Advancement of Women in the NCCR Democracy

As recent reports show, the advancement of women is still an important challenge for universities (e.g. Ulmi/Maurer 2005; SBF 2007). The Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF), Switzerland’s leading provider of scientific research funding, is fully committed to gender equality. In addition to its contributions to the Equal Opportunities Commission, it also suggests its own measures. Among others, it aims to counter the under-representation of women scientists among the beneficiaries of the funding programs by applying specifically targeted measures such as the establishment of women support groups. In this vein, the training and the promotion of women researchers is also one important feature of the National Center of Competence in Research (NCCR): Challenges to Democracy in the 21st Century. The NCCR Democracy makes a strong effort to help its members meet the challenges of the demanding and highly competitive academic world. For instance, it offers the doctoral students the possibility of acquiring various types of skills vital to building up successful careers. Further, with the funding of the peer group stepping stone for female doctoral students and post-docs, it helps to foster the advancement of women.

As Wirth et al. (2005) could show the period of writing a dissertation is particularly crucial to women’s decision to stay in academia. It has been pointed out that female researchers are more likely to quit their academic careers after having finished their doctoral studies than men (see the graph below), mainly because they find it difficult to combine a future academic career with having children.
As the graph demonstrates, figures of Swiss universities show a vertical segregation, i.e. the higher the hierarchical qualification level is, the less women are represented. Though there are 50% females at the beginning and graduation of university studies, among the doctorate this percentage drops down to less than 40% and with the qualification as a university lecturer it decreases even further to nearly 10% (see Ulmi/Maurer 2005, based on the BFS indicators for universities).

Though a recent study on determinants for calling in the (German) political science did not prove a systematic discrimination of women in general, it has identified several problems that help explain the above-shown vertical segregation. Despite the fact that there seems to be a ‘mother bonus’ – in particular the decreasing time amount between qualification as a lecturer and first professorship – the probability of becoming professor is lower for mothers, primarily due to the lack of significant publications (see Plümper/Schimmelfennig 2006).

---

1 http://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/de/index/themen/bildung_und_wissenschaft.html

© National Center of Competence in Research: Challenges to Democracy in the 21st Century
In its report on the first site visit of the NCCR Democracy the review panel once again emphasized the importance of education, training and advancement of women. Pleased to see a strong female PhD representation in the project sessions, the panel mentioned the challenge for the NCCR Democracy to advance women also on the senior level. In this respect, the NCCR reflects the general trend: whereas women are highly represented among the doctoral students, only four out of 32 professors (=12.5%) and again four out of 16 post-docs are female (=25%). Against this background, we would welcome female members to be entrusted with particular responsibilities. For instance, out of seven professors on the board of directors only one is female. Further, at this year’s general assembly no female NCCR member was on the program. For this reason, we gratefully acknowledge the establishment of a doctoral school and a mentoring program – and are convinced that the NCCR Democracy will continue to further invest in the advancement of women.

NCCR Peer Mentoring Group ‘Stepping Stone’
Tina Freyburg and Iris Giovanelli
Zurich 2007

http://www.sbf.admin.ch/htm/services/publikationen/sbf/Chancengleichheit-de.pdf