

Cornelia WOLL

International Symposium on « Education and Gender Equality »

Boston, 20-21 October 2017

Distinguished speakers,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Colleagues and friends,

My name is Cornelia Woll, I am Vice-President for Studies and Academic Affairs of Sciences Po, and I am both honored and proud to see this room full of experts, scholars and activists who have dedicated their lives (or a portion of it) to understanding and moving forward on gender equality, in education and through education. What a great chance for Sciences Po to join forces with Wellesley College in organizing this event, at the initiative of Valéry Freland, Consul général de France in Boston, who has been the motor behind this endeavor with relentless energy for over two years.

At Sciences Po, the organisation was in the hands of a small team of dedicated women and men in our Program for Research and Study on Gender (PRESAGE) and I would like to thank Hélène Périvier, Charlène Lavoisier and Anne Boring, who are with us today for all of their work. Together with our gender

equality office, PRESAGE has been crucial in moving Sciences Po as an institution to the forefront of gender studies and institutional change in our university to increase chances for women. In addition, the personal effort and conviction of our University President, Frédéric Mion, got him to be elected in 2015 as one of the ten university champions world-wide, supporting women through the UN Women « He for She » Campaign.

Our student body now counts 60% of women, up from none in 1919, when the university opened its doors to the first female students. In fact, Sciences Po is known in France for its highly competitive entry exam, but few people know that it was developed in these early days and applied only to women! Yes, our entry exam was in fact a screening mechanism to make sure only the most deserving women would find their place in a male dominated elite training program in the social sciences.

Although there is much to be said about the student body, please allow me to focus on the other side – professors – to tell you some of the insights we have gained over the past years and how this has led us to change our functioning, sometimes opening new questions that we still need to find the right answers to.

Let me begin with a simple finding much research has confirmed: female professors matter! They make a difference for the way students project themselves into careers. In a study of the subfields in economics, Pablo Zamith, one of our PhD students found that women predominantly chose “issue areas” such as health, labor or development economics, and they are less often interested in econometrics or theoretical modeling. If you were Larry Summers, you might think this has something to do with math. This was indeed the initial research intuition of this dissertation work, but in fact, the data revealed that there was a very strong concentration of women in financial economics in two French universities. It turned out that the most likely explanation for this observation was the presence of two female professors who had taught the introductory courses to the field!

So clearly, this is another reason to fight for gender equality in academic positions, but how do you do this? Another study published at Sciences Po examined the national competition for full professorship (“l’agrégation”) and found that women applied much less often than men, given comparable academic track records. The authors conclude that women “hold back” and censor themselves, but it is just as likely that they are less willing to pay the costs this promotion – it requires mobility to another university in France – or that they are less well networked and do not realize that their application is mature

enough to pass. To increase gender equality in universities, the French government requires a gender balanced selection committee, but research is still out on whether female committee members actually increase the likelihood of a female candidate to be hired. In some studies, the effect seems to go into the opposite direction: depending on their age, women can be harsher on female candidates than on male ones! In addition, the committee requirement is very time consuming for senior female professors, who are more often called upon than their more numerous male colleagues (who are very happy to spend that time of more valuable research).

In addition, Anne Boring has shown that metrics commonly used to evaluate performance may also be biased. In studying teaching evaluations at Sciences Po, she found that everything else being equal, male professors get better grades from their students than female ones.

All of this indicates that job market competition is not leveled, and we need to be attentive to correct both pre-market conditions and the way we evaluate careers. Young female scholars need to be accompanied and advised by senior colleagues and both male and female professors should have the opportunity to discuss work-life balance and career opportunities from early on. My causal observation from Germany is that the most powerful mechanism for change is not

an adaptation in female career decisions, but rather the increase in men participating in family issues, for instance through parental leaves in academic careers.

At Sciences Po, we now also try to “discount” teaching evaluation results for female professors now that we know Anne Boring’s results. We still have a far way to go to have the 40% of female faculty we set out to achieve, but we closely monitor all job searches and appointments to improve little by little.

I am very interested to hear about your experience and research, since I know that all of these questions are already on your mind and will be discussed in detail in the next two days.

Let me close with a word of thanks to our partners, who made this event possible through their generous support : the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Sanofi Genzyme, CCE, Campus France and the French Embassy in Washington. I am sure we will have stimulating discussions, and I wish us all to use your many insights to increase opportunities for women in all aspects of education and ...life.

Thank you !