

Women Activists of the Seventies: Multiple Routes to Affirmative Action

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At the end of the sixties, women on the faculty were a vanishing species.

The peak had been reached in 1938 with 9.3 percent on the Senate faculty. By 1969 the number of women had dropped to 3.5 percent and was dropping annually.

Endangered Species: Berkeley Female Professors,

Position	1933	1969	1970	1971
Tenured	4.8%	3.1%	3.2%	2.9%

Then we decided to try to do something about it.

First let me set the stage.

The fifties and sixties were eras of a lot of civil rights actions. Many of us had participated in petitions, marches, and sit-ins. In fact many of us had been politically active all our lives. So we believed in remedying problems.

President Johnson had signed the Executive Orders.

The Civil Rights acts of the sixties for the first time established a legal basis for acting against sex discrimination.

In the late sixties we became aware of our low numbers. Elizabeth Scott, a distinguished statistician, compiled a table that showed the decline from 9 percent to 3 percent, as women retired without replacement. The GI bill, which brought men into academia from a wide variety of backgrounds in the fifties, exaggerated the decline in the percentage of women.

Scott's statistics sounded the alarm.

We met together and formed the **Women's Faculty Group**.

Sixty percent of the publishing female scholars on campus were lecturers and researchers, so they were in the group along with ladder faculty and a few high level administrative staff members.

It did not include all faculty, for not all faculty cared about these issues, just as now.

Later the group was renamed the Association of Academic Women.

The actions of this group I will call the **inside route**.

They worked through Senate committees, through departments, and through consultation with the administration.

Many women felt more radical actions were necessary. The **League of Academic Women** was formed of this subset of the WFG, along with staff and students. There were two tactics which subsequently were undertaken by members of this group which can be called the **government route** and the **legal route**.

One tactic was to file a **civil rights complaint** under the Civil Rights Act. The other was to go to court and file a **class action discrimination suit** under federal and state anti-discrimination laws. All the three approaches were used concurrently. It is my belief that the pressures from the radical tactics contributed significantly to changes that occurred in the Senate and administrative channels. The evidence for this belief is that discussions regularly occurred in the Senate about what was happening on the other fronts.

Now I will outline briefly the history and outcomes of these three tactics.

The first move was taken by the Policy Committee of the Academic Senate. In 1969 the Policy Committee set up a **subcommittee to report on the Status of Women on the Berkeley campus**. The charge was broad, essentially to deal with academic women, including students and faculty. The committee was chaired by Elizabeth Colson of Anthropology and Elizabeth Scott of Statistics, members were Susan Ervin-Tripp of Speech, Herbert Blumer of Sociology, and Frank Newman of Law.

Professor	26.2%	3.8%	17.9%	3.8%	10.6%	0.0%	13.4%	5.3%	4.3%	0.4%
Assoc.Prof.	18.1	9.9	14.0	5.3	14.5	9.1	9.3	12.7	2.9	0.0
Asst. Prof.	20.7	14.0	16.0	8.5	18.4	14.3	12.4	8.9	3.3	1.8

One of the striking features of this table is the backlog of underemployed women it revealed in the age cohort of Professors.

Now I will move to the government route, or **bringing in the feds.**

The League of Academic Women believed that the slow processes of nudging departments would not bring fast enough change, and that additional pressure was needed.

Therefore we filed a civil rights complaint with the Office of Civil Rights of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare in 1970. The department was run by Casper Weinberger at that time, under Nixon, and it was charged with administering the act as it applied to educational institutions. Under the act, any contracting institution could have its federal contracts suspended as punishment for discrimination. In the spring of 1971 the Contract Compliance Office of HEW came on campus. It met considerable resistance because it demanded access to personnel files. By late 1973 there was a threat of delaying new contracts if there was not more cooperation.

The names of those filing this action must have been known to the administration, since I was called to a Policy Committee meeting by Martin Trow, its chair, and scolded for signing. I told him that in the middle ages peasants treated badly by the nobles complained to the king.

The federal investigators came on campus. As a result of their presence, or the threat of it, a preliminary affirmative action program was set up in spring of 1971 for non-academic positions, involving timetables. An affirmative action coordinator was appointed the following spring, and a system of monitoring was put in place. Eventually, when it was extended to academic departments, this analysis provided each department with information about the availability pool in different age cohorts of PhDs in each field. The idea was to have some rough approximation of what a department might expect if they did a good job of searching. The table you see on the screen is typical.

Probably the most important change was the requirement of open advertising of positions for the first time. By fall 1972, 24 % of new Senate appointments were of women.

You must remember that in 1970 there was NO public advertising of positions, and it was considered inappropriate to apply for a job. A job was like an arranged marriage. The chair might call a department in a leading institution and ask if they had some good young men in a particular field coming along. One of my colleagues told me he was hired that way even before he had begun his dissertation. Because of this practice, it was unlikely to hire from another department or from a lecturer position.

Since the agreement also covered minorities, the whole apparatus of classifying individuals by ethnicity was put in place. We began monitoring progress in hiring, admissions and degrees at this time. The final program was signed in spring of 1974. This program has had an effect.

Changes in the Percentage of Women on the Senate Faculty

	1933	1970	1972	1994
Professors	2.0%	2%	3%	14%
Assoc. Prof.	10	6	6	33
Asst. Prof.	15	4	9	38
Tenured	5	3	3	18
Total	7	4	5	21

The percentages have still not stabilized across ranks, an indication that changes are still in progress as we move towards bring more women through graduate schools, and more graduates into jobs.

The third route was to the courts. A **class action suit** was brought in early 1972 by the League of Academic Women and 12 named women. Among them were two accomplished scholars who were lecturers on annual appointments and had never been considered for ladder faculty jobs. There were graduate students and a staff member also in this suit.

The law suit was a tough route for these women. In addition to being maligned in court, just as rape victims can be, they can see their jobs vanish. Women who file suits often lose their professional careers or their health, and their families suffer. The women in this suit filed a class action in the hope of helping all women, not just themselves. They took great risks, and they lost. At that time in California, judges regarded the university as insulated against such assaults. It was only since a recent Supreme Court decision that files have been opened to permit the comparative evaluation of particular persons necessary to winning a discrimination suit. On this campus, such discrimination suits have led to out of court victories in the Law School and in the Math department. There are still many extant suits on discrimination against the university.

In addition to these organized actions, there were many individual contributions by men and women who changed fellowship and grant policies, reported administrative actions, leaked administrative documents needed in finding out what was going on, and in other unrecognized ways aided social change for women.

Tomorrow, I believe that we should honor these unknown soldiers, and thank the women who took risks. Those of us who were tenured on the faculty took no risks at all. We put in time but we enjoyed the process. Sometimes our beliefs that our own actions caused the change may of course be illusion. The women who got no pleasure from this era were the ones who took risks and lost. They are the ones we need to honor for their contribution to progress.

There were two aspects of this period that gave me particular pleasure. One was the network of cooperation of women in many sectors of the university. For example, I was on a Senate committee in 1971 set up to investigate a dorm worker's strike, which uncovered a lot of sex discrimination in the custodial workers' categories. We had contacts throughout the system with the staff unions and other groups, and we helped each other.

The other pleasure was work with minority organizations. It was not an accident that the Senate Committee changed its name to the Status of Women and Ethnic Minorities. It was a decision not to let anyone divide and conquer, not to dispute over the few positions. I think that was wise. Representatives of all these groups met regularly to coordinate plans.

These collaborations are fundamental. We have not yet achieved equity in all sectors of university life, and as long as that is true, we have to revive the power of mutual help and joint tactics.

Now, when there is a brief hiring window for VERIP replacements, it is very important to maintain the affirmative action program. This not the time to destroy the achievements we worked so hard for in opening up the university to talent.

How can we tell when the job is done? When the Academic Senate and the top administrators look similar to a sixth grade class, we can know we have arrived.