

Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in the Economics Profession

One hundred years ago when the American Economic Association was founded, there were few women economists. Since that time there have been enormous changes in women's status in American society. Women are now permitted by law to vote, to attend the same schools as men, and to work in a variety of occupations outside the home. Currently, more than three-fifths of adult women (aged 20 to 64) are gainfully employed, compared to less than one-fifth a century ago. In spite of these changes, women still earn much less than men and lack the power and status traditionally associated with economic success. Their low earnings stem in large part from their concentration in low-paid occupations and their underrepresentation in most of the professions. In recognition of these facts, the American Economic Association established the Committee on the Status of Women in the Economics Profession (CSWEP) in 1972. Hopefully, by the time the American Economic Association celebrates its bicentennial in the year 2085, such a committee will no longer be needed.

This report summarizes changes in women's status within the profession over the past decade and describes the most recent activities of CSWEP. The overall trends on women's representation are generally positive for the decade as a whole and we would like to think that CSWEP's activities contributed to some of that progress. It is also clear that women do not progress within the profession at the same rate that men do. We need to learn more about why this is so, and continue efforts to integrate them fully into the profession.

The Changing Status of Women Economists. As indicated in Figure 1, there has been a substantial increase in the number of women majoring in economics at the undergraduate level and in the number completing advanced degrees. Women now receive 34 percent of all BA degrees in economics, up from 22 percent a decade ago, and 18 percent of all PhD degrees, up from 11 percent over the

same period. This has translated into considerable improvement at the entry level for the profession as well. In fact, women's share of all assistant professors has tended to mirror their share of PhD degrees over time. Progress to the top academic ranks of the profession, on the other hand, has been slow or nonexistent. Only 3 to 4 percent of all full professors were female in both 1974-75 and 1984-85.

It is interesting to compare the ten-year record to changes over the past four years (1981-85). Tables 1 and 2 contain data on a matched sample of institutions for these periods and, for comparative purposes, data from an unmatched sample (all that is available) for the preceding four years, 1977-81. One might hypothesize that there would have been a slowing of progress due to flagging interest in, and pressures for, affirmative action during this most recent period. However, most of the indicators presented in Tables 1 and 2 show continuing progress at rates comparable to earlier periods with two notable exceptions: the proportion of women BAs has levelled off and the proportion of women PhD students taking jobs in the academic sector appears to have dropped sharply. Since these are two critical points of entry into the profession, these data do not augur well for the future.

Closer inspection of the trends suggests that some recent progress is the result of 'pipeline effects' at work. For example, the sharp increase in women's representation at the MA degree level between 1981 and 1985 seems to mirror the sharp increase in their representation at the BA degree level between 1977 and 1981. Table 3 is an attempt to look at these pipeline effects more systematically by comparing women's representation at each level of the profession to a logically prior level four years earlier. If women progressed within the profession in the same way and at the same rate as men, the ratios in Table 3 would all eventually be close to 1.00. The fact that they are all well

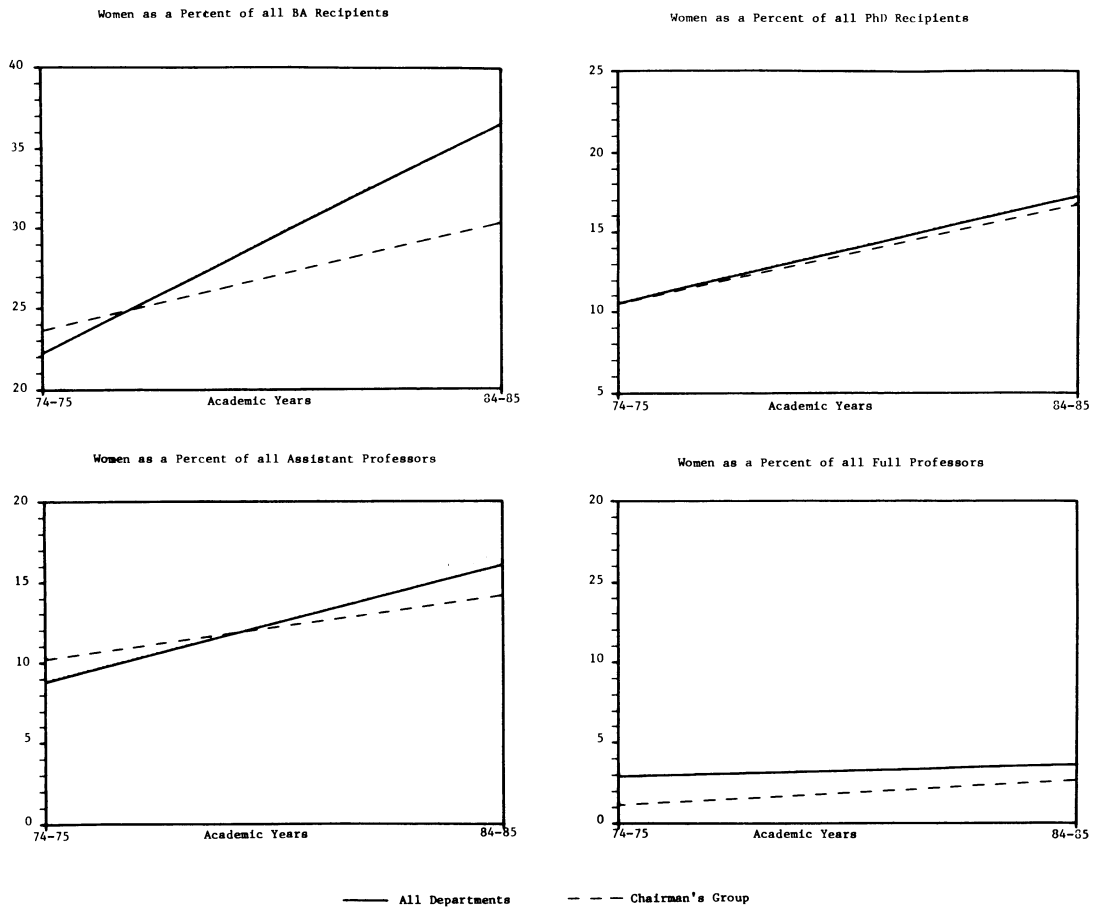


FIGURE 1. THE CHANGING STATUS OF WOMEN, 1975-85

below 1.00 indicates that the problem is not just a lack of women with the requisite prior training or experience. Moreover, the problem is more serious the higher one goes in the hierarchy. Women seem to succeed reasonably well (though not as well as men) in translating their educational credentials into a first job but much less well at moving up the ranks from assistant to associate to full professor.¹ (My impression is that they do

better in nonacademic pursuits and this may be one reason the proportion of female PhD graduates entering the academic labor market has dropped.) The critical point appears to be promotion from assistant professor suggesting that few women receive tenure. In this connection, it is interesting to note that the number of newly tenured people dropped between 1981 and 1985, but the proportion who were women went up, especially in the Chairman's Group (where no women received tenure in 1981). Another

¹ Since the data used to construct the ratios in Tables 3 and 4 are stocks (proportions at a point in time) rather than annual flows, it is possible for women to do as well as men in terms of hiring and promotion rates but still be poorly represented at the senior levels for many years

since turnover is low in the higher ranks and women are the "new entrants."

TABLE 1—SELECTED DATA ON WOMEN'S STATUS IN THE ECONOMICS PROFESSION: ALL DEPARTMENTS

	1976-77		1980-81		1984-85	
	N = 343 Depts.		N = 200 Depts.		N = 200 Depts.	
	Total ^a	Percent Women	Total ^a	Percent women	Total ^a	Percent women
BA Degrees Awarded	10759	23.7	9975	35.0	11424	36.5
MA Degrees Awarded	1434	17.4	1149	22.7	1192	38.3
PhD Degrees Awarded	628	8.6	693	13.1	559	17.2
Employment ^b						
Asst. Professors	1294	8.5	889	11.9	876	16.1
Assoc. Professors	1017	4.5	698	4.4	825	7.9
Full Professors	1458	3.1	1314	3.0	1391	3.6
Changes in Academic Status ^{b,c}						
New Hires	339	9.1	231	10.4	201	21.4
Newly Tenured	131	9.2	75	8.0	71	9.9
Promoted to Rank	256	7.4	151	7.3	123	10.6
Graduate Students: ^d						
PhD Students	2389	14.3	4631	18.1	5090	20.4
MA Students	1080	17.3	2808	20.9	2061	26.3
Grad Students						
Receiving any Aid: ^d						
PhD Students	1802	14.4	3017	18.3	3320	21.1
MA Students	418	17.3	605	27.6	595	33.6
PhD Grads Employed as						
Economists: ^e	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>
All Sectors	89.9	87.8	95.5	92.1	90.9	88.7
Educational Instit.	53.9	57.6	60.1	63.5	61.3	49.1

Source: Data for 1976-77 are from an unmatched sample of institutions responding to the Universal Academic Questionnaire. Data for 1980-81 and 1984-85 are from a matched sample.

^aTotal represents the sum of men and women and not necessarily the raw data totals.

^bIncludes both full-time and part-time professors.

^cOnly considers assistant, associate, and full professor slots.

^dIncludes both full-time and part-time students.

^eShown in percent. "All Sectors" includes: Educational Institutions, Business, Industry, Federal, State & Local Governments, Banking, Finance, Consulting, Research Institutions, Foreign Employment and International Agencies.

conclusion that can be drawn from Table 3 is that the *rate* of progress within the profession did not deteriorate between 1981 and 1985; indeed it appears to have improved somewhat at most levels.

In summary, we know that more and more women are acquiring the requisite training and experience to advance within the profession and that their ability to translate these into concrete advances within the academic community has probably improved somewhat. But women are still poorly represented, especially in the higher ranks. We do not know what factors lead to these gender differences. As always, one can advance both demand-side and supply-side reasons. One of CSWEP's priorities in the coming year will be to launch a more in-depth investigation of these factors, building on work done earlier

in the committee's history by Barbara Reagan, Myra Strober, and others.

CSWEP Activities. CSWEP has traditionally maintained a roster of women economists. The data are usually updated annually and a hard copy mailed to all dues-paying members of CSWEP. Both the hard-copy version and on-line searches are available for use by employers and those interested in doing specialized research on women economists. There has been some debate within CSWEP about the utility of continuing the roster, particularly in light of the more frequent publication of the AEA Directory in recent years. But we have decided to continue publication of the roster for now since CSWEP has made a considerable investment in the basic data, because there are a very large number of women economists

TABLE 2—SELECTED DATA ON WOMEN'S STATUS IN THE ECONOMICS PROFESSION: CHAIRMAN'S GROUP

	1976-77		1980-81		1984-85	
	N = 43 Depts.		N = 33 Depts.		N = 33 Depts.	
	Total ^a	Percent Women	Total ^a	Percent Women	Total ^a	Percent Women
BA Degrees Awarded	3196	21.2	3014	29.3	3562	30.4
MA Degrees Awarded	610	18.2	427	23.9	382	23.6
PhD Degrees Awarded	408	8.1	303	13.5	249	16.9
Employment ^b						
Asst. Professors	310	9.3	249	12.0	240	14.2
Asso. Professors	212	2.8	166	3.0	221	5.4
Full Professors	570	1.6	438	2.1	465	2.6
Changes in Academic Status ^{b,c}						
New Hires	88	3.4	50	10.0	55	12.7
Newly Tenured	12	8.3	23	0.0	13	15.4
Promoted to Rank	57	3.5	40	2.5	27	7.4
Graduate Students: ^d						
PhD Students	1951	14.5	2014	18.3	2240	20.2
MA Students	570	15.6	539	22.4	595	25.9
Grad Students						
Receiving any Aid: ^d						
PhD Students	1465	14.7	1329	18.5	1493	20.6
MA Students	189	15.3	183	26.8	180	33.9
PhD Grads employed as						
Economists: ^e	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>
All Sectors	91.5	88.9	96.0	92.9	90.6	87.5
Educational Instit.	53.3	57.4	61.6	64.3	63.4	45.8

Source and fnn: See Table 1.

TABLE 3—UPWARD MOBILITY WITHIN THE PROFESSION: ALL DEPARTMENTS

	1980-81	1984-85
Women's Share of PhD and MA Degrees Awarded Relative to Share of BA Degrees Awarded Four Years Earlier	0.81	0.90
Women's Share of Assistant Professors Relative to Share of PhD and MA Degrees Awarded Four Years Earlier	0.80	0.84
Women's Share of Associate Professors Relative to Share of Assistant Professors Four Years Earlier	0.52	0.66
Women's Share of Full Professors Relative to Share of Associate Professors Four Years Earlier	0.67	0.82

Note: The above ratios are computed from the percentages in Table 1 and 2. Thus, if women earn 30 percent of all BAs, they might also be expected to earn 30 percent of (a smaller number of) all PhDs 4 or 5 years later if their rate of moving up the hierarchy were the same as men's. In this case, the ratio would be 1.00. Thus, this table attempts to measure, albeit crudely, whether women's rate of progress within the position has changed.

TABLE 4—UPWARD MOBILITY WITHIN THE PROFESSION: CHAIRMAN'S GROUP

	1980-81	1984-85
Women's Share of PhD and MA Degrees Awarded Relative to Share of BA Degrees Awarded Four Years Earlier	0.92	0.71
Women's Share of Assistant Professors Relative to Share of PhD and MA Degrees Awarded Four Years Earlier	0.85	0.72
Women's Share of Associate Professors Relative to Share of Assistant Professors Four Years Earlier	0.32	0.45
Women's Share of Full Professors Relative to Share of Associate Professors Four Years Earlier	0.75	0.87

Note: See Table 3.

who belong to CSWEP but not to the AEA, and because the CSWEP roster is a better tool for conducting targeted employment searches. In addition, updating the roster is a natural extension of the work entailed in maintaining a mailing list and sending out annual dues notices. We are extremely pleased that Joan Haworth has agreed to take on all of these tasks and we owe her and her staff a big debt of gratitude for all their hard work. A new roster is now being prepared and should be available in early 1986.

In addition to the roster, a major activity of CSWEP is publishing a newsletter three times a year. CSWEP spent considerable time this year discussing the purposes of the *Newsletter* (and implicitly, the purposes of CSWEP). A major issue is the extent to which the *Newsletter* should contain items of professional interest to women economists, whatever their field, and the extent to which it should feature material on gender-related research and the status of women generally. While we believe that both are important, the prevailing view of CSWEP was that more emphasis should be put on the former than the latter, and that any new editor should feel comfortable with this set of priorities. In this connection, I am very happy to report that Nancy Gordon, a new member of CSWEP, has agreed to take on the editorship of the *Newsletter*.

CSWEP is pleased to see an increasing number of women represented as officeholders and committee members of the AEA. For example, Elizabeth Bailey is a Vice President, Janet Norwood serves on the Executive Committee, Clair Brown was a member of last year's Nominating Committee, Marianne Ferber is on the Committee on Economic Education, Claudia Goldin and Susan Woodward are on the Editorial Board of the *American Economic Review* and Carolyn Shaw Bell on the Editorial Board of the *Journal of Economic Literature*.

We are particularly pleased that Alice Rivlin became President-elect in 1985. The President of the AEA serves as an *ex officio* member of CSWEP and CSWEP has generally tried to stay in contact with the President even though he or she does not normally attend our meetings. Rivlin demon-

strated her particular interest in our efforts by accepting an invitation to attend CSWEP's first meeting this year. She saw three issues for possible CSWEP attention: (1) the process by which sessions and papers are chosen for the annual meetings; (2) the lack of upward mobility for women beyond the BA level in the profession and the possibility of doing some organized research on the reasons; and (3) using information from the Universal Academic Questionnaire (an outgrowth of earlier data collection efforts by this Committee) to learn more about the career patterns of both men and women within the profession.

The first issue was cogently addressed in an article by Cordelia Reimers in the *CSWEP Newsletter* (summer issue). In the article, she describes how the current process works and what women (or men) interested in getting on the program can do to improve their chances. CSWEP will continue to monitor the process, work with incoming Presidents to insure that women are represented on the program, and discuss possible modification of the procedures with the Executive Committee. We have written to this year's President-elect, Gary Becker, about our concerns.

The problem of upward mobility among women economists was highlighted in the first section of this report, and we are currently seeking foundation support for a small research project that would help us to learn more about why women have not made greater advances within the profession. Several foundations have expressed a willingness to consider support for the project and a number of good people have expressed interest in conducting the work. We would, of course, welcome any Executive Committee interest in extending such efforts to study the career patterns of economists more generally.

CSWEP has given attention to a number of other issues this year with various members of the board taking the lead responsibility. These activities have included consideration of a student prize in economics as a means of recognizing and encouraging young women to pursue further work in the field (Michelle White), compiling an on-line bibliography of women economists' publications (Mary Fish), arranging for a workshop on

the NSF economics grants program at the December meetings (Sharon Megdal), updating our information packet for those considering careers in economics (Sawhill), monitoring an ongoing project investigating gender bias in economics texts (Beneria), and investigating the extent to which women are appropriately represented on the editorial boards of various journals (Reimers). All of this is in addition to our usual activities of sponsoring sessions and get-togethers at the AEA and regional meetings. Particular thanks go to our regional chairs: Cordelia

Reimers (CSWEP-Northeast), Sharon Megdal (CSWEP-West), Mary Fish (CSWEP-South), and Michelle White (CSWEP-Midwest).

Four CSWEP members' terms expire this year: Barbara Bergmann (past chair), Aleta Styers (past editor of the *Newsletter*), Cordelia Reimers, and Joseph Pechman. All have contributed substantially to CSWEP's work. They will be replaced by Beth Allen, Nancy Gordon, and Katharine Lyall.

ISABEL V. SAWHILL *Chair*