WOMEN IN SCIENCE

Princeton Study Strikes Sad But Familiar Chord

Women scientists at Princeton University are far more dissatisfied with their jobs than men are, and nearly a quarter complain about inappropriate behavior by colleagues. Those findings are part of a new report by an 11-member faculty panel that parallels a groundbreaking 1999 study at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) (Science, 12 November 1999, p. 1272) and provides more evidence of the academic barriers facing women scientists and engineers.

Released this week, the Princeton study was commissioned 2 years ago by molecular biologist Shirley Tilghman shortly after she became president. Although Tilghman agreed with the report’s suggestion to name a special assistant for gender-equity issues, she is balking at a proposal for $10 million to promote hiring and retention of women scientists and engineers because of budget constraints and concerns about its legality, according to university officials.

The panel, led by molecular biologist Virginia Zakian, found both good and bad news in its examination of 14 departments of natural sciences and engineering. On the one hand, the percentage of tenure women has more than doubled in the past decade to 13%, and it tops 20% in two departments—ecology and evolutionary biology, and psychology. But progress has been wildly uneven, the report states, and “the overall percentages of women continue to be quite low.” How low is demonstrated by the fact that Tilghman’s rise to the presidency—one of the most thorough analyses to date”—on the topic. She added that she “intends to make resources available to meet the recommendations of the task force,” adding that no final decision has been made on the $10 million fund. But last month a Senate spending panel zeroed out the White House’s entire $8.3 million request for the center, which monitors the sun to warn satellite and electric-grid operators of potentially dangerous flares and other space weather. It follows a vote by the House of Representatives to cut the agency’s request by one-third. The two bodies will decide on a final number later this fall.

And the News Isn’t Good

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—ANDREW LAWLER AND DAVID MALAKOFF

BU, Galveston Win Big in Biosafety Building Boom

The last prizes have been claimed in the race to get in on the biodefense research building boom sponsored by the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. Winning the two biggest construction grants—a whopping $120 million each—are Boston University and the University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston, Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson announced this week. The money will build national biosafety laboratories as secure as biosafety level 4, which can contain the most dangerous pathogens. The labs will be used to study bugs that could be used as weapons and to design vaccines and treatments.

In addition, nine institutions will receive grants of $7 million to $21 million to build regional labs at biosafety level 2 and 3—including Duke University and the University of Chicago, which are also among eight new regional biodefense research centers that were announced last month (Science, 12 September, p. 1450). Galveston also won one of those awards, making it the top winner in the biodefense sweepstakes.

—JOCELYN KAISER