

# Home-Based Work: New Opportunities for Women?

by Joanne H. Pratt

**T**he activities of women in the labor market reveal two contradictory trends. On the one hand, women are better educated and have more job skills and training than ever before. On the other hand, a substantial number of women are leaving executive suites and returning home to have children and care for their families.

Is there a way for women to resolve the conflict between the career goals for which they have been trained and the family goals that many want to pursue? For many women, the answer is home-based work. Surveys show that:

- As many as 23 million people are using their homes as a place of work.
- Among businesses that are run exclusively out of the home, more than 70 per cent are run by women.

Women are taking advantage of a number of important economic and technological trends. Advances in computer technology mean that millions of workers can "telecommute" from their homes. The growth of the service economy is opening the doors for millions of small businesses. Most are being launched from the home.

- Of the 8.2 million sole proprietorships in the U.S. in 1980, 63 per cent were located in someone's home.

*Joanne H. Pratt's studies of home-based workers have been published extensively in scholarly and trade publications. This article is adapted from her report, "Legal Barriers to Home-Based Work," published by the National Center for Policy Analysis, 7701 N. Semmens, Suite 800, Dallas, Texas 75247.*

- While the number of new sole proprietorships is increasing at a rate of 3.7 per cent per year, those started by women are increasing at a rate of 6.9 per cent per year.

Despite the enormous economic and social benefits created by home-based work, those who work from their homes face a maze of legal uncertainty arising from Federal, state and local regulations.

**Local Laws.** About 90 per cent of all U.S. cities place restrictions on home-based work. These include requirements that no outside employee may work in the home; only one family member may work in the business; only one business may be operated from each home; only one room of a house may be used for business purposes; a separate entrance must be maintained for business customers, and no business inventory may be stored in a garage. Among the many and sometimes bizarre regulations:

- In Blaine, Minnesota, a home-based tutor in math, English or a foreign language may not tutor more than one student at a time.
- In Long Beach, California, ministers, priests, and rabbis may not give religious instruction in the home.
- In Dallas, Texas, home-based businesses may not be listed in the yellow pages of the telephone directory.
- In Danville, Illinois, no one may sell goods in a home other than by filling an order previously placed by telephone.



*An Indianapolis seamstress in her workshop at home.*

- In Southern Pines, North Carolina, there is a total ban on retail sales in the home and no inventory may be displayed in the home.
- In Downey, California, a garage may not be used for home-based work.
- In Rockford, Illinois, there can be no more than one home occupation in any single residence.
- In Chicago, there is virtually a total ban on home-based work, including a ban on connecting a home computer to an office computer.

**State Laws.** Many states ban entire categories of products from home production. These include cigars, artificial flowers, articles of food and drink, toys, dolls, bandages, purses, feathers, children's clothing, and cosmetics. When home production is allowed, it is often restricted to a small part of the labor market:

- In Hawaii and Illinois, the only people al-

lowed to work in the home are people who are unable to leave home.

- In Massachusetts, no one under contract with an employer or business outside the home may produce goods in their home.

**Federal Laws.** After a protracted court battle, the U.S. Department of Labor has managed to liberalize restrictions on home knitting. However, Federal law still bans home production (for sale) of women's garments, embroidery, handkerchiefs, jewelry, buckles, mittens and gloves.

Many of these regulations needlessly interfere with valuable economic activity and have no apparent valid social purpose. They threaten to stifle one of the most important and growing sectors of our economy, and to place obstacles in the way of the economic and social goals of an ever-increasing number of women. □

# Campus Activities: Who Pays the Bills?

by Joseph S. Fulda

**D**uring my undergraduate years at The City College of New York in the late 1970s, I had some interesting experiences with student clubs, and I began to re-examine the whole matter of student activities and the way they are funded.

There seem to be four ills affecting student organizations which, according to friends and subsequent experience, appear to be pervasive on our nation's campuses.

First, the members of some clubs share few interests to draw them together. They do understand, however, that any group of students may organize and register with the student government and the college administration and thus receive a portion of the mandatory student fees collected by the college at the start of each semester. Thus I recall sitting through a two-hour meeting of a campus honor society where the sole topic of discussion was how to dispose of the generous sum we had been allocated. The debate might still be raging had it not been decided to spend it all on a grand party at the home of a student leader.

The second problem with many student organizations is that the leadership has little incentive to adhere to organizational charters. I recall one prayer-and-snack organization with a charter mandating annual elections. Yet several

successive presidents simply appointed the other officers and their successors. When I pointed out to an officer that this was improper, I was asked whether I would prefer the secretariat or the treasury! "Private life," I replied. Of course, nobody really cares enough to take recourse. I didn't. After all, the monies are just there.

Third, club officers frequently divert funds for their own use: pencils, postage, bus fare, meals, maybe a month's rent! Our student newspaper, *The Campus*, was often filled with the latest scandal.

The fourth problem is that mandatory student fees distribute the costs of campus activities with an artificial uniformity. Those who care little about student activities subsidize the average user, while those who are very active are subsidized by the average user. The distribution of benefits is even more artificial. Typically, the student government decides on the apportionment of funds in its own inimitable way. Club officers must beg, cajole, and argue for funds. As I recall quite well, this leaves much to be desired.

Now there is quite a simple solution to all these problems. Why not limit student fees to cover such widely used items as the student center, athletics, and the student media? Maybe a piddling sum could be granted to the student government, too, for its advisory role. The remaining student organizations would be funded

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*Joseph S. Fulda, a regular contributor to The Freeman, is Assistant Professor of Computer Science at Hofstra University and resides in Manhattan.*