

3-25-2004

Faculty Members Weigh In on the Gender Divide in Academia

S. Keith Hargrove
Morgan State University

Richard B. Pierce
University of Notre Dame

Stephanie Shonekan
Columbia College Chicago

Teresa Reed
University of Tulsa

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/advance>



Part of the [Law and Gender Commons](#), and the [Other Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Black Issues. (2004). Faculty Members Weigh In on the Gender Divide in Academia. *Black Issues in Higher Education*, 22(54).

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Gender Equity and Diversity at DigitalCommons@USU. It has been accepted for inclusion in ADVANCE Library Collection by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@USU. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@usu.edu.

were only 39 percent of engineering and 55 percent of physical science doctorates in 2002 — Anderson says, “You’ve got to look at the comfort level we have in hiring folk from outside the country (for positions in the academy) when we could be preparing our own minority students instead.”

“People have bought into the idea that minorities can’t contribute in this area. That’s a problem I see that, at some point, we’ve got to deal with head on,” she adds.

Nelson has been inundated with calls since her study was released in January. She has testified on Capitol Hill, given a National Press Club briefing, been asked for data by the National Science Foundation, the National Institutes of Health and National Academies of Science. But in some ways, she confesses, she’s “disgusted” by the hoopla.

“My sense is that they could have been collecting this data all along,” she says, adding that she finds it particularly appalling that her study may be the first to make a serious attempt to disaggregate data on women and women of color.

“A study of this importance should not fall to a lone chemistry professor at the University of Oklahoma,” adds Nelson, whose ancestry is one-quarter American Indian.

Dr. Evelyn Hammonds, who is only the fourth African American woman to achieve the rank of full professor in Harvard’s Faculty of Arts and Sciences, is one of those who has been pushing for years for more information on women of color in the sciences.

“We have nothing comparable to the kind of historical analysis that’s been done of the history of women in science — and by that, what’s meant is the history of White women, not the history of

Faculty Members Weigh In on the Gender Divide in Academia

In 2001, a roundtable on gender disparities for female professors in higher education was held at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The focus of the roundtable was “how best to ensure women professors experience the same opportunities, recognition and rewards as their male counterparts.” Some three years later, a few faculty members from various disciplines weigh in with various perspectives on the current state of the gender gap.

FOCUS ON TENURE-RELATED ACTIVITIES



**DR. S. KEITH HARGROVE, CHAIR
INDUSTRIAL, MANUFACTURING AND
INFORMATION ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT
SCHOOL OF ENGINEERING
MORGAN STATE UNIVERSITY**

According to a study by the American Society of Engineering Education (ASEE), women comprised 8.9 percent of tenure/tenure-track faculty in engineering schools. And for under-represented minorities, African Americans were 2.1 percent and Hispanics 2.9 percent. America is confronted with not only expanding the technical work force with engineers and scientists for the 21st century, but also with producing educators to train and educate more than 150,000 engineers annually. Many universities have had some success in recruiting more women faculty, but efforts are far more complex for attracting minorities. Especially when women account for approximately 15 percent of doctoral graduates, and minorities less than 4 percent. In 2002, 23 African American women received doctorates in engineering.

Three challenges remain: attract and expand the pipeline or pool in engineering education to produce and increase the nation’s work force; encourage women and minorities to pursue graduate study; and encourage women and minorities to pursue academic careers that are rewarding within an environment that ensures their success. The latter appears to have a greater impact on women and minorities when it comes to tenure.

It will require institutions to make firm commitments to hiring, effective mentoring, faculty development and minimizing “over-exposure” of minority faculty on committees for diversity representation.

It is critical that minority faculty focus only on TVAs (tenure valued

activities) the first seven years, and receive the support of department chairs and deans to make it so. Yet (these faculty members) are also challenged to play a role in encouraging students to pursue similar careers. Maintaining meaningful balance is the key.

Minority faculty and women should also develop strong networks for professional and personal support throughout their academic careers. Academic socialization, one’s ability to network amongst peers, and cultural advantage, which refers to the somewhat biased nature of the antiquated tenure evaluation process that exists in academia, play a role in faculty sustainability.

OVERCOME THE “MAMMY” CONDITION



**DR. RICHARD B. PIERCE
CARL E. KOCH ASSISTANT PROFESSOR
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR,
AFRICAN AND AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME**

I recently spoke with female faculty from three different universities, and learned of the pervasiveness of what they termed the “mammy” condition. It is a practice whereby students feel emboldened to challenge grades more forcefully, drop into faculty offices to discuss issues both personal and academic, and generally seek more caretaking from female faculty. I do not know of men who are so encumbered. One friend noted that students at her southern university resisted addressing her as Doctor or Professor; instead, they preferred to call her Ms. or Mrs. There are circumstances that most African American faculty share and endure, but there are definitely gendered differences.

African American women and women of color," explains Hammonds, who teaches both the history of science and African American Studies at Harvard.

"That produces a significant gap in our knowledge — there's just too much we don't know about how gender and race work together to produce marginalization," Hammonds adds.

A variety of qualitative studies — Hammonds mentions Dr. Abby Stewart's work at the University of Michigan — give eloquent testimony to the "hostile climate" endured by women and women of color in the sciences and engineering.

But, she adds, "In terms of the quantitative work that needs to be done to build better tracking systems, in terms of the qualitative and historical analyses that will allow us to say we know something about why this is happening, we're just at the beginning."

Nelson, meanwhile, hopes that her study can spark a conversation about what women can start doing to help each other.

"We know that OCR and OFCCP" — the federal offices of Civil Rights and Federal Contract Compliance Programs — "are not doing what they ought to be doing," she says

"So how do we educate young women and women of color and minorities about what they're going to face? I'm starting to think it's not enough to tell them, 'You need to network, go to meetings, find mentors.' What we should be saying is: 'You may experience isolation, snide comments, social games, office politics. This is how you recognize the pattern; this is how you analyze what's going on; and this is how you sidestep and surmount it.'

"That's the conversation that I want to start having," Nelson says. ■

LOOK BEYOND THE GENDER QUESTION



DR. STEPHANIE SHONEKAN
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF HUMANITIES
LIBERAL EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
COLUMBIA COLLEGE CHICAGO

There is a particular need in a department that encompasses the study of the humanities, history, social sciences, foreign languages, cultural studies and gender studies to include qualified women who can bring thoughtful, intellectual deliberation and a unique sensitivity to study aspects of the world's cultures. It seems that these women have many opportunities for recognition and advancement. So, from my perspective as a faculty member who is female, the gender gap does not yet seem to be apparent. I would not be surprised if monetary rewards are stacked in favor of the men, however, as is the case across the country.

I found a need to look beyond the gender question. My students recently tackled the distinction between the philosophies of feminism and Black womanism. The general consensus was that while Black women share some common issues with White women, they also have different priorities and concerns that confront them from their position in the Black community. Therefore, from the perspective of a faculty member who is female and Black, the question of the gender gap takes on a different, less satisfactory tone.

The problem is not that Black women are not well represented. It is that Black men are not. This should be of concern to the Black community on the whole, and Black women in particular. Throughout college, and in fact I suspect across many segments of education, industry and professional sectors, Black women seem more visible than Black men. In my department, there are three Black women and one Black man. This is probably typical of faculty make-up, but it is a dilemma that begins much earlier in the academic process.

Many of my female students share with me their plans to go on to graduate school. I rarely hear this from Black male students. I am excited that young Black women are considering further study and careers in the arts and humanities, but I am disturbed that most young Black men that I have encountered do not seem to aspire in the same way. Perhaps this is not the case in the sciences, but if we are to keep in mind what W.E.B. Du Bois said about the power of gaining higher

education and the knowledge of cultures and traditions of the world, we should all be concerned that although the gender gap is narrowing on the whole, the Black academic community is experiencing an inverse situation. We should ask ourselves the very important question — how can we encourage young Black men to proceed to graduate school and eventually become professors in areas like the liberal arts?

STAY BALANCED AND PRAGMATIC



DR. TERESA REED, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR,
MUSIC THEORY AND LITERATURE,
AFRICAN AMERICAN MUSIC, SCHOOL OF MUSIC
DIRECTOR, AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES PROGRAM
UNIVERSITY OF TULSA

My perception is that while women are certainly well represented in academia, that representation is most pronounced in fields with which women have been traditionally associated. In nursing, education and the arts, for example, women tend to function in roles ranging from adjunct professor to department chair. This is less the case in fields like law and political science, which, traditionally, have been bastions of male hegemony. With regard to curricula, there are numerous incentives to develop and teach courses in women's studies. These "specialized" courses, however, tend to function as addenda to primary or required curricula, and they indicate the extent to which women's voices — and hence, women — remain locked outside of the power centers of the academic mainstream.

At my institution, I have witnessed an increase in the number of female professors with tenure. I have not seen any marked increase in the number of women with full professorships, nor have I seen an increase in the number of female academic deans. On the administrative side, there is reason for optimism. Although my institution has never had a female president, there are women who rank at the level of associate vice president and vice president, and the current director of athletics at my institution is female.

I am a tenured associate professor, but I have no aspirations beyond this rank, and the reasons for this are more pragmatic than anything. Likewise, my female colleagues are reticent to climb the ladder of academia, simply because the demands of child rearing and homemaking leave little time to compete for promotion. ■