



Equal Rights Advocates and Lieff Cabraser Announce Class Action Lawsuit by Women Vassar Professors Over College's Gender Pay Gap

Five women full professors from historically women's college file class action suit over systemic pay disparities, with 35 additional women full professors saying they share the class representatives' grievances about Vassar's pattern of pay discrimination

Poughkeepsie, NY, Aug. 30, 2023—As classes began this week, most of the women full professors at Vassar College spoke out about long-standing pay discrimination, culminating in their filing today of a class action lawsuit. The case, filed by 5 named plaintiffs along with 35 additional women full professor supporters, claims pervasive and long-standing gender-based disparities in pay between Vassar's male and female full professors. A copy of the lawsuit, along with the statement of the 35 supporters affirming the pattern of pay discrimination at Vassar and expressing their support for the class action, [can be found here](#).

The professors allege that Vassar has known for years that it unlawfully pays men more than women, and has for years refused to adequately address the discrimination. Vassar is one of the Seven Sisters, a group of historically women's colleges founded on the promise of gender equity.

According to the professors, average salary data reflect a gender pay gap at Vassar in every year for the last two decades. Most troublingly, the professors allege this gap has grown over time, with the most recent data reflecting a 10 percent gender pay disparity at Vassar. The gender pay gap is only one of multiple long-term inequitable practices at the College, including substantial differences in the starting salaries of men and women, a merit ratings system that is biased against women, and a discriminatory promotion system that systematically prevents or delays the advancement of women professors relative to their male counterparts who are considered for and promoted earlier than comparable women.

The lawsuit describes how women professors at Vassar have attempted for at least 15 years to work discreetly and collaboratively with the College to remedy the gender pay gap, but that the College has both ignored the problem and taken steps to *decrease* the level of pay transparency in recent years, in an apparent attempt to mask the disparity.

“It’s unfortunate we have to be here today, but standing up for the rights of women is part of why these professors came to teach at Vassar in the first place,” said Jessica Ramey Stender, Policy Director and Deputy Legal Director at Equal Rights Advocates and co-counsel representing the plaintiffs. “These women have dedicated much of their lives to teaching, to this college, and to uplifting students at a school founded on values of gender equality. They deserve to be paid fairly and equally.”

Co-counsel Kelly Dermody of Lieff Cabraser stated, “Plaintiffs—and all Vassar female full professors—are leaders in their fields and highly regarded by both their contemporaries and their students. For too long, Vassar has refused to equitably value their contributions to the College. We hope this case will prompt Vassar to finally live up to the storied role in the movement for gender equality that it so publicly claims.”

Named Plaintiffs Wendy Graham (Professor of English), Maria Höhn (Professor Emerita of History), Mia Mask (Professor of Film), Cindy Schwarz (Professor of Physics), and Debra Zeifman (Professor of Psychological Science) explained their motivation in bringing this lawsuit on behalf of other Vassar professors: “Through this action, we seek to achieve what we were prevented from accomplishing through private internal channels: gender equity for ourselves and other female full faculty, and the adoption of fair processes to ensure that future generations of faculty are paid, promoted, and evaluated fairly.”

The Plaintiffs:

Plaintiff Wendy Graham is a Professor of English. Information about her areas of study and accomplishments is available [here](#).

Plaintiff Maria Höhn is a Professor Emerita of History. Information about her areas of study and accomplishments is available [here](#).

Plaintiff Mia Mask is a Professor of Film. Information about her areas of study and accomplishments is available [here](#).

Plaintiff Cindy Schwarz is a Professor of Physics. Information about her areas of study and accomplishments is available [here](#).

Plaintiff Debra Zeifman is a Professor of Psychological Science. Information about her areas of study and accomplishments is available [here](#).

To speak with counsel, contact Blake Case at (601) 832-6079 or blake@emccommunications.com.

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About Equal Rights Advocates

Equal Rights Advocates fights for gender justice in workplaces and schools across the country. Since 1974, they have been fighting on the front lines of social justice to protect and advance rights and opportunities for women, girls, and people of all gender identities through groundbreaking legal cases and bold legislation that sets the stage for the rest of the nation. Additional information about Equal Rights Advocates is available at <https://www.equalrights.org/>.

Lieff Cabraser Heimann & Bernstein, LLP

Lieff Cabraser is one of the country's most successful firms exclusively representing plaintiffs in civil litigation, including in some of the most significant employment cases of the last decade. Partners Kelly Dermody and Michelle Lamy, co-counsel here, represent female workers in both the Goldman Sachs gender discrimination class action that resulted in a \$215 million settlement for women at the company (*Chen-Oster v. Goldman Sachs & Co. LLC*, No. 10-cv-6950-AT-RWL), and in the Google gender pay equity litigation that resulted in a \$118 million settlement for women at Google (*Ellis v. Google LLC*, No. CGC-17-561299). Kelly also represented plaintiffs in the high-tech wage conspiracy case alleging an agreement among prominent technology companies not to poach each other's employees, which resulted in settlements totaling \$435 million (*In re: High-Tech Employee Antitrust Litigation*, 11-cv-2509-LJK). Additional information about Lieff Cabraser is available at <https://www.lieffcabraser.com/>.