

Chancellor's Award for the Advancement of Women

Monday, March 30, 2009 – Cole Hall

Chancellor's Introduction

Claire Brindis, DrPH - Professor of Pediatrics and Health Policy, Department of Pediatrics and the Interim Director of the Phillip R. Lee Institute for Health Policy Studies

It is fitting that this year's faculty awardee, Dr. Brindis, excels in all the criteria used to select our nominees, from elevating the status of women on campus to generating and disseminating knowledge on women's health through research, teaching and public service.

Dr. Brindis has worked for many years to improve campus policies impacting the lives of our faculty and staff, by mentoring and serving as a role model of women, and by her tireless advocacy. A former Chair of the Chancellor's Advisory Committee on the Status of Women (CACSW), she worked closely with the School of Medicine to identify key ways to improve the campus climate for women faculty members. She was instrumental in creating a new fund that is used to overcome a variety of traditional barriers encountered by women in academic medical centers – from lack of child care support to present at professional meetings to funding their research endeavors, if they have encountered a personal set back.

Mentoring of faculty, students, and staff are among her signature efforts, including the integration of a gender lens in a campus-wide mentoring initiative.

In her research, she and her team at the Bixby Center for Global Reproductive Health (part of the Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology, and Reproductive Health Sciences) have conducted a multidisciplinary evaluation of California's family planning program, one of the largest programs in the country, providing comprehensive family planning care to low-income populations (<200% of poverty). Through her research and effective ability to translate research findings for national and state policy makers, Dr. Brindis and her team have been able to garner over a billion dollars over the past decade to support critical health care services that help over a million and a half women and adolescents avoid unintended and mistimed pregnancy.

Dr. Brindis is committed and dedicated to mentoring women faculty and staff, supporting and enhancing the success of women at UCSF, and improving the health of women and adolescents everywhere.

Claire's Remarks

Thank you, Chancellor Bishop and members of the Selection Committee for this tremendous professional honor and personal affirmation. I share this honor with many others who have devoted themselves to advancing the status of women on our campus and whose support has been so instrumental in my life. I feel proud to join an illustrious group of outstanding campus leaders who have received this award in the past and to continue to build upon their example and contributions. I particularly want to thank Renee Binder, Renee Navarro, and Donna Ferriero and others who submitted my name for this award. And I want to offer my hearty congratulations to my co-winners—Michael and Surit.

This wonderful award has caused me to reflect on my early roots, on key individuals and mentors, on some experiences that have shaped my views, and on where we are today. I'd like to share these reflections with you.

And, I'd like to take this occasion to celebrate both the women and men who have influenced my journey as a women's advocate.

Early Roots – The Emergence of a Women's Health Advocate

Today I stand before you--a child of historical circumstance.

I was named after my grandmother Clara Dzialoszinski, a woman I never met, but whose sacrifice enabled her only child, my father Walt, to leave Nazi Germany in 1939 at the age of 19. He left just in time. But it was not only Clara's choice that impacted my life—it was the American government's critical decision at the moment he was seeking refuge to refuse to accept any more refugees.

As a result, my father lived in South America, primarily in Argentina, for 18 years before he was able to emigrate and finally achieve Clara's and his own dream. In Argentina, he met my mother Lucy and I was born.

Growing up in the tango capitol of the world, my early memories were shaped by clear social rules of gender separation. As a small, but telling example, boys played soccer as part of the school day, while girls went to a separate room where we learned to embroider—a skill I must confess I never excelled in. But in my private world, nurtured by the unconditional love and unwavering pride of my parents, these structural role expectations did not squelch a growing sense of wanting to “save the world”, inspired by the role models I found in books.

My father came first to the US, to establish secure roots before sponsoring my mother and me to follow. My mother struggled with the decision to come, but like Clara, sacrificed her own happiness for the promise of opportunities for my brother and myself. My first real memory of America emerged in the dawn's heavy mist, following a 2-week boat trip to join my father. **Imagine a sleepy little girl** at shipside seeing a woman, larger than life, her bronzed arm uplifted to shine a beacon, welcoming us to her shores. Her image continues to capture my imagination even today.

However, the disconnect between the ideal and the reality of being a struggling immigrant quickly emerged. By arriving in the US as a child, I became part of the group demographers labeled the 1.5 generation, a group that teeters **on the high-wire** between the old and the new world, often feeling the outsider in both, challenged to develop a sense of identity, and struggling to fit in. I still feel the pain of being taunted for not speaking English and not being accepted.

Remembering this experience drives my research interest in the issues of immigrant health, acculturation and resilience. It compels me to advocate for the importance of committing ourselves to creating a welcoming community – here at UCSF, in California, in the United States—particularly for individuals who never expected to feel that they could fit in—who have been left out, left alone, or left behind.

(Omitted 2 paragraphs due to time: As a teenager, I also remember being struck by the power of data. Overnight, when the Surgeon General’s report on smoking was presented in 1964, my father, a life-long smoker, quit! For a long time I believed that knowledge itself was sufficient to shape behavior and bring about social change.)

Remembering too that both my parents worked as court translators in the Los Angeles court system for over 20 years, it doesn’t seem surprising that my professional career links policy-relevant research and translation of research findings to provide information that is useful for diverse policy makers.)

My First Mentors

I have been blessed with mentors throughout my life.

My mother taught me the generosity of spirit—not with material things, but with the gift of her soul. She showed me how to connect deeply and really see people’s strengths, as well as their needs—and then to find how those needs could be met. My mother was the consummate networker and multi-tasker, and you could almost see her “Google”-like brain trying to figure out how to help or connect people. It was one such seemingly inconsequential match that resulted in life altering events for me.

By fateful circumstance, my mother began to provide once a week respite care for the wife of a UCLA materials engineering professor, Daniel Rosenthal. He soon became a part of our family. Although Daniel was not a formal mentor, his **simple** expectation that I **could and would** pursue higher education opened a world of possibilities and gave me the confidence I needed to take the first steps on my academic journey. I try to repay my debt to Dr. Rosenthal whenever I can by reaching out to those who **still** might not see themselves in our academic world and encouraging them to join us. It is a simple power that we all possess.

Snapshot: Structural segregation

In preparing for this talk, snapshots of the past flew through my brain. It has been rewarding to connect those dots and see how they led to today.

One experience that has shaped my views was an early job experience at Atlanta’s Grady Memorial Hospital. This 15-floor, city block sized hospital, serves the city’s most disadvantaged, and represented my first exposure to the architecture of segregation. The hospital was built as a letter “H”—half for blacks and half for whites. This was the formal state of the state until 1965 when the first federal civil rights laws were passed. Desegregation of Grady and 1000 other hospitals occurred through the vision of a leader whose name I did not know at the time, but who 10 years later would become a lifelong mentor—Dr. Philip R. Lee.

While we would all like to envision a world where structural and systemic segregation are behind us, we need to recognize how strongly these factors continue to shape people’s lives and impact all types of diversity. This requires the courage to examine our challenges, as well as our progress in meeting our

diversity goals, which are slower than many of us prefer. I applaud the leadership and the campus-wide meeting to be held on April 13th to present the progress and strategies being pursued to improve our structural environment.

There are also other structural factors, many of which are experienced only by women—and in particular, women of color.

I remember starting my doctoral program at UC Berkeley pregnant with our first son, hiding my pregnancy as long as possible by wearing wrap around skirts, for fear that my professors would judge me as not being a serious student. While we think this era is past, I still hear from women that this continues to be a concern—even when formal policies for stopping the clock have been established. The sense of isolation runs deep and many still feel that there is no possibility of balancing work and family within our environment. After a recent CACSW retreat, one participant shared confidentially with me that she could now actually “allow” herself to have a child, while also pursuing her scientific career. Another woman noted that while she had been on our campus for 10 years, during this event was the first time that she no longer felt she was an orphan.

Where Are We Now?

Changing the climate in which diversity—whether gender, ethnicity and race, sexual orientation, or ability—can flourish is vital and requires strong institutional commitment. It is heartening to see that issues and recommendations have been made by the Chancellor’s Special Committees to create a different culture, for example:

- greater transparency related to career advancement, and
- academic and career mentoring at every stage of our lives.

It is also heartening to see that many of these issues are receiving far greater campus-wide recognition and clear and exceptional leadership provided by Chancellor Bishop, Executive Vice-Chancellor Gene Washington, and Associate Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Sally Marshall. These include:

- a campus-wide faculty mentoring program (directed by Dr. Mitch Feldman); In addition, a tailored Clinical and Translational Science Institute Mentor Development Program , led by Jeanette Brown and Mitch Feldman, has recently completed training 40 new research mentors, half of whom are women.
- a faculty welcoming program and web sites that provides insights and information pertaining to career advancement,
- a diversity faculty small grants program & Traveling Ambassador program led by Caroline Damsky,
- The CACSW website (statusofwomen.ucsf.edu) that receives an average of nearly 4,000 hits a month, and in the month of March alone, 103 international information seekers from countries as diverse as: Ghana, New Zealand, Bulgaria, Germany, Canada, Netherlands, Croatia, Australia, India, Japan, Malaysia, Pakistan, Switzerland, Ireland, Egypt, Canada, Peru, Moldova, United Kingdom, France, Argentina, Spain, Russia, Romania, Turkey, and
- the CORO faculty development leadership program.

These efforts and others represent important benchmarks and resources for both men and women on our campus who strive to balance work-life issues. Additional Resources are provided through the:

- UCSF Work-Life Resource Center
- the Center for Gender Equity

In addition, with the leadership of David Wofsy, significant inroads have been made in increasing the diversity of our medical school classes—in turn David Irby, Helen Loeser, and Maxine Papadakis, among many others, strive for these students to experience success—**just think** about the power of this pipeline of leaders.

Other “architectural” and “structural” advances are evident, and hopefully you can add to this list. The availability of breast pump rooms at every campus, maintained by the National Center of Excellence in Women’s Health is critical to women’s ability to balance family and work when their children are infants. Childcare slots have been increased at UCSF, and more are being built at this campus; however, this enormous need has not been met yet.

With the support of campus leadership, we established a fund that makes it easier for men and women who have a child or elder responsibilities to travel to professional meetings so that their careers are not disadvantaged. Other systemic changes are also needed—for example, instituting policies around family-friendliness, including scheduling faculty meetings at times when individuals with young families are not prevented from being at the table when important decisions are made. These efforts give clear messages regarding what is valued within the environment

And the data are beginning to show some results from these initial investments—a 25% increase over the past 5 years in the number of women faculty at the Associate level—now representing 45% of all core faculty. This represents a potential pipeline for the advancement of women to professor rank, where UCSF has experienced a 15% increase over the past 5 years. Approximately, 26% of the overall number of senior professors are women.

Yet, we can ill afford to sit on our laurels. Too many junior faculty, and even senior faculty, continue to feel lost—or face exceptional challenges in balancing the demand of family and career. **We may see these concerns as peripheral to our mission. But** nothing could be further from the truth. It is our commitment to diversity—to making **structural and systemic** changes that will enhance and assure our continued excellence.

Gratitude

Today is a day of gratitude—and remembrance.

Apart from my dear mother and father, I honor the memory of two other wonderful mentors:

Dr. Connie Wofsy, whose ability to balance family, friendship and pioneering research in the area of HIV/AIDS, with a special focus on women, clearly influenced my own pathway, and

Dr. Felicia Stewart, a giant in the field of family planning, whose wisdom was and continues to be inspirational.

And I am eternally grateful for other mentors including Philip Lee, Nancy Milliken, Nancy Adler, Dixie Horning, Charles Irwin, and Paula Braveman for their support and guidance. I am also grateful for the powerful network of professional and personal colleagues at the Philip R. Lee Institute for Health Policy Studies, the Bixby Center for Global Reproductive Health, and the Division of Adolescent Medicine. And to CACSW for their continued voice to improve the lives of women at UCSF, serving as the monitor and early detection system for the campus.

My own safety net is comprised of wonderful family and friends who anchor and nurture my life, including Debbie, Andrea, Lynn, Sarah, and Marla and her mother Bernadette who is channeling my mother today.

I share a strong virtual umbilical cord with my brother George—whose love and support are precious gifts. I am honored that he and my sister in law Steffie are here to share this event.

I am also blessed with two outstanding sons, Seth and Daniel, who I believe demonstrate a strong sensitivity to the needs of women—specifically, Seth’s lovely wife Stephanie and the next generation, signified by 2 year old Violet Lucy Brindis-Reich.

But, clearly, it has been my wonderful husband and life partner Ralph whose love, enthusiasm, and support plays such a crucial role in my life. It is ironic that on this day, as I am being honored, he is being honored as well . He is in Orlando Florida, being as inducted to serve as President Elect of the American College of Cardiology at their annual meeting.

I close with a call to action.

In these incredibly challenging times, I reaffirm my commitment – our shared commitment—to advance the careers of women, to provide the current and next generation new opportunities to shine, and to give back to the community that has given so much to me.

Let us continue to challenge ourselves and our institution to lift the light, to ask and to monitor how well we are doing:

Are we effectively reaching young people, particularly young people of color, so the upstream pipeline of possibility is seen as a reality?

Who are we leaving out and how can we open additional welcoming doors?

Who are we not advancing and how can we nurture them to succeed?

Finally, in these tough economic times, I challenge the leadership of UCSF to continue to fund those programs that have made possible our recent progress. To do otherwise will restrict the opportunities of many worthy women and men and will diminish the excellence of our institution.