Work and Working Conditions as Women:

Service staff represented their work as ranging from cleaning bathrooms, trash, classrooms, and performing emotional labor—“keeping everyone happy.” When asked about their working conditions, they said they had occasionally been placed in positions where they did not feel safe working or that they felt were not conducive to work. For instance, the only restrooms available to use for some when working morning shifts was in the basement of her building. The PI later accompanied her on her request to see the space: it is a large basement area with dim lighting and the roar of boilers at work. The staff member said using the restroom here in the early mornings made her feel unsafe as the layout of the room could conceal people and not allow her to reach help, as below:

“People are not allowed to go down there without earplugs, but we still have to go down there. If something happens, no one can hear you. Nobody should have to go down there.”

Staff are asked to lift weights well above their own weight limit. Saying no is not an option. As two women reported:

“There could be more compassion with us. As I get older, I can’t pick up heavy things. I wish they [supervisors] were more understanding of that.”

“Don’t threaten me if I can’t pick up 50 lbs then I can’t have the job anymore. I’ve been here so many years.”

Another staff member said that a junior on her staff expected her to do the cleaning work since he assumed she would, as a woman. One said she was interested in specific kinds of work, such as painting, which she was denied since “women don’t do that kind of work.”

When the PIs went to meet some service staff they were eating lunch in a basement area, on a common table. They had been told that the storage rooms, where they usually ate, could not be used anymore and referred to this basement space as a “hideout.” Both the basement spaces as well as the storage rooms are inappropriate eating spaces; the storage rooms hold cleaning supplies and offer only minimal standing space.

“I would really like a break room or a sitting room. We really are not allowed to sit and eat where everyone sits. We used to be able to sit in the closet and eat. But that’s not right.”

The basement spaces offer no natural light or proper seating and have been “found” and appropriated out of need for a small space with seating. Neither of these spaces that some of the service staff use share any of the facilities used by others on campus for lunch: a space with a microwave, sink, basic dishware, and seating.

In summary, service staff said that they had some issues of safety with regards to building use, performed work that was unsuitable given their physical ability, could not be trained to do some tasks which they wished to undertake, and were not offered the same facilities for break time and lunch as others on campus are.

Relationships with supervisors and administration

Staff noted that most of their seniors were men, although there were qualified women who could do the job as well. Some staff said that they had a hard time with supervisors earlier but the situation had recently improved. However each of them had individual experiences with supervisors who appeared to take arbitrary decisions, display favoritism, and show no compassion during major life events for which leave had to be taken. They reported instances of supervisors slamming down the phone, refusing leave, and issuing “occurrences” for absences when there had been a death in the family

Staff agreed that decisions for new hires seemed to be made on the basis of favoritism and nepotism, with preference given to relatives of the managerial staff. These relatives do not receive the same kind of penalties as other staff. They said they had very little compassion from their immediate supervisors; one recalled being written up when she faced a death in the immediate family, another did not get leave when she had a heart attack.

Staff recalled several instances in which a supervisor either did not appear to be familiar with Emory policies or was uncooperative and the staffer “had to go above his head.” In other cases the supervisors used the policies to their advantage to penalize staff who asked for leave. In general the older staff members said they were very familiar with Emory’s policies and often explained it to newcomers, but they did not mention any formal sessions in which they were made aware of their rights or the policies applicable to them.

There were several complaints made about the nature of “occurrences”—they were only handed out to those who were not favored by supervisors. Since the number of occurrences per year is limited (they mentioned it was 13 per year), it was important to service staff that there is some fairness and justice in dispensing these.

Staff who had been at Emory longer than others recollected that Staff Fests which were all-day events had now been cut down to brief occasions. Other celebrations or staff-oriented events do not take into account service staff performing other jobs off-campus.

Professional Development Opportunities

“I’ve never had a day of training and I’ve been here 8 years.”

These words of one staff member reflected the feeling of the group that the training they received at Emory (with regards to learning how to use the computer, for instance) was minimal and inadequate. Staff at the focus group universally said that cross-training would be helpful, and that they would appreciate learning specific skills. Half an hour was devoted to teaching computer skills to a complete beginner; this was inadequate and one staff member said a professor compensated for this by teaching her himself.

“There are people in the department who can’t read, write or use the Internet. They need to teach that. They only have a 30 minutes training and most people need more than that to learn the basics.”

Many staff responded to the question about leadership opportunities by explaining that they did not necessarily want the additional duties and responsibilities that came with leadership—however they were unanimous that skills-training was vital and necessary for all staff, and something under-invested in. Notices about events are posted on a board rather than encouraged and communicated personally, and this mode of reaching out prevents several from knowing what is available. Another problem with communication is that it can be too informal. As one member put it:

“There is no communication. We always hear three sides of something. The director might say something and the message gets warped by the time it gets to us. It’s a lot of hearsay.”

Several staff work two or more jobs, often leaving one job for the next, so skills-training and training modules in general would have to be during their regular work hours.

d. Undergraduates

The undergraduate focus group was invited by reaching out to friends of the Center, and through word-of-mouth. The group comprised seven students including Asian, South Asian, Caucasian, and African American students representing the humanities, sciences, and nursing.

Academic Environment

We asked undergraduate students about how comfortable they felt in the classroom environment. Many participants in our focus group expressed feeling uncomfortable talking or asking questions in class, especially students in STEM fields. Students reported feeling ignored if they asked questions and male students talking over them. Students reported mixed experiences when they sought help in office hours, EPASS tutoring and other academic services, all believing that their gender was the reason for their negative interactions. As one said:

“I don’t ask questions in big classes because I’m worried that my questions are stupid. When I have group work with male students they ignore me and when I ask questions they don’t answer.”

Many students said that they either didn’t know who to go to in the institution to help with issues in the classroom or they thought these conversations would not be fruitful. Some students felt that having detailed classroom codes or having a way for students to anonymously report to professors about the classroom environment has been helpful. Several students discussed that having someone in their departments who was of the same gender or race was very helpful.

Leadership, Mentorship, and Professional Development

Students seemed ambiguous about the leadership opportunities available at Emory. One explained that simply having leadership opportunities to cultivate leaders was not equivalent to, or a substitute for, more long-term community-building. She said that efforts to build community amongst students was not supported by the management and that official organizations or groups at Emory attempt to claim credit for campus activism rather than supporting student initiatives. As she explained it,

“How Emory deals with this is not right- pushing leadership programs on students doesn’t fix all the problems. All of these things make you look great on paper, but it seems like Emory doesn’t care about what people are dealing with in their daily lives.”

One student said that leadership activities at Emory seemed engineered to look impressive on a CV rather than to actually impart collaborative skills:

“I’ve learned how to be a leader on paper and I know how to put things on paper. I haven’t learned any collaborative skills here. “

In general, students at the focus group widely reported a lack of institutional trust, saying that the administration did not listen to them or trust their leadership abilities. In terms of professional activities following graduation, most students had visited the Career Center but reported negative or unfruitful experiences, indicating that employees there did not know how to help them.

Students were eager to experience and become involved in mentorship opportunities with others who were of the same identity as them and those who were in the same field. Students reported that they liked having professional and personal mentors. When asked about available leadership and mentorship opportunities such as workshops, students reported that having official leadership retreats or training has not been particularly helpful. However they appreciated having the chance to do external projects and internships funded by Emory. At least one student affirmed the extent of learning and professionalization she received by working with organizations off Emory’s campus.

Safety

The majority of students in the focus group reported feeling physically and emotionally unsafe on campus. Students named particular instances when and where they felt unsafe including at night, around Frat Row, and around construction sites.

“I think moving off campus has helped me feel safe on campus. I feel like I can compartmentalize my time at Emory as just part of my day instead of it feeling like my whole world. I’ve never felt safe in the frats. The general feeling at Eagle Row, especially if you aren’t Greek, is hostile.”

Many said moving off campus helped them to feel emotionally safe on campus—probably because this distinction between spaces afforded them the safe spaces to encounter campus. Many said that they sought out safe spaces on campus as a way to deal with the general environment at Emory, citing the Center for Women and the Office of LGBT Life, as examples of such spaces. Students also emphasized the need to have access to transportation to be off campus.

e. Graduates

There were graduate students from the social sciences, humanities, and sciences; with representation from US and foreign nationals (3); and at least five different race and ethnic backgrounds. Two graduate students had experience with giving birth and raising a child while a PhD candidate at Emory, and one was a postdoctoral fellow.

Difference and Diversity in the Classroom and Department:

All women from the sciences, regardless of race, nationality, and ethnicity, felt that their voice was not heard in classrooms or could recall occasions when they had been racially stereotyped in the past, as for example professors describing the correlation of race and learning and calling on a black student to affirm the veracity of the study via identity-based personal experience. A white student explained that her voice held little weight even as she came close to graduating. Another said she had been publically humiliated on an email thread by a male colleague through no fault of hers, concluding that “you have to be 10 times more assertive than a man in order to let people hear you.”

Outside the sciences, race played a role in determining what texts were taught in classrooms, and how students respond to certain texts and generate class discussions based on them. These experiences of race as it plays out in the selection of texts and the composition of a humanities classroom left one black student feeling that the classroom space was not an inclusive one for her.

Another issue regarding race was the low number of black women teachers at Emory. One black student said that this low presence translated into black students seeking her

out as a friend and ally. “There was a student of color who wanted to be my best friend,” the student explained, “... there is an expectation that I would be less strict with students of color.”

Other students added that while student bodies in certain science streams did have a significant composition of women, the number seemed to trail off in the higher positions so that faculty were almost always men. Diversity is addressed by faculty when they apply to grants and approach students of color as beneficial to acquire certain grants—what one student called the “we need to get our numbers up” approach to encouraging students of color to apply for grants. Students then feel like a statistic and would far prefer an approach where faculty mention grants for which they would qualify but not insist they apply to them.

Outside the sciences, students in the humanities said they experienced micro aggressions along the axes of gender and race. For instance, expectations around when married women will give birth; sexualized comments or observations made in front of women graduate students including of patronizing attitudes such as “you’re looking cute”; or structural exclusions such as compulsory scheduling of events that prevents graduate students who are nursing or care-giving from attending.

Spaces of Support:

Graduate students described their primary support as coming from advisors or the DGS, and friends. While advisors play a key role in professional development, graduate students rely on their friends for support and community during graduate school. Several mentioned that informal community within departments, or along the lines of race or nationality:

“I’ve always just turned to my friends. In [my] department when I first started, all the black women who were either graduate students in my department or just certificate students emailed me and were like ‘we are having a dinner for you, and for you alone’... when I got there, there was spaghetti and wine and shoes were off and they were like ‘Welcome. To Emory. And here’s what you’re up against.’

And it was extremely empowering to know that I had that community but it was also really sad that that is something that had to happen and that has to happen every year for the black women that come in to that department. So it did help me know in those moments when I think I am crazy that I am not alone. When I feel like ‘Am I crazy? Did this happen?’ I am assured that it did happen. Right. Because they already told me that this was gonna happen, [by the] people that I turned to vent and to strategize.

A lot of it is just that this happened, what should I do and we sit with paper and pens and it makes no sense but it’s like ‘Here’s what you have to do,’ so to have that kind of strategy even just to get through, I never felt supported or felt there were faculty that I

could go to... even the women of color that look like me. In certain situations I know where they'll have my back and in other situations I know they absolutely won't and it could be because so many people have to rely on them."

For this graduate student the community of support came from other black women on campus, across departments. Other graduate students (for instance from other nations) acclimatized on their own, without the support of explicit community.

Birth and Childcare:

Graduate students with children in the focus group said that they had very little support while having babies and were tempted to leave the program owing to the mixed responses that they received. Students said that they were asked questions about when they would return even before they left for maternity leave. Students in neuroscience said that they put together a policy to ensure that an NIH project for parental leave was put into effect at Emory.

Yet students felt that a two-month leave period was minimal; if they needed to take time away from school for child care and encountered an additional need for leave such as taking care of another family member, their leave had been used up. Students felt that they were allowed only one reason for taking leave, whereas many students act as multiple kinds of care-givers including for childcare of family members and taking care of elders. One student said that Emory sought out "diversity" hiring students from different class and race backgrounds but did not then understand that these students also have additional responsibilities toward their communities.

"It's something that I see as a problem with Emory in general—you celebrate diversity but you don't know what to do with it when it gets here... There's all this other kind of family pressure that gets on you when you're first generation PhD, that community is so small, and all of that is put on you and there's nothing, no kind of support for it in the dept and within the institution so it's like why did you bring me here? "

In addition the childcare offered to those at Emory was too expensive for graduate students, it seems mostly to be devised for faculty. Students suggested that there could be a gradient for childcare depending on salary. When students do take time off for childcare and birth, those with children said they felt judged on their return, and that there were no acknowledgments of their status as parents in terms of attendance requirements and timeline for completion of their PhDs.

Having a baby while in an academic environment seemed unattainable, without a clear role model for most focus group participants with regards to how this can be managed. It seemed to be unclear and mythical as this participant explained:

“You hear a lot of stories about women who had a baby and literally weren’t alive the next day, it’s almost like a mythology, one of the scary things is that its like these super women – if that’s even a thing - are the only ones who are going to make it. I admit that I don’t talk to faculty because I’m intimidated. It feels unattainable for me. I don’t think I could do what you’re doing.”

Professional Development Opportunities:

Students talked about professional development by way of teaching opportunities and leadership training.

Many students seek out leadership opportunities, some by volunteering their time on graduate student groups, and others by joining more formalized groups on campus, where they are still volunteering their time and effort.

Graduate student groups such as the Emory Women in Neuroscience (EWIN), Black Graduate Student Association, Center for Women, and other topical groups at the Rollins School of Public Health have provided leadership opportunities as well as opportunities to be a Teaching Assistant outside the department and occasional opportunities such as the Mellon Fellowship.

Teaching had been a source of stress and induced feelings of vulnerability for some of those present. They did not feel adequately supported by their departments or by Emory. With the exception of one student, none claimed confidence with knowing about Emory’s resources and options to protect teachers (such as the reporting systems available to teachers). They were not prepared for identity-based hostility that they might encounter for lack of a support group who could warn them prior to their initial experience in the classroom.

Students felt they were met with hostility when discussing issues of social class as teachers; one described an aggressive response on the first day of class by a student, and another was harassed by a student over email, with his mother cc’ed on the thread, and accused of being tired while teaching when she was pregnant. One graduate student in the social sciences said that she felt that white undergraduate students were hostile or reluctant to discuss race in the classroom and this reflected in their antagonism toward her (their teacher). She said that she was reluctant to discuss this with her department since she expected their response to be to rethink her syllabus.

In general students felt that they had little authority or negotiating power when undergraduate students turned aggressive or demanding. Rather than turn to departments for support or Emory, they turned to friends and other graduate students for advice and support.

Work-Life Balance:

Graduate students in the focus group said that they were in a precarious position with regards to work-life balance since their role on campus is an ambiguous one, straddling both student and teacher roles. One student said she felt the weight of emotional labor that was largely uncompensated; undergraduates often came to her for advice and help and she did not turn them away. Yet the nature of this mentorship was both unacknowledged and uncompensated.

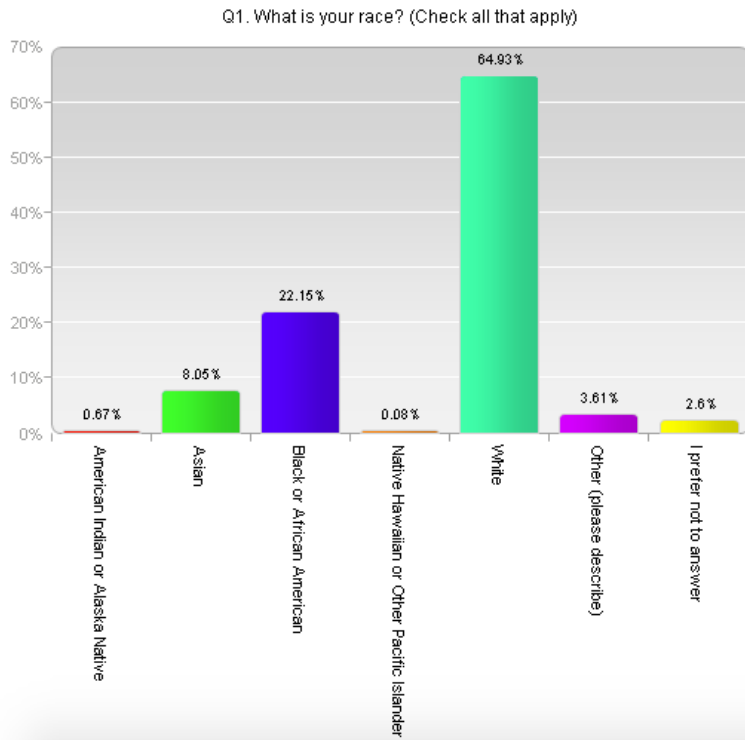
While students said that they felt the work-life balance “was terrible”—in the words of one—they also felt a compulsion to perform busyness. Being seen as having a life outside work could be misconstrued as not being a successful graduate student. This leaves graduate students in the position of having to seem busy even while they seek out personal time outside of work.

Survey Results

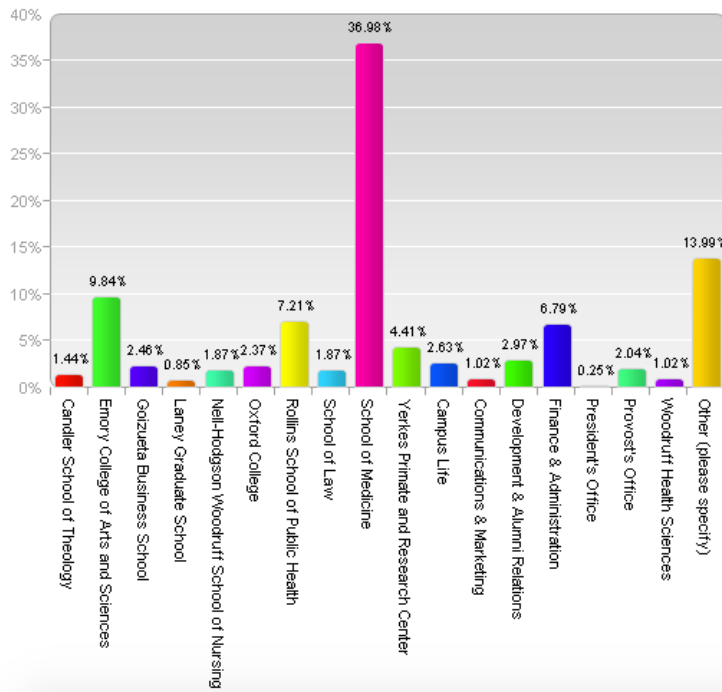
Staff and Faculty

The staff and faculty survey was administered between April 14, 2015 and May 9, 2015 and was taken by 1192 women-identified staff and faculty across Emory.

Survey-takers were over 99% women, with a .64% choosing not to answer. A little over 87% identified as heterosexual, 4% as gay/lesbian, a little over 2% as bi/pan sexual and almost 2% asexual. Most respondents were in their forties. 76% were staff, and the rest identified as faculty. Of the over 23% who were faculty, 52% were tenure track, 34% were tenured, and almost 13% were in a lecturer position. Respondents were primarily white-identified, with the racial composition available in this graph:



Almost 40% came from the School of Medicine, with organizational affiliation as follows:



Summary of Needs

Summary of Needs

Staff

1. Need for mentorship programs based on matching on the basis of diversity
2. Institutional support that recognizes skills and talents and provides leadership opportunities accordingly, rather than based on favoritism
3. Leadership training needs to accompany opportunities to implement learning
4. More opportunities for leadership development
5. Need to reach out to staff for their particular expertise
6. More informal opportunities to meet like-minded women
7. Need for the Center for Women to continue to serve staff and faculty
8. Transparency in leadership decisions and organizational change
9. More teeth to the ERG so that staff can speak frankly and fearlessly
10. Publicity for women-oriented programs and opportunities
11. Relevant professional development for new hires
12. Sensitization of supervisors to respect staff time off

Faculty

13. Better climate for speaking out on systemic gender differences in pay, use of grant money, and unfair distribution of service work
14. More indication from the administration that it is supportive of gender issues
15. More substantive presence of administration at spaces where gender-related work is celebrated and recognized ie Unsung Heroine awards
16. Imparting management skills: How to run a meeting, how to write a grant, budgeting
17. Create a social space for women faculty without a specific agenda
18. Cafeteria for faculty
19. Time management program
20. Facilitating a web of mentors: While this was not an explicit recommendation from faculty, one faculty member mentioned that rather than expect one program or a single mentor to impart all valuable learning, she had come to understand that a web of mentors is far more effective.
21. Interacting with undergraduate students informally
22. Collaboration with the Center for Faculty Development and Excellence on programs.
23. Unsung Heroines expanded to include a discussion on gender-related issues (such as the impact of the Greek system on campus life) prior to the event
24. Faculty Writing Circle allowing women faculty to share writing and what they are working on

Service Staff

25. Need for safe working environments
26. Need for recognition of age and ability in assigning tasks

27. Need for abolition of gender-based work discrimination (expecting women to do certain tasks and not allowing them to do others)
28. Cross-training
29. Computer-based intensive training and professional development
30. Suitable and acceptable break rooms for lunch and breaks
31. More women in leadership positions
32. Need to sensitize supervisors about working with service staff
33. Need for a neutral arbitrator of occurrence-issues
34. Need for training and awareness with relation to work policies

Undergraduates

35. Need for anonymous system of reporting classroom gender-based discrimination
36. Awareness about institution-based availability of resources through which to address classroom discrimination
37. More suitable leadership development focused on cultivating community-based change rather than individual "CV-building" workshops
38. Building institutional trust
39. Strengthening student services including the Career Center
40. Increasing and expanding the links between students and off-campus organizations and mentors including through support structures such as transport on and off campus

Graduates

41. Increase diversity and sensitization about diversity within the classroom amongst professors (including how professors communicate with students, racial composition in the classroom, texts used in class)
42. Need for more diversity in faculty hire
43. Need for sensitization amongst faculty with respect to sexist comments and creating gender-sensitive environments in the department
44. Need for institutional support for student-based communities who support each other by communicating their experiences and keeping alive knowledge and responses to institutional sexism and racism
45. Sensitization for departments to ensure substantive and meaningful support for graduate students who have children including affordable child care, more awareness about nursing nests, scheduling of departmental events
46. Sensitization for departments to ensure substantive and meaningful support of diverse class and race backgrounds of graduate students including responsiveness to life events and need to make changes in their completion timelines or attendance requirements
47. Support for graduate students as teachers including awareness about policies and procedures and creating informal networks of support
48. Compensating and acknowledging graduate student time and labor as mentors

