Gendered Standards: Achieving Gender Equity at Harvard Business School

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Abstract: Harvard Business School (HBS), one of the top business schools in the world and the standard bearer for American business, has a gender problem. Female students, often having graduated from elite institutions at the top of their class, were falling behind in the classroom and receiving less awards and honors than their male counterparts. Furthermore, HBS was struggling to retain highly qualified female faculty members who were not put on tenure track positions nearly as often as their male colleagues. Female faculty members often left HBS having faced harassment and harsh judgment from their students while they were there. Under Drew Gilpin Faust, Harvard's first female President, and a new dean at the business school, Nitin Nohria, HBS set out to understand the causes of this gender disparity. In 2011, HBS worked to restructure their program by evaluating their grading policy, investing in stenographers and upgrading their curriculum. However, the school could not have anticipated the effect that the student's social culture had on their performance in the classroom. Faculty had to decide when and where social intervention was appropriate in their curriculum, and whether or not this type of education would benefit them in the real business world.

Introduction

In the fall of 2011, a classroom full of brilliant and accomplished young women, first year MBA students at the Harvard Business School (HBS), sat dumbfounded as they listened to a second-year student teach them how to raise their hands in class. One student, Brooke Boyarsky (HBS '13) recalled the instruction to sit tall at the edge of her seat, and when she had an idea, to assertively shoot her hand into the air, as to catch the attention of her professor. Many of these students had graduated at the top of their class from Ivy League institutions and had worked for a plethora of high profile companies all over the world before coming to HBS. For that reason, these lessons in class participation felt demeaning, and these seminars failed to address the root of the problem that HBS's faculty has noticed. The problem was that female students entered HBS with the same credentials as their male counterparts, and yet, these students fell behind in class participation and men repeatedly received the school's highest honors.

The Class of 2013 entered at a moment in HBS history when the program administration recognized the need for greater attention to gender issues within the school. They had found that female students were falling behind their male peers year after year, and concluded that they would need to intervene in student affairs in order to promote a better learning and social environment

for women. The students of the 2013 class became guinea pigs in Harvard Business School's experiment to improve gender relations, which included instituting measures to reduce gender bias in the classroom, creating programming aimed at giving women tools for success, changing the school's curriculum, and even engaging in the student's social lives.

On the morning of September 7, 2013, *The New York Times* published a front-page article titled "Harvard Business School Case Study: Gender Equity." Jody Kantor, author of this scathing piece, is no stranger to controversial and thought-provoking journalism. Kantor, "specializes in long-form, deeply reported stories," and she works to effect change through her writing, especially with regards to women's issues (The New York Times 2017). Her work has resulted in policy changes at mega corporations such as Starbucks and Amazon and inspired the creation of lactation suites for nursing mothers (The New York Times 2017). Her piece about the Harvard Business School garnered widespread attention, and the article promptly generated discussions about gender equity in higher education nationwide.

Under the leadership of Drew Gilpin Faust, Harvard University's first female president, Nitin Nohria "pledged to remake gender relations" as the new dean of HBS (Kantor 2013). With the help of Professor Frances Frei, senior associate dean for faculty planning and recruitment, the two orchestrated a remodeling of the academic and social culture of Harvard's historic and prestigious business school. The school that champions the case method of teaching, a method entrenched in the value of class participation and active engagement, was now conducting a case study of their own, concerned with that very act of participation. Why were these overly qualified women not jumping at the opportunity to impress in the classroom?

The subject of study would be the incoming HBS Class of 2013, for "year after year, women who had arrived with the same test scores and grades as men fell behind" (Kantor 2013). The HBS administration instituted measures to make the classroom a more gender equal learning space. Furthermore, upon realizing that how students perceived each other outside of the classroom affected how they interacted in the classroom, the administration opened up conversations about student's problematic relationships, broaching topics such as sexual harassment and exclusive men's clubs. One researcher, whose focus is on the out-of-class experience of undergraduate women, states "The prevalence of pressure on women students to pursue heterosexual romantic relationships, to go along with and participate in sexual harassment for fun, and to engage in excessive alcohol consumption paints a picture of an out-of-class experience that undermines their success" (Allen 2008, 135). The administration argued that not only are these aspects of student's social lives problems themselves, they can directly affect student's coursework, whether they realize it or not. Students tend to separate their academic and social lives, therefore the HBS administration sought to show them that the two are inherently linked.

The Business School's Burden

Because the case method of study is central at HBS, where class participation constituted upwards of fifty percent of students' grades, the lack of women's participation in class was of grave concern. Harvard's Business School is a "standard-bearer for American business," obligated to set an example for business schools around the country, as well as for the companies which hire their students after matriculation. That sense of duty led HBS to focus on "how women speak in group settings, the link between romantic relationships and professional status, and the use of everyday measurement tools to reduce bias" (Kantor 2013). To make these observations and adjustments within the school itself is one task, but the looming problem was that "the more exquisitely gender-sensitive the school environment became, the less resemblance it bore to the

real business world" (Kantor 2013). The MBA program at HBS is only a two-year venture. With such a small amount of time, HBS set out to challenge decades old gender biases and norms with no guarantee that their changes would have an effect. Even if HBS is able to achieve some sort of gender equality within their institution, there was also no guarantee that students were going to be able to function outside of a gender equal utopia once they leave HBS. Would these students leave HBS with a better understanding of the effects of gender in education and the workplace, or would they leave feeling like they wasted their money on a failed social experiment?

History of Women at Harvard Business School

The gender relations overhaul that occurred in 2011 came at a very important time, marking the 50th anniversary of the integration of women into HBS. The Harvard Business School opened in 1908, but it was not until 1962 that the administration decided to allow women to enroll in the business school's MBA program. The initiative to integrate women began in 1937, with a one-year certificate program for women at Harvard's coordinate school, Radcliffe College. The course was aimed at giving women a "practical education" that would enable women to enter into jobs in human resources (Banta 2013). Their education was a product of the times, and understandably very different from the curriculum of HBS today. Women went to business school so that they could study to do personnel work, which as one course catalog described was, "a careful and analytical study of the motivation which underlies behavior" (Banta 2013). Personnel work required that the women study subjects such as economics, sociology, government, and education psychology.

The program expanded during World War II, focusing on jobs that were necessary during wartime, especially personnel workers. Post World War II, it received another upgrade, and it was renamed the Management Training Program, with a broader curriculum that included human relations and education on production. Even in its early stages, students were mainly learning via the case method system, where they had the opportunity to analyze and discuss real world problems, a novelty for women at the time. Unfortunately, enrollment in that program dropped drastically in the early 1950s, leading Radcliffe College to contemplate the idea of shutting the program down altogether. In 1954, HBS decided to assist Radcliffe College with some of the costs, which included assuming full educational responsibilities. Radcliffe continued to provide classroom space and housing to the women. This change resulted in a huge enrollment increase. While the program, which drew in students from around the world, remained separate, HBS faculty taught most of the classes offered at Radcliffe. This undertaking from HBS was the beginning of the full transition of women into the MBA program. In 1955, the Radcliffe training program became the Harvard-Radcliffe Program in Business Administration (HRPBA). At this point, the curriculum between this new program and the Harvard Business School MBA were very similar, and now included courses in marketing, accounting and statistics, finance, and a required written analysis of cases.

By 1959, graduates of the Harvard-Radcliffe Program in Business Administration could apply for the second year of the Harvard Business School MBA program, and in 1962, women could directly enroll in the MBA program as first year students. The women who had been students in HRPBA soon saw drastic changes coming their way after they joined HBS. For many of the women at Radcliffe, joining "HBS was a real culture shock. Some faculty were opposed to having women in the classroom, so were some students" (Banta 2013). By 1963, when the Harvard-Radcliffe Program in Business Administration officially ended, there was a total of 1,200 alumnae. Betty Diener, a member of the HRPBA class of '63, recalled that the year she spent in HRPBA

gave her and her classmates a "voice" (Grant 2000). She reflected in an interview with Livingston Grant (2000) that had their business education started in an environment where men significantly outnumbered women, "[they] never would have spoken up, [they] never would have been recognized for [their] ideas, [they] never would have gained that sort of self-confidence." Many of the women who joined HRPBA noted that without the Radcliffe program, they never would have been able to catch on to the language of business, and it was their proficiency in the subject that contributed to their success when they joined HBS.

Gender Relations at Harvard Business School in 2009

Harvard, like many elite institutions of higher education faces a glaring gender problem. Female students compose upwards of 40% of the student body, but men receive the majority of academic awards and recognition. This problem plagues not only the student body, but the faculty as well, as shown in 2006 and 2007, when a third of female junior faculty members left their positions at the school (Kantor 2013). Untenured female faculty members left HBS for many reasons, including "uncertainty over maternity leave, the lack of opportunities to write papers with senior professors, and students who destroyed their confidence by pelting them with math questions they could not answer on the spot or commenting on what they wore" (Kantor 2013). While the student body boasts a record number of female students, the available female professors, and furthermore, female professors up for tenure, were few. In 2009, the faculty was comprised of only 19 tenured female professors compared to the 76 tenured male professors. While less than a third of the untenured faculty was female, more than 120 untenured male professors were on their way to gaining tenure (Kantor 2013). One professor noted, "As a female faculty member, you are in an incredibly hostile teaching environment, and [the administration does] nothing to protect you" (Kantor 2013). Many female faculty members face undue burden simply for being one of the few women, if not the only woman, in their field. Based on a study conducted by the Office for Faculty Development & Diversity at Harvard, 43% of women disagreed that the climate for female faculty was at least as good as that for men, while women typically felt that they had to work harder than men to prove that they were legitimate scholars (Simon 2017). Another professor even expressed that she was terrified of a wardrobe malfunction, securing her custom fitted suits with body tape (Kantor 2013). Harvard Business School could not idly sit around until this problem of gender imbalance resolved itself.

Gender Inequality is Everywhere

The HBS gender disparities do not exist in isolation. The gender gap is not only noticeable in the business world, but extends to all fields of study. Several law professors at the University of Pennsylvania conducted and published a study in 1994 that uncovered the markedly different experiences between men and women at this elite law school. The professors found the same patterns as seen at HBS nearly 16 years later. The report states, "Despite identical entry-level credentials, this performance differential between men and women is created in the first year of law school and maintained over the next three years" (Guinier et al. 1994, 3). During the first year of law school, professors rely on the Socratic method of teaching, and not surprisingly, a performance gap forms between male and female students during this first year. Female students "do not 'engage' pedagogically with a methodology that makes them feel strange, alienated, and 'delegitimated.' These women describe a dynamic in which they feel that their voices were 'stolen' from them during the first year" (Guinier et al. 1994, 4). The law program at the University of Pennsylvania was structurally unable to offer women a path to success, and women received the

message that their success depended on them learning how to act like a man. One male professor explained to his first-year class, "to be a good lawyer, behave like a gentleman" (Guinier et al. 1994, 5). These professors draw attention to the fact that hiring more female professors or ensuring equal numbers of female students is not enough, calling for a "reinvention of law school, and a fundamental change in its teaching practices, institutional policies and social organization" (Guinier et al. 1994, 100).

A study conducted in 2005 looks at gender relations within another Harvard institution, the Harvard Law School (HLS). Student participation at HLS looked very similar to the picture of student participation at HBS. At HLS, only a small number of students spoke up in class, and that small group was overwhelmingly male (Neufeld 2005). Similarly, male students were more likely to graduate at the top of their class with Latin honors than female students (Neufeld 2005). This repetitive narrative of the gender gap in elite institutions of higher learning suggests something universal. This consistency of gender inequality shows that is there is something structural, something built into the academic system, that prevents women from achieving the same success as men.

One explanation revolves around the curricula of these institutions in which participation constitutes the majority of student's grades. Men invented this system of education for other men. The education system is riddled with implicit "male norms in rules, standards, and concepts that appear neutral or objective on their face. [These] rules [are] designed to fit male needs, male social biographies, or male life experiences" (Chamallas 2012, 6). The case study method in itself harbors male bias, as well as the cases used to teach in this method. As one researcher explains, "Professors' use of stereotypical examples of women's and men's roles, comments that disparage women in general or that demean women's abilities, and the use of sexist humor" prevent women from succeeding in the classroom (Myers and Dugans 1996, 331). The case study method of teaching has many advantages, mainly that it provides students with real world scenarios and asks them to solve real world problems. However, like most academic disciplines, the protagonists in most case studies were men, and these case studies rarely deal with issues of gender in the workplace. The number of case studies used for teaching that feature women protagonists or women's issues are few, leaving female students to learn about business through the eyes of men and alienating them from the business world. For example, at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard, there are approximately 1680 cases. Within this pool of cases, only 32 have a female protagonist, and 35 of them deal with women's issues (Kenney 2004). Out of the 6766 cases that HBS has, about 78 have female protagonists, and 29 of them address women's issues. These cases are instrumental in shaping the landscape of the "real" business world, especially for female students, because these cases showcase women's issues, women's organizations, and women's leadership skills (Kenney 2004). Therefore, adjusting the curriculum is a concrete change that any administration can make. The root of the problem lies in the perception of women outside of the classroom which is much more difficult to address. Handling this aspect of the gender gap for the HBS administration would prove challenging.

Gender Beyond the Classroom: The Social Scene

Harvard is an elite institution that is coursing not only with intellect, but also tremendous wealth. Some students belong to secret societies, such as Section X, which is made up of "ultrawealthy, mostly male, and mostly international students known for decadent parties and travel" (Kantor 2013). Female students often struggled to navigate this extravagant social scene, where many women felt as if it was their "last chance among cream-of-the-crop-type" people, and

that the only way to be accepted was to flaunt designer clothes and share the same interest in partying (Kantor 2013). It would seem that these young women were facing the same issues that their predecessors faced 50 years prior. Women at the Harvard Business School are victim to the same double bind that women face in just about every single male dominated field. Some students fear that ambition and assertiveness in the class room would hurt their "social capital". Sheryl Sandberg, Chief Operation Officer of Facebook, states:

> All through my life, culturally reinforced signals cautioned me against being branded as too smart or too successful. It starts young. As a girl, you know that being smart is good in a lot of ways, but it doesn't make you particularly popular or attractive to boys (Sandberg 2016, 42).

The realization that this social factor outside of the classroom plays a huge role in student performance in the classroom commanded attention from HBS administration. The school had no tried and true plan to negotiate the social lives of their students, but they knew that they had to try something to change the toxic environment in which "male students, many with finance backgrounds, commandeer classroom discussions and hazed female students and younger faculty members, and openly ruminated on whom they would 'kill, sleep with or marry'" (Kantor 2013). Considered the school's dirty secret, the way women were treated outside of the classroom was never spoken of. The idea to ameliorate social relationships from an administrative standpoint is novel, and HBS struggled to implement change because they were working with grown adult professionals, not young, undergraduate students.

The administration began hosting mandatory seminars that covered a variety of topics. During a conversation on sexual harassment, Brooke Boyarksy raised her hand-the way she had been taught-to bring up a much different point. She steered the conversation towards the immense focus on appearance and money that dictated the social structure at HBS. While the conversation on sexual harassment failed to engage the students, Boyarsky's comment resonated. The students spoke about the secretive Section X, and the student body's infatuation with designer clothes and international parties. This conversation was probably the first and last time the students would be excited about a topic, for many students came to resent the faculty's insistence on discussing gender issues. Unfortunately, the students were much more interested in talking about class than they were about the conversation that faculty members wanted them to be having, one on gender.

The Administration

With Harvard's first female president in place, Nohria dove headfirst into HBS's gender relations. According to Nohria's biography, one of his priorities for HBS is "creating a culture of inclusion, where every member of the community can do their best work in support of the School's mission" (Harvard Business School 2016). Nohria was not a stranger to HBS when he became dean in 2010. He was co-chair of the Leadership Initiative, Senior Associate Dean of Faculty Development, the Head of the Organizational Behavior Unit, and professor at HBS. Nohria had an understanding of the gender climate of HBS because he has been a faculty member from 1988, and he has witnessed firsthand the disparities between men and women at HBS. During his time as a faculty member, Nohria recalled that many of the male faculty were starting to pay attention to gender issues, which their female colleagues had been aware of from the moment they stepped on campus. During a meeting in 2005, one professor asked what percentage of women received honors and were named Baker Scholars. No one who attended that meeting knew the answer,

which signaled to Nohria that gender relations at HBS needed attention (Groysberg, Herman, and Lobb 2013). When these questions about the performance of women at HBS began to surface, it provided a launching point for some consciousness raising, specifically amongst male faculty members who had turned a blind eye to the issue of gender inequality within their institution. When Nohria became dean, he appointed Youngme Moon as senior associate dean of the MBA program, the first woman to ever hold this position. He also created a new position for Robin Ely, an expert in gender and diversity (Sandberg 2016). During an address Nohria gave at an alumni reunion at HBS, Nohria notes, "We know that opportunity should be available to anybody as long as they have the ability and the will and desire to pursue it. But I'm not sure I can always say that that's true today" (Groysberg, Herman, and Lobb 2013, 24). In this statement, Nohria acknowledges that the school as a whole can do better.

To assist in Nohria's vision, Professor Frances Frei, professor turned administrator, approached the problem with full force, adopting the word "unapologetic" as her mantra. She was unapologetic about the measures that HBS was taking to change the school's culture, which she saw as hindering female students and faculty alike. The students respected Frei as a professor, but by the end of the process, students were wearing "Unapologetic" T-shirts, "to lacerate Ms. Frei for what they called intrusive social engineering" (Kantor 2013). Frei's aggressive approach to fixing HBS's gender problem produced resentment amongst students who felt like, "they were 'back in kindergarten or first grade'" (Kantor 2013). Frei was the most vocal among the faculty involved, and she had influence in two spheres as both the chairwoman of the first-year curriculum and the senior associate dean for faculty planning and recruitment. Nohria, Frei, and other faculty members, "saw themselves as outsiders who had succeeded at the school and wanted to help others do the same" (Kantor 2013).

The Experiment

Harvard Business School's gender makeover included changing its curriculum, rules, and even social rituals in an attempt to close the gap in participation and success. The administration implemented several important program changes in an effort to address their concerns, what Sheryl Sandberg calls "the soft stuff—small adjustments students could make immediately, like paying more attention to the language they used in class" (Sandberg 2016, 157). One of the most concrete ways that HBS sought to ensure equality in the classroom was by installing stenographers to prevent biased grading. Since the case method is so dependent on class participation, professors tend to remember male students who speak up frequently, but tend to forget female students who only speak up once or twice. These classes and discussions are fast paced, so professors are often unable to later recall with accuracy who said what and when. Stenographers, along with new grading software, allow professors to instantly check how many times they have called upon a student and organize that data by gender, which then enables professors to observe their students objectively when assigning grades at the end of a semester.

The administration also changed their program by offering untenured female professors private coaching to help them gain the respect of their students while facing the many gendered critiques of their teaching style. Recognizing that students need to have female professors who can serve as mentors and inspiration, HBS pushed to retain their female faculty members. This emphasis on finding a mentor was evident to some who were not at HBS during the time. In her book, *Lean In,* Sheryl Sandberg commented that during a visit to HBS in the Spring of 2011, she found the need for female mentors was a salient topic. Since Sandberg is a graduate of HBS, Nohria conducted an interview with her, after which a Q&A was held with students. Sandberg noted that

while men were asking her questions about her time at Facebook, one female student asked Sandberg, "How do I find a mentor?" Sandberg was devastated when she realized that "the men were focusing on how to manage a business and the women were focusing on how to manage a career" (Sandberg 2016, 66).

Professor Frei, working along with Youngme Moon, was instrumental in aiding female professors, acting as "the guardian of the female junior faculty" (Kantor 2013). Frei was "watching virtually every minute of every class some of them taught, delivering tips on how to do better in the next class, going as far as barring other professors from giving advice for fear of confusing the junior faculty" (Kantor 2013). Frei realized from watching the female faculty that female professors wanted to be liked, and in that process, sacrificed their assertiveness in the classroom. Frei noticed that female professors went from not being strict enough to being overly defensive, failing to find a happy medium. Frei advised faculty to "project warmth and high expectations at the same time" (Kantor 2013). Students evaluated their professors at the end of each semester using a number system ranging from '1' to '7', and often, female faculty received the lowest scores. Following Frei's advice, one female faculty member moved from a student rating of '4' to a '6' (Kantor 2013). While professors were performing well, no measures were taken to improve the numbers of female faculty members at HBS.

The school even made an effort to stray away from their hallowed case method of teaching, creating a new class called Field Immersion Experiences for Leadership Development (FIELD), which became a required course for all first years in the MBA program. This class broke students up into small groups where they solved problems as a team to encourage the development of leadership skills. However, most students did not take on the additional work of the FIELD courses, "which many saw as superfluous or even a scheme to keep them too busy for partying. Students used to form their own study groups, but now the deans did it for them" (Kantor 2013).

However, these concrete curriculum changes seemed to be working. As a genuinely new environment began to take shape. Women were participating in their classes more than ever before, and a record number were receiving awards and honors. While these results are comforting, the administration found that there were now issues that they could not have anticipated, and that they had no idea how address. The student's discontent continued to proliferate as the administration encroached further and further into student's personal lives outside of the classroom. More and more, faculty were reporting that students were falling behind because, "women, especially single women, often felt they had to choose between academic and social success" (Kantor 2013). Recognizing that the student body was fueled by alcohol and money, the administration "wanted to nudge the school in a more studious . . . direction." It was difficult to directly express the dismal record of women at HBS so the administration harped on words such as "culture", "community", and "inclusion" (Kantor 2013). The policing of the student's social lives had become apparent to the student body, and they resisted decisions made by Frei, such as a ban on Halloween costumes in the classroom. From Frei's perspective, HBS had a responsibility in changing the student culture, even if that meant "[heading] off the potential for sexy pirate costumes" (Kantor 2013).

Nothing that the administration had done spoke to the student's culture, and their efforts to change the student's social lives were ineffective. The administration was still struggling to provide the students with more female faculty and to keep up with the student's demands. At the end of the term the Women's Student Association at HBS organized a study session, lead by a student who quizzes other students in preparation for their upcoming exams. Many were grateful for the administration's efforts and believed in their cause, but they felt that having a female student leader teaching a review session did more to solidify women's place on campus than

anything the administration did. One student states, "It's the most powerful message: this girl knows it better than all of you" (Kantor 2013).

Conclusion

Harvard Business School still has a long way to go before they can claim that they have made an environment that fosters success for women. The changes that HBS made did improve the reception of female faculty, improved the grades of female students, and enabled women to be recognized in the school's greatest honors. With this success in mind, Harvard must find a way to move forward in changing not only the structure of the school, but the social culture of its students. It is clear that the student's resented the administration for their forceful and patronizing tactics to open up conversations about gender on campus. The students found the forced conversations and policing of their partying habits through increased coursework to be overbearing. While HBS has no perfect plan in place to address these issues, all hope is not lost. While the students resisted having these conversations in public, some students claimed that the changes were sparking conversations in private. Furthermore, students were more open about their discomfort with the money coursing through the school, and they were able to identify a source of the social stratification found on campus.

Epilogue

Since 2013, Harvard Business School has put in place several programs that specifically aim to better women's experience at HBS. Nitin Hohria's commitment to this cause has been a defining aspect of his time as dean of HBS. In 2014, Nohria addressed a group at a Gala event celebrating the 50th anniversary of women at HBS. Nohria apologized to the women of the school, saying, "The school owed you better, and I promise it will be better" (Patel 2014). Nohria has made it the school's mission to double the case studies that are written with female protagonists, bringing the level up to 20% in a span of five years. This push to increase the number of female protagonists is important in three ways. First, it sends the message that women are just as capable as their male counterparts to lead in business, and it provides female students with role models who they can look to for inspiration. Secondly, these case studies have the potential to instruct students on approaching gender issues in the workplace. Teaching guides for case studies provide a case for authors to explicitly guide professors towards speaking about gender issues in the classroom. Third, this push recognizes that there are talented women who have matriculated from HBS, and who are now working in the business world. Their experiences, both successes and downfalls, deserve to be chronicled and used by future business school students.

The student body of HBS is also contributing to the cause by rallying within their own organizations. The Women's Student Association (WSA) aims "to actively support a community that empowers and mobilizes women to thrive academically, socially and professionally for long-term success," hosting the Dynamic Women in Business Conference, bringing in speakers, and a women's welcome event for incoming students (Harvard Business School 2017b). Under the Woman's Student Association is a program called the "Manbassadors." Founded in 2013, the manbassadors are a group that seeks "to actively engage male students and partners at HBS in a productive, ongoing conversation about gender issues and to involve male students in the WSA" (*Women's Student Association* 2017). The fact that students, both men and women, are having open conversations about the work-life balance and equal pay shows that the school is moving in the right direction when it comes to gender equality.

Lastly, established in the beginning of the 2014-2015 school year, the Gender Initiative seeks to "accelerate the advancement of women leaders and promote gender equity in business and society." The Gender Initiative is a culmination of research on gender issues at HBS, with the intention to further understand how gender is operating within the school of business. This grounding of the discussion of gender in research provides more tangible data and will hopefully engage community members in fruitful discussions regarding the state of gender at HBS. The Gender Initiative hosts a Gender & Work Symposium every spring which brings together academics and researchers as a way to share ideas and foster community. The Harvard Business school is by no means finished with their work to incorporate gender issues into their curriculum and to ensure that their environment is suitable to the success of women. The fight for gender equality is a process that requires trial and error, but the fact that HBS cares at all is setting an example for other institutions of learning and the business world at large. Through this process, HBS has gained valuable insight into the shortfalls of their program and demonstrated that there is no one way to achieve gender equity.

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