

Date:2022/07/05

External Evaluation Report for the Program "Initiative for Realizing Diversity in the Research Environment (Advanced type)" for the FYs 2020–2021

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This document reports the results of an external evaluation of the FYs 2020–2021 project results based on the separate “Report on the Results of the Program "Initiative for Realizing Diversity in the Research Environment" (Advanced type) for the FYs 2020–2021.”

1) Achieve a recruitment rate of 30% or more for women researchers

Remarks: As I understand from reviewing both the Report for FY 2018 and 2019 along with the Report for FY 2020-2021 many structural measures have been undertaken to help reach the 30% goal for recruitment of women researchers. This goal is both laudable and substantial. No one could reasonably suggest that the goal is either unserious or insignificant. But the boldness of the goal, given the current landscape and numbers, will require the university to address both structural and systemic barriers toward realizing the goal. The structural landscape is of course crucial, but equally important is a broad cultural commitment to achieving this goal. I would encourage the ongoing efforts around broader dissemination of the goal University-wide, in addition to signaling that across university leadership, this goal is understood and supported. This broad observation cuts across all areas of my evaluation. While I will not presume to understand the full range of cultural resistance or possible objections to the goal of realizing diversity in the research environment, what I can observe across many male-dominated cultures is an entrenched patriarchy and resistance to equally valuing the contributions, talent, and intelligence of women. As Kobe University makes gains in removing or addressing structural impediments to your diversity goals, it will be necessary in an ongoing and fully visible way to make plain that this initiative has the full support and commitment of university leadership.

2) Improve the percentage of women holding higher ranking positions

Remarks: It seems clear that perhaps more than other areas, the COVID pandemic impacted this goal. If indeed COVID and its many variants is receding, this is a goal for which I would encourage vigorous attention. The university has existing faculty from which to draw to achieve this goal which in some ways may make it easier over time to hit the mark of 20%, (but of course the pool is smaller). This goal, as with number 1, will be impacted by the perception around meaningful and intentional commitment. While some of the activities toward achieving diversity goals included staff interviews, it was unclear to me whether this was such an area. If not, I would encourage interviews with current women on staff to identify, what, in their view might impede promotions. It is also unclear from the reports if in fact the university was able to identify any factors which may be contributing to the failure to meet targets for the number of women associate professors. Knowing what those factors might be, either structural or cultural, will be essential in making progress in this area.

3) Increase the base of next-generation young researchers

Remarks: It was gratifying to see this as an articulated goal. At some point, even the most vigorous efforts to realizing greater diversity and leadership from women will fall flat without a pipeline of new and younger leaders to both fill roles and push the university for greater efforts. Again, in this area, I would respectfully suggest that the highest levels of university leadership make obvious this commitment. Seeding your efforts with girls coming up through junior and high school will not only create a pipeline, loyalty to the university and a greater pool of new leaders, but it will also inevitably have a boldening effect on your efforts. A younger generation will likely be more insistent on change and less patient with the status quo. This infusion of young leadership will hasten the cultural shifts that must occur for the university's important initiative and goals to be realized.

4) Enhance the diversity environment and expand it beyond the university

Remarks: This strikes me as an area rich for growth and impact. The report acknowledges that there have been inconsistent efforts in elevating the university's diversity efforts. The failure to fully exploit the many tools to make very clear the commitment to realizing gender diversity at the university can and must be corrected, as the report notes. The good news here, is that this is an area very much within the control of university leadership so that a course correction can occur, and this area of weakness addressed. As noted earlier, real and perceived cultural barriers, resistance, or even laggard response or engagement all can combine to signal that this very important initiative doesn't have the full heart, mind and soul of university leadership. While it may sound trite, it is in fact the case that meaningful cultural shifts begin at the top. How leadership shows up, responds, engages and speaks is often the clearest indication of whether a shift in culture is possible and the necessary shift in attitudes, required.

5) Verification of the results and evaluation of the Overseas Dispatch Program for Women Researchers

Remarks: It's difficult to fully evaluate this area on the information provided, so these observations may be inapposite, but having a separate program for men v. women could and perhaps does invite inequality. Whatever the programs here, they should be on equal footing both in perception and reality. The planned surveys could yield very useful information in this regard. Once that information is received, I would encourage prompt and serious action to correct both real and perceived inequities or relative valuing of the two programs in the eyes of the participants and the university.

6) Issues to be addressed with respect to this project (Please add comments regarding "Report on the Status and the Results of the Actions Taken in Response to the Findings of the FY 2018 and FY 2019 External Evaluations" here)

Remarks: It is clear to me that Kobe University authentically wishes to realize greater diversity

in the research environment. That is both an honorable goal. The initiative is both serious and substantial. I do observe several impediments toward achieving both the goals and the impact of the initiative for the university many of which I've raised above. I offer here a few additional thoughts:

While the creation and existence of a Gender Equality Office is critical, there must be a clear understanding that this work has the full support of university leadership from President FUJISAWA Masato and running through the entirety of university leadership. It is a strong signal that the Director of the Gender Equality Office reports to the President. But I would respectfully suggest that university leadership work to create a climate where it is understood that the entirety of the university is responsible to the success (or challenges) of the Realizing Gender Diversity Initiative. For example, I could not find where the Gender Equality Office lives on the Kobe University website. Nor is there any mention of the initiative in the letter from the President. It may be that there are barriers or implications I do not understand, but approaching it from a potential woman researcher you wish to recruit, to have no mention of the office or the initiative could suppress potential women from applying. This will be especially true over the coming 10-years in my view. My general point here is that while the existence of the Gender Equality Office is an essential part of the success of the initiative, the office is a part of a larger ecosystem. This understanding and the cultural shifts it entails will be required for the effort to meet your ambitious goals.

Do not underestimate the power of story or narrative. In multiple places in the 2018-2019 Report, it was noted that a survey would be undertaken to gather more information. I strongly encourage the use of survey instruments at multiple points in the life of the initiative. Perhaps one soon to get a baseline "climate survey". What is life like now at the university for women professors or researchers? Forgive me if this has already been done, but even so, to renew it every 2 years or so could be a powerful additional data point for your efforts. Additionally, elevating the voices of women staff through your newsletter or other vehicles could have an impact beyond just the one article or story.

I submit these evaluation comments with great humility and gratitude. If you wish more information or any clarification, please do not hesitate to let me know. It is my honor to be a part of this critical effort.