The Gender Perspective in Maritime Education and Training

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to show if and how European maritime education and training institutions have met the increasing enrolment of women, and how shipping in general has reacted to gender equality. WMU has partly been the source for finding data related to studies in a multicultural and gender (minority) mixture of students and professors. In addition to a questionnaire to maritime education and training institutions, unstructured conversations with WMU students and professors have contributed to fact findings.

Apparently, there is more to be done in order to have women compete on a level playing field in the sphere of shipping. Shipping is historically male dominated and conservative, so it is well understood that there are ropes to be untied.

In this article, there are examples on how stakeholders in society have introduced policies on how to meet diversities. It is recommended that universities seriously pursue this trend.

I wish to appeal to educational institutions to publish a university policy on the gender perspective and diversity management in general. The policy must be in writing in order for staff and students to understand and remember the content of the policy. This is an issue that should follow the quality assurance aims and goals and should be posted in a public place within the university’s premises for everybody to be reminded.

Keywords: Gender, Maritime Education, WMU, Diversities, Women

1 Preface

The reason for this study has been the growing number of female students at World Maritime University (WMU, inaugurated by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) in 1983), the female intake at maritime education and training (MET) institutions and a growing presence of women working onboard ships and at various maritime stakeholders’ offices ashore.

Seafaring is often considered to be a high technology career best carried out by men. Although it is considered to be a very tough job, the number of women both in shore employments and onboard ships is gradually growing.

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Isolation and loneliness are major human problems because of the often small crew complements. Fatigue and diversity have become a safety problem and occupational health problems are frequent. The industry, from an international point of view, is trying to master these problems with new ideas that perhaps have not been properly founded. The issue of crewing is one of these challenges. A part solution is to recruit women to overcome the growing shortage of seafarers. Men appear to appreciate shore jobs more than the challenges at sea.

To crew ships with women should not be a hindrance because it is not muscles that are required but good judgement and professionalism. In addition, women are known to have a caring attitude, something with which they identify themselves. This characteristic, most probably, would increase the retention rate that also has become a dilemma for many shipowners (hereinafter owner). Therefore, shipping should accommodate women to have equal possibilities and be equally treated as men onboard ships as well as at worldwide MET institutions.

The fact that more and more women come to study at worldwide MET institutions leads to the question: Are the MET managements and their faculties ready to receive this cadre of women?

2 Introduction

The UN Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR) celebrated its 60 years in 2008. It is a document translated into most languages but not necessarily the most read. Robinson1 is an optimist and explains that the reason for the slow development of the Declaration is to be found in a badly rooted holding among people in general (Det är ett privilegium… 2008).

The effort to give all humans the same possibilities is nothing new in itself. The UDHR, dated 1948, has 30 articles. The two articles below have a special concern to this study:

Article 23

“(1) Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.  
(2) Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work.”

Article 26

“(1) Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.” (The universal … 1948)

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1 From 1990 to 1997 she was the first female Irish president and is the Chairman for the Council of Women World Leaders.