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# The Gender Gap on Service

January 12, 2011

For years, women in academe have complained that they are [assigned a disproportionate share of departmental service duties](#) -- work that needs to be done but that doesn't carry much weight when it's time to decide who gets promoted.

[A study](#) on the issue -- by Joya Misra, Jennifer Hicke Lundquist, Elissa Dahlberg Holmes and Stephanie Agiomavritis -- is being released today in *Academe*. It explores the subject through surveys of and interviews with 350 faculty members at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst in 2008-9 -- and finds significant gender gaps in service assignments and advancement of male and female professors. The study examines patterns related to specific service duties as well as allocation of time.

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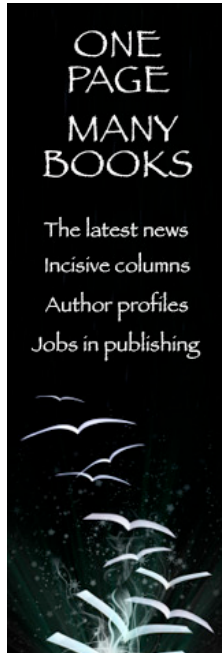
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One duty studied was serving as director of an academic department's undergraduate program. Of associate professors, one third of women but only 17 percent of men had served as undergraduate directors. "Because undergraduate directors spent more time teaching and working with undergraduates -- tasks that research universities tend to undervalue -- gendered norms may contribute to women associate professors spending more time in devalued roles," the paper says.

In fact, the study finds that women associate professors who served as undergraduate directors took, on average, 12 years (rather than the typical 7) after receiving tenure to be promoted to full professor. Male associate professors who served as undergraduate directors moved to full professor at the normal pace. While the study acknowledges that a range of factors beyond serving as undergraduate director may be involved, it notes the significant gap in years.

In terms of time on various tasks, the survey asked faculty members at different ranks to measure the hours spent in various activities. For most ranks, the faculty members reported only modest differences by gender, with women spending a little more time on mentoring and service. But associate professors reported "remarkable differences" by gender, the report says. These disparities are significant given [recent attention by the Modern Language Association](#) and others to the fact that women's advancement up the academic ladder seems to stall at the associate professor level.

Male and female associate professors reported working the same number of hours in total (around 64 a week). But men spend seven and a half hours more a week on research than did women. Assuming no gaps in time spent during summers or semester breaks. Even if these differences in research time occurred only during semesters, not during summer or holiday breaks, this would mean that men spend in excess of two hundred more hours on their research each year than women did, the report says.

How are the female associate professors spending their time? On average, they devote an hour more a week to teaching, two hours more a week to mentoring and five hours more on service.

Of overall time, male associate professors reported spending 37 percent of their hours on research (the activity most likely to earn them advancement) and 20 percent on service (the activity least likely to result in advancement). Women, in contrast, reported spending 25 percent of their time on research and more -- 27 percent -- on service.

Those surveyed were asked about their preferences for work assignments -- and women and men were equal in feeling that they had too much to do and not wanting additional service assignments. So the paper argues that these gaps can't be attributed to women wanting to do more service than do men.

The paper offers several strategies that may deal with the pressure felt

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### Comments on **The Gender Gap on Service**

#### Conceptual Change

Posted by **Bruce Larson**, Professor of Economics at University of North Carolina at Asheville on January 12, 2011 at 7:30am EST

I found this to be interesting, although not surprising, and look forward to learning more. It is always of great value to provide evidence for what casual observation suggests.

Some of the examples of "assigned service" actually sound more like administration to me. Perhaps it is time that we recognize and build into our conceptualization of faculty work that 'administration' will be part of virtually every faculty member's work over his or her career.

So, instead of the traditional "three-legged stool" (or triangle, as might be more appropriate), we might look to something with four aspects: teaching, scholarship, service, and administration. This is the approach suggested by the work of Arreola and Theall of the Meta-Profession Project.

To learn more about the Project, please see: <http://www.cedanet.com/meta/>. Among other things, you will find at the site materials from their January 2010 AAC&U presentation. Although this won't resolve gender (or other) bias, it will help us all think more clearly about the problems we are wrestling with.

Posted by **skeptic** on January 12, 2011 at 9:15am EST

"In fact, the study finds that women associate professors who served as undergraduate directors took, on average, 12 years (rather than the typical 7) after receiving tenure to be promoted to full professor. Male associate professors who served as undergraduate directors moved to full professor at the normal pace. While the study acknowledges that a range of factors beyond serving as undergraduate director may be involved, it notes the significant gap in years."

I agree that (1) taking too many service obligations can slow one's progress toward promotion, and (2) that women and minorities may have more service obligations. However, the above paragraph would seem to belie the association between service and years to promotion. If male undergraduate professors serving as undergraduate directors move to full professor at a normal pace but female associate professors in the same position do not, then it appears that gender is the issue, and not service. Can anyone clarify this?

Posted by **Last Woman Standing** on January 12, 2011 at 10:15am EST

Has anyone looked at how the phenomenon of replacing tenure lines with adjuncts affects this issue? At my institution, women have so many service (read: administrative) obligations because departments have shrunk. In my department, there are exactly half the tenure-track/tenured professors that there were when I came to the university, and we can't ask adjuncts with heavy teaching loads to mentor graduate students, advise undergrads, write never-ending assessment reports for administrators, etc. All of these tasks have to be completed, nonetheless, so the survivors end up taking on more and more work, and most are women with young families. It's not surprising that research suffers.

**causal thread?****Posted by Hoosier Prof on January 12, 2011 at 11:30am EST**

I just welcomed another crop of new, junior colleagues, and the message I gave to my female colleagues was "just say no" when colleagues started knocking on their doors asking for committee volunteers. Note that I went to the volunteers with this message, not the Dean. And the following will explain why:

One question this study seems to dance around is WHY these gender disparities exist in service activities. Are women being asked/told to take on more service activities, or are they volunteering to do so? We know that women are socialized differently into volunteer behaviors, and this nature/nurture gender difference crops up in all kinds of studies. So doesn't it stand to reason that women take it on themselves to mentor more, teach more, serve more? So from the POV of prevention, isn't that an important question to ask?

I am not trying to assign blame with this question, just trying to get at how the behavior can be changed. It might be easier, in fact, to institute departmental policies that protect junior women, than to communicate the appropriate message to women to stop being such accommodating colleagues. But it might be less effective to do so in terms of changing the behavior. Moreover, since so much of the "asking" is not by deans but by other colleagues (a decentralized system that is harder to control), it is probably less effective to institute policies from the top down than it is to encourage women to "just say no".

**Having to be careful about saying no****Posted by Doctor K on January 12, 2011 at 12:15pm EST**

A personal policy of "just say no" for female professors has problems of its own. Tenured professors may interpret too many "no's" as a lack of collegiality and punish that professor when she comes up for tenure. While it's still rare, a former colleague of mine was denied tenure on the basis of insufficient service, an excuse, really, for someone the Chair found to be not particularly "collegial."

The best approach is for university top administrators to start placing more value on these roles, which can be critical to the success of the institution.

**What is valued?****Posted by Phil Pons , Doctoral student at Old Dominion University on January 12, 2011 at 12:45pm EST**

Another question we might ask is why are the functions of teaching and mentoring of so little value in higher education?

**Or could it be?****Posted by Good questions on January 12, 2011 at 1:00pm EST**

Or is it that women are asked more to do service because we've become conscious about making sure committees are more representative? If you have less women than men in a department, this means women in that dept will do more service hours than the men.

**Yes it could****Posted by S R Thomas , Assoc. prof. at SLAC on January 12, 2011 at 2:30pm EST**

"Good questions" asks a good question, and this is one I've been talking about since I was a grad student. Yes, it's good to have wider representation on the committees that make the important decisions, especially about e.g. curriculum and rank/tenure. And yes, that means that members of under-represented groups do a disproportionate amount of service, because they are (ahem) under-represented. Fewer women [blacks, disabled folks, ...] means more service per capita.

I think one answer is to encourage administrators to make sure there is broad representation on the committees that actually matter, and to worry about it less on the minor committees. Also, administrators should keep this matter in mind when considering whom to assign to (or ask to join) a committee; don't go back to the same few people.

**Posted by Prof. on January 12, 2011 at 2:30pm EST**

In puzzling over why service commitments slow women's advancement more than men's, it's worth noting that not only are women socialized to be more giving of their time, but research consistently shows that students also expect more from women faculty in terms of time and emotional labor. When women don't provide what students expect, they are also more likely to complain about women faculty than men. So it makes sense to me that women undergrad advisors are slowed in the pathway to full professor because the expectations of their performance in this job are in fact different than if a man colleague holds the same position, and they are more likely to experience consequences if they don't

satisfy those higher expectations.

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**Be careful when looking at percentages**

Posted by **Ken Mellendorf**, Physics Professor on January 12, 2011 at 2:30pm EST

When in a department with perhaps 20% female and 80% male faculty, a committee of three will often be required to have one female member. This will require a greater portion of time devoted to such committee duties for the women of the department. Are more women in such circumstances because men don't want to do it, or because some aspects are balanced by number and others are balanced by percentage?



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