

Dr. Tapp discusses recent national conference of women administrators

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"Several of us agreed that what every female administrator needs is a wife," smiled June Tapp, provost of Revelle College at the University of California, San Diego, as she discussed a recent national conference of women administrators in higher education.

Provost Tapp, who assumed her position as head of Revelle just over one year ago, was one of 20 women selected from more than 250 applicants to attend the First National Identification Forum sponsored by the American Council on Education (ACE) in Racine, Wisconsin, September 29-30.

The women met to discuss a range of topics concerning the role of the female administrator in higher education. Their concerns ran the gamut from the traditional problems such as the hunt for more research funds and the future of "steady-state" to the challenge of being accepted as a woman in an administrative position.

"If you're a female provost or a female president, someone's much more likely to ask you about the floral arrangements or the menu at an educational event," said Tapp. "On the other hand, you may be much more likely to want to know, but at some point you, too, learn to say, 'I can't worry about that.'"

Another potential problem, according to Tapp, is that "most secretaries and support staff personnel have been 'socialized' or trained by males. As a result, some women secretaries may have mixed feelings about a 'powerful' woman or about doing things for the female boss.

"They may expect her, because of expanding meanings of assertiveness and a confusion between role and structure, to do more of her own things. This is not always the case, but female administrators, like female professors, may 'suffer' this problem more.

"One of the male participants at the conference suggested that females should use their sex to get ahead or solve office problems, which shook the group for a while. Then he went on to say he used his sex, which shook the group further. What he explained was that since we do interact as males and females, maybe we should accept that and enjoy it. That, too, brought a mixed reaction from the participants, male and female.

"That conferee also wanted to know why we weren't spending more time talking about women's problems as administrators. The reaction was that that was just a small part of our concern as academic administrators," Tapp continued.

"The more demanding concern is what do you do that's going to be innovative in a day of constricting resources. Increasingly, the job of the college leader is one of moral suasion and persuasion, trying to encourage faculty to undertake more curricular and program reorganization at a time of limited funds.

"One major task of a college administrator is to consider With the faculty how to build intellectually sound programs. I think a college administrator has to be a catalyst, to raise questions, to suggest curricular and extra-curricular programs that make sense in terms of the academic needs of the faculty and the students.

Some women at the conference felt their role as administrators was to provide intellectual leadership, while others thought their job was to manage existing programs," Tapp said. One must have management skills, and, for example, know the problems in budget allocations, but the real job of a university administrator is to 'administer' in the best sense of that word, and not merely to 'manage.'

Educational leadership should be more than system-maintenance. It is responding to and extending the academic and educational models and not swallowing uncritically the business and corporate models," she said.

Another task of the conference was to look for ways to increase the visibility of women administrators. It was aimed at bolstering their opportunity to consider top-level positions in academia and government.

"As a result, there was much discussion of the effect of job networks and a plan developed to set up a sort of network for females, similar to the presently existing 'old boy' network. It would aim toward assisting in the hiring of competent women in academic and governmental circles," Tapp said.

She feels such a network could be extremely valuable in helping well qualified women find positions. Coincidentally, it could also be useful to leaders in higher education in their search for qualified applicants to fill vacant positions.

The most compelling topic of the conference for Tapp, however, was the attention paid to defining and developing intellectual leadership and academic excellence at both student and professorial levels. She recalled that the persons remembered as educational leaders were those who molded ideas and institutions, not merely managed or maintained them.

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