

## Charge to NIH Working Group on Women in Biomedical Research Careers

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January 30, 2007

Dr. Vivian Pinn and I are very happy to co-chair this Working Group, and I would like to thank you for your service on this Working Group.

The briefings we received relative to the *Beyond Bias and Barriers, Fulfilling the Potential of Women in Academic Science and Engineering* report clearly showed the need for us to follow up internally as an institution. Constructive action is necessary, since, in the past, similar reports have gone on the shelves with no action taken.

We are at a transition time in our demographics and in our ability to truly attract the best and the brightest from wherever they come.

The status of women in science and engineering is a serious concern. Today, the pipeline is balanced in terms of gender from K-12 through the postdoctoral level. Then, we lose quite a bit of talent downstream. There are many theories as to why and how, and we have received input regarding the tangible problems that relate to being a woman in science. There are intangible concerns as well. The report addresses both of these in many ways.

As a Working Group, we need to use our insight and creativity and not be overly concerned with the interpretation of the reality; rather, we need to take actions that will change the reality.

If we can come up with a working hypothesis and design an experiment, this would be preferable to arguing about varying interpretations of reality.

Taking action is the step where many Federal organizations freeze. They are unable to resolve the pilot program phase and often choose to seek a one-size-fits-all solution that is perfect from the date of its implementation.

Such an approach can be restrictive and creates an enormous amount of consultative work, arguments, and firm positions. The end results are very complex proposals that attract a tremendous amount of both opposition and support. In the end, we do not move forward.

My exhortation to the group is to determine solutions to the gender gap in sciences and engineering and change the reality. This is a long journey and results will not happen overnight.

Be practical. If we can define a doable experiment, let's do it. There will be potential remedies that are low-hanging fruit that NIH can implement internally. Our actions will also have implications for the extramural community. We are in a position to communicate with the extramural community and be change provocateurs.

The report has argued strongly that there are barriers to hiring and promotion and there are many different interpretations of the reasons for these barriers.

The chair of the committee that wrote this report, Donna Shalala, issued a personal challenge to me for NIH to respond to this report. From my standpoint, the time has passed for argument and theorizing—what counts is what happens next.

I encourage this Working Group to define what we can do in the short term that can be implemented intramurally and extramurally. This Working Group should also determine the obstacles that are amenable to experiments that can inform us about how best to proceed in the medium and long term.

Thank you for agreeing to be part of this Working Group and contributing to the success of this effort.