

WOMEN'S ROLES IN AMERICA'S PLANETARIUMS

Noreen Grice

1. INTRODUCTION

This study was undertaken to identify the status of women who are employed by planetariums. Specifically, women's job descriptions, salaries and opportunities for career advancement were evaluated. A separate study of planetarium salaries and job titles was done in 1991 by David Menke (Buehler Planetarium, Davie, Florida). The final results of this survey are compared with Menke's data in the summary section.

Forty eight planetariums participated in this study. All surveys were completed by telephone interviews with N. Grice.

To obtain a wide geographical survey range, the United States was divided into four quadrants: Northeast, Southeast, Northwest and Southwest. Within those regions, planetariums were randomly selected from the International Planetarium Society Directory. Almost all of the small school-district planetariums were excluded because most were not open during the summer of 1992 when this survey was taken.

2. STATISTICS

The Northwest sample population is the smallest group in the survey because there are few non-school planetariums in this area. No high-level jobs are held by women in the planetariums surveyed. Women comprise an average of 40 percent of the planetarium work force. Of this, 3 percent of the women are employed as secretaries. The remaining women were employed as part time show presenters.

In the Northeast region, women average 35 percent of the planetarium work force. Of these women, 50 percent are employed in traditional female jobs (clerical or cashier).

In the Southwest, women comprise an average of 34 percent of the planetarium work force. Of this, 53 percent of the women were employed in traditional female jobs (clerical or cashier).

In the Southeast region, women comprise an average of 33 percent of the planetarium work force. Of these, 23 percent of the women held clerical or cashier jobs.

Women's salaries relate directly to their job position. In the Northeast region, four women earned \$30,000 or more per year. In the Southeast, three women fit into this category. In the Southwest, one woman earned at least \$30,000 per year. No women in this survey earned above \$10,000 per year in the Northwest. In fact, the majority of women surveyed in this study earned between \$5,000–\$10,000 per year. This is due, in part, to some women holding only part time jobs.

Among the 48 planetariums surveyed, six women are currently planetarium directors. Of the remaining planetariums, seven hired women in the past as either director or interim director. Thirty-five planetariums in this survey have never had a woman as a planetarium director.

3. SUMMARY

In 1991, Dr. David Menke sent a survey to 982 planetarium directors in the United States.¹ Questions on his survey pertained primarily to the director's education, salary and job satisfaction. Menke's summary showed that men outnumber women in the position of planetarium director by a factor of 10.8 to 1. At this level, men earned about \$46,000 per year while women earned about \$10,000 per year less.

As a comparison with Menke's survey, only salary information for female planetarium staff was included in this study. Most women employed by planetariums served in part time positions as show presenters or on clerical staff. Eight planetariums employed women *only* in secretarial jobs. Five planetariums had *no* women on staff at all. Clearly this would indicate that most women occupy the lowest salary range jobs available in planetariums. The best opportunities appear to be in both southern regions which show the highest salary ranges and the majority of female planetarium directors. However, no women directors participating in this study earned anywhere near the average salary of about \$36,000 found by Menke.

In general, most men and women interviewed stated that there were good opportunities for women to attain the position of planetarium director. A few men stated plainly that they didn't feel women were as qualified as men for senior level positions. A few women indicated that they *had* encountered sexual discrimination in the past or in their current jobs. However, almost all of the respondents predicted that more women could attain management positions in the planetarium field.

The last question in the survey was a request for advice to females considering a career in the planetarium profession. Listed below are some quotes taken during this survey. In parenthesis is the gender of the person who gave each statement.

(f): Women need to know a lot about the equipment because the trustees have given me a tough time, (m): Women—if people steer you away from science, oppose that—do what *you* want, (m): Children love women because they are excellent role models, (m): Internships are good but women need to be considered *only* for positions that are somewhere between interns & senior management, (m): The trustees will never let a woman be director, (f): We need women in higher levels, (f): The previous director dismantled all of the special effects equipment when he heard a woman was hired, (f): Opportunities are bad, women are not treated equally, (m): I want to hire more women.

ENDNOTES

¹“The Status and Future of the Planetarium Professional,” paper by Dr. David Menke, Director (Buehler Planetarium), 1992 International Planetarium Society Meeting, Utah.

Noreen Grice: Education Coordinator, Charles Hayden Planetarium/Boston Museum of Science