

Equal Opportunity for Women Plan 2007

Endorsed by the College Advisory Board, 16 May 2007

In common with other faculties and departments in Australian universities the ANU College of Engineering and Computer Science is significantly under-represented by women among its academic staff. This is a problem shared by most faculties in the English speaking world but is not necessarily replicated in Asia and Europe.

Recognising the importance of the perspective women can bring to the practice of engineering and computer science, the professional community over the past 20 years or so has undertaken a significant number of initiatives to increase the potential pool of female academics. These include special incentive schemes for female graduate students, including re-entry scholarships following raising a family, and targeted, but not exclusively so, recruitment campaigns.

The fact that those programs have not been successful is evidenced by the still very low proportion of academic women found in the engineering and computer science departments of Australia's universities.

The ANU College of Engineering and Computer Science has a particularly low number of female academics as tables 1 and 2 demonstrate, especially at the senior levels. We are twice as under-represented by women as the nearest other College in the ANU in the respective category and there has been a gradual decrease among levels A-C. Were it not for a recent promotion we would still not have women at the D and E levels. We have not appointed women to senior positions in the past five years meaning that our ability to provide broad leadership in the College is potentially compromised.

Accordingly, notwithstanding the need to maintain and strengthen existing incentive and attraction schemes, a significantly different approach must be taken if we believe that it is important to increase the proportion of female academics to achieve a better gender balance in the College.

Not only is a higher proportion of women important because of the different perspectives they bring and the fact that we are not tapping into 50% of the available workforce, but an increased proportion of women on the academic staff is important as a role model in the recruitment of female undergraduate students and postgraduate research scholars. Even though our undergraduate numbers are good on a national scale, at about 16% female undergraduates, much more needs to be done in order to increase the attractiveness of engineering and computer science as professions for young women school leavers. In recognition of this need Engineers Australia (the Institution of Engineers, Australia) has targeted 2007 as the year of Women in Engineering.

Further, we need to improve our gender-balance image, particularly at the senior levels, so that prospective female applicants for our positions are not deterred by a perception that our workforce has a strongly male dominated culture.

Table 1. Percentage of Women Academic Staff, by College, at Levels A-C

| ANU College | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 |
|--------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Arts & Social Sciences | 45% | 46% | 47% | 45% | 48% |
| Asia & the Pacific | 34% | 36% | 43% | 44% | 40% |
| Business & Economics | 22% | 28% | 28% | 26% | 27% |
| Engineering & Computer Science | 15% | 15% | 12% | 11% | 11% |
| Law | 39% | 36% | 37% | 33% | 32% |
| Medicine & Health Sciences | 43% | 49% | 52% | 48% | 50% |
| Science | 33% | 32% | 32% | 31% | 30% |
| ANU | 36% | 37% | 38% | 36% | 36% |

Table 2. Percentage of Women Academic Staff, by College, at Levels D, E

| ANU College | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 |
|--------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Arts & Social Sciences | 20% | 20% | 24% | 28% | 25% |
| Asia & the Pacific | 21% | 18% | 17% | 16% | 21% |
| Business & Economics | 6% | 5% | 15% | 14% | 11% |
| Engineering & Computer Science | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 4% |
| Law | 33% | 36% | 38% | 38% | 41% |
| Medicine & Health Sciences | 32% | 26% | 32% | 31% | 34% |
| Science | 6% | 6% | 7% | 7% | 9% |
| ANU | 14% | 14% | 16% | 17% | 18% |

Our Strategic Goal

For the reasons above it is appropriate in this first year of our new College plan that we undertake a significant departure from previous procedures for encouraging women academics by instituting a targeted campaign on the attraction and recruitment of women.

Our major objective under this Affirmative Action Plan therefore consists of setting ourselves a target of achieving 25% women in the academic staff complement of each of our four academic departments.

In setting ourselves this 25% objective we are confident that we will not compromise the quality of those appointed to the College and we have selected a target beyond which more typical attraction schemes can be expected to operate.

Table 3 shows the target in terms of numbers, from which it can be seen that our objective is achievable.

It is important to recognise that in pursuing our target, we will do so only through the recruitment process and not through changing the manner in which we select the most appropriate person for one of our positions. Figure 1 illustrates this point in which the appointment of a staff member is seen to consist of both recruitment and selection stages. The recruitment stage can be by any of advertisement, targeted advertisement, search committees, invitations and the like, as allowed by University policy, whereas the selection process depends upon merit-based selection of the candidates recruited, the application of standards and the use of selection committees. Achieving our goal by targeting the recruitment process will allow us to run women-only advertisements and advertisements which might express preferences for female applicants even though generally worded

Table 3. Current Academic Staffing and the Target

| Department | Academic staff numbers | | |
|------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------|--------------|
| | Men currently | Women currently | Women Target |
| Computer Science | 17 | 2 | 5 |
| Computer Sciences Laboratory | 9 | 1 | 3 |
| Engineering | 17 | 2 | 5 |
| Information Engineering | 12 | 1 | 3 |

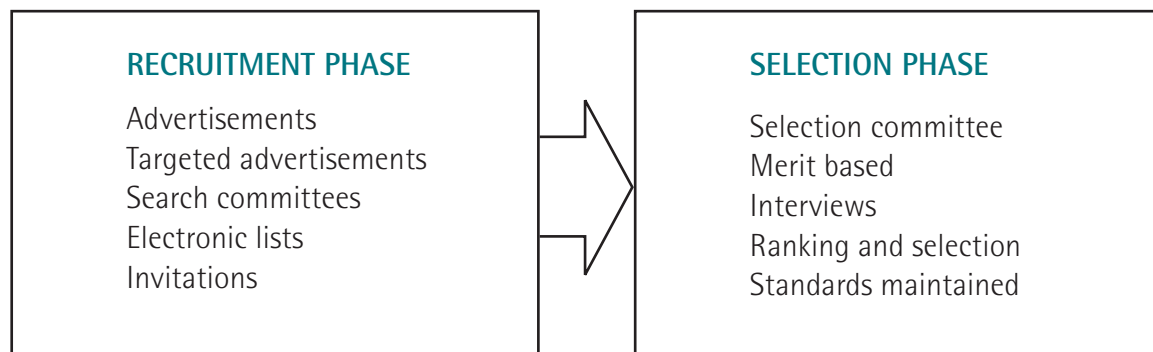


Figure 1. The two phases in appointing new staff.

Our Approach

We will reach our objective by adopting a strategy that targets women-only appointments through our recruitment processes in the following manner:

- whenever vacancies arise the respective Department will determine whether it should be filled by a female candidate;
- the selection committee (established according to University principles and including both men and women) will decide how the vacancy is to be publicised: that could be by way of advertisements or mailing list entries indicating the academic position is for a woman; more general advertisements but with wording that encourages applications from women; and the use of search committees; in exceptional cases and in accordance with University procedures, an appointment might be made by invitation; the criteria for the position will be reviewed in terms of gender inclusive skills and experience;
- normal selection processes will be applied including the use of selection committees, merit-based selection principles, interviews and the seeking of referees reports;
- at all times the standards associated with successful appointments to the College will be maintained;
- should the vacancy not be filled through targeting female applicants, the Head of Department has the option of running a general recruitment and selection process with no targeting.

The Legislative Basis for our Plan

The adoption of a strongly targeted affirmative action initiative such as ours requires an understanding of the legislative basis that makes it possible. Fortunately the provisions of the Sex Discrimination Act 1984 include, at Sub-Section 7D(1)(a)

- the taking of "special measures" for the purpose of achieving substantive equality between men and women,
- affirmative action measures which confer a benefit on a group for the purpose of achieving substantive equality.

Further, Sub-Section 7D(2) provides that such "special measures" do not give rise to discrimination under Section 5 of the Act.

While defence under these provisions turns on the definition of substantive equality, there is little room other than to conclude that our academic staffing situation is highly unbalanced to the detriment of the profession, prospective women employees and the role models we project to young women school leavers.

Other Parallel Initiatives

We will have a number of complementary strategies to support our 25% target, and to remain in place as mechanisms that will stand alone to maintain our attractiveness to female applicants once the target has been achieved. These are

- consideration of permanent part time positions, whenever possible, and flexible working arrangements more generally,
- targeting media geared towards female academics,
- the introduction of College re-entry fellowships for suitably qualified women wishing to re-establish themselves as research scholars following a prolonged period out of the academic workforce, and
- working with the University in establishing University-wide support networks, possibly in association with the current IARU project on academic women.

Review

Notwithstanding adopting the 25% target as an on-going objective, it is important to review this plan to see whether it has worked and/or whether it needs to be continued. Accordingly, we set in place a review on the third anniversary of its implementation – nominally June 2010.

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