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Enhancing the Attractiveness of Research to Female Faculty

Abstract

[Excerpt] CSWEP has long been concerned about the underrepresentation of women in faculty positions at major research universities. I have been charged by the committee with enumerating a set of policies that might enhance the attractiveness of research universities to female faculty. After presenting some data that suggest the magnitude of the underrepresentation problem, I do so below. In each case, I sketch the pros and cons of the policy. Although the focus is on increasing the attractiveness of research universities to female faculty, many of the policies would increase the attractiveness of academic careers per se to new female Ph.D.s if implemented in academia more broadly.

Keywords

higher education, research universities, female faculty, underrepresentation, policy

Disciplines

Higher Education | Labor Economics | Labor Relations | Law and Gender

Comments

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Enhancing the Attractiveness of Research to Female Faculty

Ronald G. Ehrenberg
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I. Introduction

CSWEP has long been concerned about the underrepresentation of women in faculty positions at major research universities. I have been charged by the committee with enumerating a set of policies that might enhance the attractiveness of research universities to female faculty. After presenting some data that suggest the magnitude of the underrepresentation problem, I do so below. In each case, I sketch the pros and cons of the policy. Although the focus is on increasing the attractiveness of research universities to female faculty, many of the policies would increase the attractiveness of academic careers per se to new female Ph.D.s if implemented in academia more broadly.

The CSWEP Board's plan is to distribute a revised version of this document to all CSWEP representatives and chairs of economics departments, as well as to present it to the AEA Executive Committee. Before doing so, however, the Board would like to hear any reactions that you have to these proposals, as well as your views as to other policies that you believe would be desirable. Reactions should be directed to the Chair of the Committee - Professor Robin Bartlett, Department of Economics, Denison University, Granville, OH 43023 (bartlett@denison.edu).

II. The Data

Table I presents data on the proportion of female faculty nationwide, by rank and institutional category in 1995-96. These data come from the annual AAUP institutional survey and span all disciplines. They show quite clearly that at each rank, the proportion of faculty that is female is higher at the general baccalaureate (undergraduate) institutions than it is at the comprehensive (masters level) institutions, which in turn is higher than it is at the doctoral level institutions. Furthermore, at each type of institution, the proportion of faculty that is female progressively declines as one moves from the assistant professor to associate professor to full professor level.

The latter result is partially attributable to the changing demographic distribution of new doctorates. As Table 2 indicates, the proportion of new Ph.D.'s that is female has steadily increased over the last 20 years. However, data collected by CSWEP for doctoral level economics departments over a recent five year period suggests that this is not the only explanation.

In particular, the CSWEP data suggest that the proportion of assistant professors promoted to associate professor is lower for females than it is for males at Ph.D.-granting departments. Similarly, the proportion of associate professors promoted to full professors is lower for females than it is for males at these institutions. Since, the proportion of newly hired assistant professors that is female at these institutions is slightly lower than the

employment because of the focus on faculty spouses and other partners. Unless these people become equally productive, the quality of administrative and support services provided by the university would be lower.

D) Scheduling Issues

Departments might be encouraged to schedule courses and meetings in ways that facilitate faculty parents meeting their child care responsibilities. If faculty meetings are scheduled on weekends, late afternoon, or evenings, departments might consider paying for child care expenses for those meetings.

Some faculty with spouses and partners find themselves in long distance commuting relationships. Consideration might be given to allowing these faculty increased flexibility in scheduling. For example, they might be allowed to cluster their teaching during a few days each week, or for those on quarter systems, during two rather than three quarters.

Objections to such policies may come from colleagues who are asked to teach at times that they consider less desirable. Paying for child care expenses also has cost implications.

E) Professional Expenses

Some departments reimburse faculty for expenses associated with attending professional meetings. To encourage female faculty with young children to attend meetings, these departments might also include potential funding for child care expenses in their allocations. The only real issue here is costs.

F) Compensating Workload

The relative small number of female faculty are often asked to accept disproportionately high student advising and committee assignments. Since these activities are rarely rewarded in tenure decisions, one might contemplate reducing their other workloads. For example, if a female faculty member advises many more students than other faculty do, she might occasionally be given a compensating course reduction if she does an outstanding advising job.

Critics of such proposals argue that this will place women in the position of concentrating their effort in an aspect of their job that is not readily rewarded at tenure time. This may be a true concern and that is why it is important that extra advising and committee work not be accomplished at the expense of research performance.

IV. Concluding Remarks

Not all of the policies discussed above are of equal importance. For example, colleagues on the CSWEP Board strongly feel that parental leave, longer tenure clocks, on-campus child care and compensating workloads are the major issues that should be discussed.

Different people may have different views so one should view the list of policies as a menu that should be discussed on each campus. However, if institutions want to make progress in attracting and retaining more female faculty, even marginal policy changes may make a difference.

CSWEP Board members and Cornell colleagues have also stressed to me that the availability of a written statement by each university spelling out what its policies are with respect to these issues may well be the single most important policy it can implement. In the absence of such a document, it is often difficult for female faculty to know whether a policy exists in an area and, if so, what the policy is. Written statements help female faculty from having to individually incur search and information costs and go through individual negotiations with chairs - who often don't know the policies either. Indeed, in my administrative role at Cornell, I have several times seen how the absence of written policies has contributed to different treatment of different women and led to considerable acrimony at tenure decision time.

Finally, several female colleagues have stressed to me that the key issue is not looking for ways for female faculty to do less work than their male counterparts, but rather for ways for the university to recognize family-related concerns. Indeed, some have even gone so far as to suggest that it is a responsibility of faculty in academic jobs not to abuse flexibility in their work schedules. Perhaps, it may turn out that the establishment of policies to increase the attractiveness of research universities to women, rather than female faculty actually making substantial use of these policies, will be the thing that increases the desires of female Ph.D.'s to come to and stay at these institutions.

Table 1. Proportion of Female Faculty, by Rank and Institutional Category in 1995-96: All Disciplines

Academic Rank/ Institutional Category	Doctoral Level	Comprehensive (Masters')	General Baccalaureate
Professors	.13	.19	.20
Associate Professors	.28	.33	.37
Assistant Professors	.42	.47	.48

Source: Author's calculations from Daniel Hamermesh, "The Annual Report on the Economic Status of the Profession: 1995-96", *Academe* 82

(March/April 1996): Table 12

Table 2. Share of New Doctorates Awarded By US Universities to Women

Year	Total	Physical Sciences	Engineering	Life Sciences	Social Sciences	Humanities	Education	Professional Other
1973	.180	.072	.014	.181	.210	.286	.246	.127
1978	.270	.105	.022	.230	.308	.377	.397	.205
1983	.338	.139	.045	.310	.395	.437	.504	.294
1988	.352	.166	.068	.368	.450	.443	.552	.320
1994	.385	.203	.109	.416	.494	.477	.609	.371

Source: National Research Council: Summary Report: Doctorate Recipients from United States Universities. Washington, DC: National Academy Press. 1989 (Table E) and 1995 (Table 1A)

Endnotes

1. Vice President for Academic Programs, Planning and Budgeting and Irving M. Ives Professor of Industrial and Labor Relations and Economics at Cornell University. I am greatly indebted to my colleagues on the CSWEP Board and to numerous female faculty at Cornell University for their comments on earlier drafts.
2. See Rebecca Blank, "Committee on the Status of Women in the Economics Profession 1995 Annual Report," American Economic Association Papers and Proceedings 86 (May 1986): 502-507. During the 1990-94 period the share of newly hired or promoted associate professors that were women averaged 4.2 percentage points below women's representation at the assistant professor level in these institutions. Similarly, the share of new full-professor hires or promotions was 2.7 percentage points below the share of female associate professors.
3. See Debra Barbazet, "The Market for New Ph.D. Economists," Journal of Economic Education 24 (Summer 1992): 262-276.
4. See Shulamit Kahn, "Women in the Economics Profession," Journal of Economic Perspectives 9 (Fall 1995): 193-205 and the references cited therein.
5. On a personal note, when my son was struck by a malignant brain tumor in 1990-91, I spent nine months with him in a hospital 50 miles from Cornell as he underwent in-patient and out-patient treatment. A young assistant professor placed in the same situation I was would have found the situation even more stressful than I did.
6. This was the reaction of the majority of the Stanford faculty when then President Donald Kennedy proposed such a plan to them several years ago.
7. Such a program has been developed at the University of Wisconsin for female faculty by Barbara Wolfe.

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