

**Recruiting, Promoting, and Retaining Women Academics:
Lessons from the Literature**

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Recruiting:

1-1) Be alert for instances of gender bias, as it may affect the recruitment of women academics.

Men's traits are generally viewed as more valuable than women's, and men are diffusedly judged as more competent (Ridgeway 1997). Women academics are perceived as "less productive and/or incapable of succeeding in full-time, tenure-track positions" (Perna 2001), which results in women's performances being subject to both more scrutiny and higher standards than comparable men (Williams 2004). One common type of bias is "attribution bias," where "people tend to attribute the behavior of members of their in-group to stable causes, while they attribute the behavior of out-groups to situational causes: he's brilliant, but she just got lucky." Attribution biases are especially likely in situations of tokenism, i.e., when there is only one woman in a department or within a rank. Social categorization and in-group biases that lead to attribution biases are part of the normal functioning of cognition, and they occur regardless of people's conscious feelings toward other groups (Reskin 2000, p. 321; Fiske 1998, p. 364). Constant self-evaluation and a system of accountability can undermine these cognitive tendencies.

1-2) Beware of gendered evaluation of interpersonal behavior and communication.

Studies indicate that when men are assertive, this is perceived as evidence of great talent, but when women exhibit the same behavior, they are seen in a negative fashion, as being too aggressive (Williams 2004). Similarly, men and women who engage in "self-promotion" are often viewed in different ways, with men being admired for their accomplishments, but women being seen as arrogant. Arguments about women candidates being too aggressive or "difficult" are often used to disqualify them.

1-3) Guard against homophily in hiring decisions; broaden the search beyond personal networks.

Homophily in hiring and promotion decisions occurs when recruiters seek to "reproduce themselves in their own image" (Kanter 1977). Evaluators look for "outward manifestations" of the "right sort of person" and choose to hire and promote those from within their own social group who resemble them most (e.g., brilliant young men on a steep trajectory in whom they can project themselves). Homophily often affects the candidate pool when informal networks are used for recruitment and job searches, which results in more men being hired (Ibarra 1992; Reskin and McBrier 2000). Thus, it is imperative to search broadly when recruiting, so that job candidates are not limited to those referred through the personal networks of decision makers. This may be facilitated by bringing in more women to give talks within departments and research centers.

1-4) Identifying stellar women may require looking into a slightly older pool of candidates.

Women academics with children often have a productivity gap as compared to their male counterparts. Indeed, there is evidence that women academics with children are less productive than non-parents, putting in fewer hours per week in the lab and being less likely to present at academic conferences than their peers (Mason and Goulden 2002). Thus stellar women may peak slightly later than their male colleagues. Also, while this productivity gap disappears as women enter higher ranked positions, women with children face disproportionate difficulty in reaching higher ranks. Hence the importance of looking beyond the “below 45” cohort to identify academic stars who are women.¹

1-5) Support an increased number of women in university administration and recruitment committees.

Women are more likely to be hired for positions generally occupied by men when there are more women in critical administrative posts (Konrad and Pfeffer 1991; Cohen et al 1998). Consider appointing more women on in key decision-making positions within your department and putting forward women’s names for higher-level appointments. This will increase the likelihood of hiring women. In particular, efforts should be made to insure that promotion committees are diverse.

1-6) Consider better accommodating dual-career couples.

More women academics have spouses with advanced degrees than male academics (Mason and Goulden 2002). Recruiting top-level women academics may be greatly facilitated by creating opportunities for their spouses.

Promoting:

2-1) In promotion decisions, take into consideration the differential impact of having children on men and women.

Having a child early in a woman’s academic career hurts her chances of receiving tenure (Mason and Goulden 2002). Men who have children early in their careers do not experience this negative consequence. Given the challenges women academics face when combining motherhood with a successful academic career, we should interpret carefully temporary drops in productivity when assessing likely long-term trajectory.²

¹ The overall hours per week spent on care-giving, household labor, and professional work by women academics (30-50 yrs with kids) is over 100, compared with the 85+ hours by male counterparts (Mason and Goulden 2004).

² Because the average age of obtaining a Ph.D. is quite late (33), postponing children until after one obtains tenure is no longer an option for many scholars (Jacob and Winslow 2004; also Jacobs 2004).

2-2) Make the criteria for evaluation and promotion more objective and explicit.

Although vague and subjective criteria allow for some “flexibility” in evaluation, numerous studies indicate that the more loosely defined the criteria, the more likely bias will operate (Deaux and Emswiller 1974; Nieve and Gutek, 1980). Evidence shows that universities can affect the success of women positively by making the criteria for rewards more explicit (Fox 1985). Great transparency in standards, rules, and process generally facilitates greater gender equity in academia.³ A close reading a scholar’s work, as opposed to relying more exclusive on reputation or citation counts, generally works in favor of women, as they tend to be less likely to be the beneficiary of symbolic citations than men.

2-3) Equalize distribution of teaching, research, and service tasks.

Women faculty members tend to have disproportionate levels of routine service and teaching obligations compared to men. However, tenure decisions often place a higher importance on research (Menges and Exum 1983). Thus, balancing teaching, research, and service across the sexes may lead to more equitable promotion outcomes for women.

2-4) Increase access to informal institutional networks and decision-making.

Several studies conclude that women leave academia in part because they are less involved in central departmental and institutional decision-making (Trower and Chait 2002, Fried et al. 1996). Thus, increasing access to networks and decision-making concerning matters of significance may lead to greater retention of junior women faculty.

2-5) Reduce isolation from colleagues by fostering mentorship and collaborations.

Women in academia are less likely than men to have mentors who foster their careers (Fried et al. 1996). They are also less likely to be involved with collaborative research projects with other faculty members. Reducing isolation may lead to increased productivity and greater likelihood of promotion. Isolation may be reduced by the addition of more female faculty and by increasing the role of women in informal institutional networks and decision-making.

2-6) Increase resources such as personnel, space, and equipment.

In general, women have less access than men to the structural and personal resources that enhance research productivity (Xie and Shauman 1988; see also Fried et al. 1996). Thus women typically publish fewer papers early in their careers, decreasing chances of promotion to higher ranked positions. However, once women do reach higher ranks, this disparity in productivity between the sexes lessens or even reverses itself.

³ Note however that some studies suggest that women are not disadvantaged by the use of subjective, as opposed to objective, criteria of evaluation (e.g. Hennessey and Bernardin 2003).

2-7) Favor internal promotion when possible.

There is evidence that women are more likely to be promoted from within than hired externally (Konrad and Pfeffer 1991). However, internal promotion and external hiring should both be pursued.

Fostering Diversity within Departments

3-1) Support an overall change in the departmental culture whereby taking leave, slowing the tenure clock, or having a flexible schedule are considered the norm for caregivers.

Department can improve the likelihood of retaining, and eventually promoting, more junior women by implementing a strategy that changes the “culture, climate, day-to-day practices and expectations” to reduce subtle forms of discrimination (Drago et al. 2001; see also Finkin 1996). Simply adding work-family policies such as parental leaves at the university level will not be enough, as faculty may avoid using such policies for fear of adversely affecting their careers. There are a variety of strategies and mechanisms that encourage the development of a more family-friendly culture within departments, including using a third party to negotiate parental leave or reduced work-load, promotion and advertisement of work-family policies, and the continual monitoring of the perceived work-family climate (Drago et al. 2001). Department should consider adopting such mechanisms.

3-2) Each department should consider appointing a standing committee on diversity to evaluate and make recommendations on topics relevant to gender equality.

Case studies show that merely adding formal policies—such as leave policies or formal evaluation criteria—is not very effective in terms of promoting gender equity (Drago 2001; Sturm 2001). Ongoing evaluation of relevant factors such as the composition of search and promotion committees and the distribution of resources and responsibilities is more effective in promoting gender equity. Individuals familiar with the culture and history of departments are best qualified for finding problems and solutions specific to each environment. Programs that establish an ongoing evaluation structure—such as a diversity committee, a diversity staff person, and an affirmative action plan that is revised annually—are most effective in increasing diversity (Kalev, Dobbin and Kelly 2003; see also Sturm 2001). Also particularly effective is having departmental diversity audit every five years.

3-3) Create a more inclusive environment by adjusting the scheduling of meetings and talks to reduce work/family conflicts.

Women are more likely than men to experience conflict between the expectations of academic culture and personal responsibilities (Drago et al. 2001; see also Fried et al. 1996). Avoid scheduling departmental meetings and talks after 5:00 pm to insure greater integration and participation of women faculty members in the decision-making and

intellectual life of the department. Family-friendly scheduling can have an impact on whether or not women faculty members perceive their department as inclusive and as a place where they will want to stay.

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