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University Women's Professional Network Examines Its Reach And Effectiveness

Realizing a need to "step back and adjust the goals and focus," the University Women's Professional Network (UWPN) on March 27 reaffirmed its purpose of linking women across campus, and addressed ways to make the linkage more productive.

The lunchtime meeting in Memorial Hall was led by Karen Jacobus, UWPN chairwoman and University Health Services health educator.

Valerie Falk of Alumni Relations, and a UWPN steering committee member, noted that it is "especially important to address the problems women on campus are facing during these tough economic times."

UWPN members who possess skills such as resume writing or desktop publishing should be networking with other women on campus, said Jacobus. The possibility of bartering skills was also discussed. One idea is to trade childcare for carpentry service.

Jacobus pointed out a number of issues which the steering committee deems worthy of further discussion to help shape the future of UWPN. These include meeting attendance, networking, possible change in the name of the organization, dues, and meeting time and location accessibility.

Removing the word "professional" from the name of the organization was brought up by women who feel it intimidates those who do not fall under the University definition of professional staff.

Falk said, "Like our flyer says: 'Every woman who works at this institution is a professional.'"

Others urged UWPN to keep dues and luncheon costs low, so all women can attend. The informal atmosphere of meetings was praised, but Falk noted that in these times when most University employees feel they are doing the work of two people, it is important to make meetings as productive as possible.

Some women said they want to attend UWPN meetings but cannot always afford more than a 30-minute lunch break.

Jacobus and Falk suggested that since University employees have not received cost-of-living raises in three years, allowing employees to attend meetings is a way to give "extras" and keep staff morale high.

Fran Deats of the Employee Assistance Program said UWPN may want to improve the productivity of the meetings. "If I was a supervisor in these tough times, I would think twice about letting three or four of my people leave for 90 minutes. It's a justifiable concern."

Future meetings may focus on such issues as childcare and job advancement. "We should try and address two or three different issues at meetings, because not all issues will effect all women," said Jacobus.

Members also said new employees should be informed of UWPN.

Falk noted that UWPN would continue to provide "support, confidence, and power to the women on campus." She added, "By channelling our efforts we can make the campus a better place for all women." -- EU