

# Making cookies

BY REBECCA ZISCH

REBECCA ZISCH SPLITS HER TIME BETWEEN THE WOMEN'S STUDIES DEPARTMENT AT UNLV AND THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT AT CCSN. SHE IS ALSO A REGULAR COMMENTATOR ON NEVADA PUBLIC RADIO.

The news of Carol Harter's resignation as the president of University of Nevada, Las Vegas on Jan. 29 came as a surprise to many in Southern Nevada's academic community. What appeared to be missing from the announcement was any of the explanations that often accompany such news. There appeared to be no new professional opportunity, no family or health issues that would explain her decision. There wasn't even a publicly divisive issue that could have led her to such a result.

However, in the wake of Harter's announcement that she will step down on June 30, the local media has reported that she and Chancellor Jim Rogers suffered from a difficult working relationship and that he may be responsible for forcing her resignation.

Howard Rosenberg, a university regent, told the *Review-Journal* that Rogers and Harter's disagreements over management style are actually issues of gender. In fact, he went so far as to state that while strong men in leadership positions are praised, "a woman is considered a bitch."

Rosenberg's invoking of the "B" word is nothing new, but it is, unfortunately, old. No matter how much progress may be made in gender equality, every day women are still suffering from social expectations that we be demure and take a back seat to men. Whether a woman is waitressing or leading a university, she is still expected to acquiesce to men, whether they are restaurant managers or chancellors. And women who achieve power in their chosen fields appear even more threatening in their professional equality and, therefore, are often attacked for being masculine, aggressive and, yes, bitches.

Consider Jesse Helms infamous proclamation: "I do not intend to be pushed around by discourteous, demanding women." And by that he meant elected United States senators. Throughout our culture, we continue to see this mindset purveyed through media images of women, gender-identified professions, sexual harassment statistics and gender discrimination lawsuits. Even the fictional female U.S. president, played by Geena Davis on ABC's *Commander In Chief*, is regularly subjected to doubts concerning both her "masculine" behavior and assumptions that she cannot be aggressive enough to lead the country.

If an imaginary president with script doctors remains caught in such a conundrum, what kind of a chance did President Harter have?

Not much, according to an anonymous higher education official quoted in the *R-J*. Asked about Harter's upcoming move from the president's office to a position with the university foundation, this source stated: "They needed a place to park her. I mean, she couldn't go home and bake cookies."

Does President Harter need to be parked like a car where she can be easily located, watched and kept until such a time when her professional skills will be taken out for a spin? And are we to assume that a person with her experience and expertise would have no other choice after resigning than to return to a domestic role, where perhaps she would continue her past fund-raising success through bake sales? Is this what a lifetime of hard work, dedication and leadership leads to? President Carol Harter: bitch and cookie baker? **CL**