

WOMEN IN THE PROFESSION

Background

Beginning in the late 1960s and continuing through the following decades, women in ever-greater numbers were choosing the law as a career. By 2002, the number of women entering law school equaled the number of men. Women now account for approximately 30% of all lawyers, and that percentage will continue to grow as older, male lawyers retire. But while their numbers are growing, women still remain significantly underrepresented in positions of greater importance, influence, and economic rewards.

In 1987 the ABA Commission on Women in the Profession was created to assess the status of women in the legal profession and to identify barriers to their advancement. The commission issued a groundbreaking report in 1988 showing that women lawyers were not advancing at a satisfactory rate.

The ABA Commission on Women in the Profession has continued as a resource and national voice for women lawyers. In October 2001, the commission released *Balanced Lives: Changing the Culture of Legal Practice*. This report includes an overview of the challenges posed in accommodating lawyers' personal and professional commitments, along with recommendations for change and sample policies on alternative work schedules and family leaves. Another report published by the commission in 2001 was *The Unfinished Agenda: Women and the Legal Profession*. This is the third status report published by the commission to chronicle progress toward gender equality. Many other ABA entities also focus on women in the profession, including the Law Practice Management Section's Women Rainmakers Division, the Litigation Section's Women Advocate Committee and the Business Law Section's Women's Business Law Network. In addition, the commission provides current information about the status of women in the profession, such as the "Current Glance of Women in the Law" (2002).

Missouri Bar Activities

In 1990 the Supreme Court of Missouri created the Gender & Justice Task Force, whose members were jointly appointed by the Court and The Missouri Bar, to conduct a major research project on gender bias in Missouri. The task force held hearings throughout Missouri (150 witnesses testified at six hearings) and also conducted an extensive survey of lawyers, court officials and judges (707 responded). The task force then issued its report, detailing the discrimination that was found relating to both women in the profession and women in their interactions with the justice system. The Missouri Bar distributed 18,000 copies of the report.

To follow up on the recommendations made by the task force for steps needed to reduce and eliminate gender bias, the Supreme Court and Missouri Bar appointed the Gender Fairness Implementation Committee. Between 1993 and 1996, the Implementation Committee served as an advocate for reform and was successful in achieving statutory amendments, rule changes, education programs for lawyers and judges, as well as other action items.

Upon the completion of its work in 1996, responsibility for gender issues was transferred to a standing committee: The Missouri Bar's Gender & Justice Committee. That committee continues to monitor gender issues through the work and reports of the ABA Commission on Women in the Profession.

In addition, The Missouri Bar sponsors programs and activities to facilitate networking and to foster mentoring relationships between older and younger women lawyers, and to address the special needs of women in the profession.