

An Agenda for Excellence:

Creating Flexibility
in Tenure-Track
Faculty Careers

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Executive Summary

OVERVIEW



The critical work-life dilemmas detailed in *An Agenda for Excellence: Creating Flexibility in Tenure-Track Faculty Careers* indicate an urgent need for higher education leaders to examine and proactively address the institutional climate that governs the entire career cycle of faculty—from entry into tenure-track positions to retirement. As they shape long-term fiscal and strategic plans for their institutions, college and university leaders need to evaluate and act on all aspects of faculty career cycles. They need to do so to attract and retain those who are most talented in order to maintain excellence in teaching and cutting-edge, innovative research and to provide incentives for older faculty to retire with satisfaction and financial security, thereby accommodating the next generation of scholars and teachers. Central to

meeting this challenge is finding ways to create more flexible career paths for the tenure-track professoriate to enter, thrive in, and retire from academia.

An increasing number of new PhDs leave academia or opt for careers outside the traditional tenure-track path.¹ Many are forced to do so because of the tightening academic job market in a wide range of disciplines. Others, especially women, find themselves in adjunct and non-tenure-track positions—despite low pay, minimal or no benefits, and lack of potential job security—for a better balance between personal/family life and professional life.² Such positions provide them the time and flexibility they seek to place family as their priority at particular stages of their lives and careers. Faculty with unusual caregiving responsibilities (e.g., multiple births, a

dependent with a physical or mental disability, or terminally ill dependents) might especially choose non-tenure-track career paths to manage work and life demands better.

Besides faculty work-life issues, U.S. research universities have an added dilemma: They need to be concerned with maintaining competitiveness in the global higher education market and the security of the country. As national security issues heighten and the number of

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international scientists who study and work in the United States decreases, this country will increasingly depend on the capacity of U.S. research universities to continue to produce American scientists and engineers who engage in innovative research that will transfer into cutting-edge discoveries and developments for citizens' financial, physical, and environmental well-being. Career flexibility

for tenure-track faculty is key to attracting and retaining this scientific workforce in academia.

Without a doubt, academics in non-tenure-track positions encounter a unique set of challenges in their roles. However, this report and related project* focus solely on issues and challenges that current tenure-track and tenured faculty experience, with a special focus on research universities. Non-tenure-track faculty are considered in this report only with respect to developing and implementing strategies for moving them into tenure-track positions if and when they are ready to pursue this career option. Other projects sponsored by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation (*see list in Appendix II of the full report*) investigate challenges experienced by non-tenure-track faculty and doctoral students who are considering academic careers.

*The Alfred P. Sloan Foundation funded this project, *Creating Options: Models for Flexible Tenure-Track Faculty Career Pathways*, with the goals of challenging the current rigid structure of faculty career paths and creating models to assist campuses in thinking more strategically about effecting beneficial change in faculty career cycles. Further, this report serves as the primary vehicle through which the major objectives of the project are to be announced. These objectives include raising awareness of faculty work-life issues throughout higher education, sparking a national dialogue to encourage change, and generating thoughtful, tested approaches to assist campuses in adapting promising practices to address faculty work-life issues.

WHY PRESIDENTS AND CHANCELLORS MUST ACT

Institutional leaders must act immediately to attract the best faculty to the tenure-track professoriate at research universities. As student enrollments of women and people of color continue to grow—both at the undergraduate and graduate levels—these demographic groups will represent a substantial proportion of the pipeline to the professoriate. However, current data show that women tend to be less likely to pursue tenure-track faculty positions at research universities after earning doctorates, and anecdotal evidence suggests the same is true for PhDs of color.

In certain disciplines, namely science and technology, U.S. higher education cannot afford to lose any of its potential intellectual workforce and desperately needs the best talent in research and teaching. Talented scholars are necessary for innovative research and development to contribute to economic development of the country and to keep U.S. higher education in a competitive position worldwide, as well as for the country's security. With the time and financial investment that individuals and institutions make in becoming or producing scientific and technological researchers, it is critical for institutional leaders to devise strategies for attracting them into and retaining them in academia. As the United States continues to lose its science and technology workforce because of retirements and decreasing numbers of foreign scholars, the country needs to increase the number of homegrown scientific and technological researchers now more than ever.

There is a growing need for higher education faculty to reflect the diverse demographics of students and increasing pressure to nurture and develop more of our science and technology intellectual workforce from the American citizenry. Given these conditions, *An Agenda for Excellence* offers findings from the research on tenure-track faculty careers. These findings all point to the vulnerabilities of the tenure-track academic profession, particularly at research universities, if action is not taken immediately.

What the Data Show

Most of the findings cited below and detailed in the full report primarily refer to the adversities experienced by women and people of color because much of the research conducted has focused on the disparate treatment of women and people of color in academia. However, increasingly, white males also are finding a need to better manage the professional and personal spheres of their lives—for dependent care, health, and a host of other personal reasons. Further research is needed on how personal responsibilities are increasingly affecting the career paths of male academics; however, data do show that young white male faculty are making career sacrifices for parenting and caregiving at a much higher rate than their senior counterparts. Young white males also are more likely to support family-friendly institutional policies and resources, not only for the benefit of women, but for themselves as well.³ Senior white males typically have spouses or partners who do not work or work only part

time to manage their home lives; young white male faculty members have spouses or partners who work full time out of financial necessity. Consequently, faculty homes with spouses or partners to manage the family and household are becoming obsolete.

While most studies may relate largely to women and people of color, the recommendations found on pp. 9–11 are applicable to all tenure-track faculty members.

Diversity of the Professoriate: Growing but Not Enough

- Two decades ago, 90 percent of full-time faculty members were white males; today, women earn 51 percent of all doctorates awarded to U.S. citizens from American institutions and represent 38 percent of full-time faculty, while 15 percent of full-time faculty are people of color.⁴
 - However, the representation of women and people of color among the full-time professoriate still does not reflect the growth in enrollments of women and students of color at the undergraduate and graduate levels.
 - While their proportions have grown, women and people of color are still disproportionately relegated to the lowest tenure-track ranks of the academic profession or to non-tenure-track positions.

- Women and people of color also are severely underrepresented in particular disciplines, namely physical sciences, technology, engineering, and mathematics.
- The percentage of women and people of color with tenure has grown at a slower rate than the percentage of these groups receiving doctoral degrees.

Barriers to Retention and Advancement

- The traditional career path, based on societal norms from an earlier era (i.e., the experience of white male academics), inhibits the success of many women with spouses and children. At nearly every stage of their careers, married women leave academia at a disproportionately high rate; those with children under six are half as likely to enter tenure-track posts as married men with children under six.⁵
- Many PhDs, particularly women, report barriers to re-entry into tenure-track positions after having left the professoriate for a period of time.⁶
- Although a number of institutions have established policies to help faculty members manage work-family conflicts, most junior faculty members do not take advantage of them because they fear discrimination in future promotion and tenure decisions.⁷

Barriers to Career Satisfaction and Professional Development

- Women and people of color at all faculty ranks are significantly less satisfied than white males on measures of work-life and career satisfaction.⁸
- Tenure-track faculty members say they want more mentoring, yet at most institutions, faculty mentoring is haphazard at best, nonexistent at worst.⁹
- Because white males tend to hold the senior positions of power, they become the dominant culture-bearers for new faculty members. As a result, women and people of color are disproportionately affected by traditional faculty socialization practices and more frequently have to compromise their personal values and beliefs to “fit in” with the academic culture.¹⁰
- A 1999 national survey found that 12 percent of associate professors said they were likely to leave the profession for jobs outside of academia within three years.¹¹ Their dissatisfaction with the profession grows the longer they remain in this rank; associate professors who have held that rank for 10 years or more feel greater stress and are more dissatisfied than other faculty members. Some fear their academic careers have hit a plateau with little room left to advance professionally. Others experience insecurities about their knowledge base becoming outdated. Women associate professors are especially likely to experience dissatisfaction and stagnation and identify family

and personal responsibilities and excessive internal university service as reasons for their professional stagnation.¹²

- Although associate professors say that leaves, sabbaticals, and flexible work schedules are desirable benefits, they frequently fail to take advantage of them because of a prospective loss of income, dependent-care responsibilities, spouse or partner employment conflicts, or a disinclination to burden colleagues with additional work.¹³

● **Young white male faculty members have spouses or partners who work full time out of financial necessity. Consequently, faculty homes with spouses or partners to manage the family and household are becoming obsolete.**

- Even at the tenured ranks, women and people of color report lower satisfaction ratings than white males on relationships with colleagues, dimensions of professional development, overall career experience, and integration of their academic and personal lives. They experience marginalization and relatively few, even as full professors, become department chairs or assume other leadership positions.¹⁴

Issues with Faculty Retirements

- Because of the federal ban on mandatory retirement, senior faculty members are remaining in their careers longer, not only skewing the traditional age distribution of the faculty, but also leaving fewer opportunities for younger faculty members to be hired and move up the ranks.¹⁵

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- Aging generates anxieties among senior faculty members about scholarly legacy, outdated knowledge base, health, financial security, and the transition to retirement.¹⁶

WHAT PRESIDENTS AND CHANCELLORS NEED TO DO

The National Panel of Presidents and Chancellors, a group of 10 chief executive officers from major research universities and state university systems, advocates creating flexible tenure-track faculty career paths at higher education institutions nationwide. The Panel strongly recommends changing the current rigid structure of traditional tenure-track faculty career paths.

It also suggests new models to assist campuses in thinking more strategically about effecting beneficial change in faculty career cycles. For institutions that continuously strive to improve their teaching and research, maintaining a first-rate tenured and tenure-track faculty is a top strategic priority. To be effective in a diverse and changing environment, institutional leaders must demonstrate their commitment to this effort by documenting it in their institution's strategic plan and pledging the required financial resources to take actions on at least two fronts:

1. Create hospitable environments that welcome and support a diverse faculty in meeting changing needs throughout their careers.
2. Develop policies and programs that encourage flexible career paths to help faculty members balance work-life issues, avoid stagnation and burnout, and remain productive in various facets of scholarship throughout the course of their career lifetime so that faculty can contribute to maintaining excellence in teaching, innovative research, and U.S. competitiveness in the global

marketplace. Such developments of new knowledge and technology, in particular, are critical to the national economy and security of this country.

Creating an institutional environment that values the recruitment and retention of an excellent and diverse faculty—especially in this time of an increased number and diversity of student enrollments and decreased state budgets—requires strong leadership and commitment from an institution’s chief executive officer and its entire academic administrative team. Such leadership must be proactive and must have the long-range view of maintaining and enhancing excellence, especially within a research university.

Campus climate is shaped by all of its various constituents, but change in campus climate must start at the top. Thus, the recommendations listed below and in the full report must be implemented with leadership and input from all parties and at varying levels, beginning with presidents and chancellors and involving provosts and chief academic officers, deans, department chairs, and faculty in a campus-wide dialogue to determine the best approaches for tackling these issues on their respective campuses. For some institutions, it might be appropriate to establish these policies university-wide; other institutions will choose to institute policies at the school or unit level, perhaps by distributing grants to deans or department chairs and giving them the autonomy to achieve agreed-upon goals. Whatever the approach

taken, resources must be accessible for this endeavor, all institutional leaders must be held accountable for progress toward set goals, and the practices and processes implemented must be transparent in every way. These recommendations are provided to help institutional leaders develop collegial, supportive campus climates that will enhance recruitment, retention, and retirement of its faculty. All these recommendations have the potential to lead to greater flexibility in tenure-track faculty career paths.

MAJOR RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE NATIONAL PANEL

Enhance Recruitment Efforts

- Uncover and eliminate the preventable causes of talented PhDs opting out of tenure-track faculty positions.
- Create re-entry opportunities (e.g., postdoctoral fellowships) for PhDs who seek tenure-track faculty careers later in life after having decided to stop out of academia or work part time in order to manage career and family responsibilities.
- Abolish penalties in the hiring process for documented dependent care-related résumé gaps.
- Provide assistance to new faculty hires with spousal/partner employment needs and other family-related relocation issues.

- Allow couples employed by the same institution to select from a cafeteria-style health-care and dependent-care benefits plan (e.g., the family might be covered under the wife’s plan for health care and the husband might use his health-care allotment toward the cost of dependent care).

Improve Career Satisfaction, Retention, and Advancement

- Create incentives for faculty to develop more collegial environments, in which all ranks are encouraged and rewarded for collaborating with, guiding, and mentoring their colleagues.
- Provide training to evaluators to put in place clear and consistently applied promotion and tenure guidelines that are (and are seen as) fair, non-discriminatory, and consonant with alternative career path policies the institution has adopted.
- Allow colleges, schools, and departments within a university to establish their own agreed-upon guidelines for interpreting criteria for promotion and tenure, taking into account heavy teaching loads, professional service activities, student advising, and the four distinct functions of scholarship, as outlined by Ernest Boyer in *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate* (see more details on p. 11 of the full report). More specifically, institutional leaders should support:
 - Broadening the definition of scholarship and the structure for assessing and rewarding

faculty achievements in all facets of the new paradigm of scholarship.

- Creating, implementing, and promoting the use of policies and programs that continue to promote faculty productivity, revitalization, and professional renewal throughout the course of their career lifecycle, particularly from mid-career and beyond.

- Develop opportunities throughout the career cycle for tenured and tenure-track faculty members to opt for part-time positions that can be used for a specified period (up to five years) as personal needs arise.
- Develop and encourage leadership and professional renewal opportunities for tenured faculty.
- Establish guidelines for faculty to have the option of multiple-year leaves for personal or professional reasons.
- Create flexibility in the probationary period for tenure review without altering the standards or criteria. Longer probationary periods should not be required for all faculty, but flexible time frames of up to 10 years with reviews at set intervals should be offered. This option could benefit faculty who may need to be compensated for lost time or given additional time to prepare because of unanticipated professional or personal circumstances.

- Provide quality, affordable childcare to tenured and tenure-track faculty, particularly new hires (or information about available services); establish or provide information for childcare programs for emergency back up, evening and overnight care, and school and summer breaks.

Improve the Climate for All

- Create a professional climate in which the use of family-friendly and work-life policies is encouraged, not penalized.
- Examine and proactively address the work-life issues and professional climate of faculty members throughout the entire career cycle.
- Assess the degree to which campus environments are amenable to and supportive of the achievements of their faculty.
- Allow units to determine how best to meet their productivity goals and objectives and provide block grants to colleges, schools, and departments to help them do so. This will help curtail the level of competition among colleagues within a given unit.

Develop Incentives for Faculty Retirement

- Provide phased retirement plans under which senior, retirement-age professors may continue teaching or conducting research, or both, part time for a limited number of years.
- Offer partial or full coverage for health insurance to faculty for a set number of years after retirement, or implement retirement health savings programs.
- Provide space on campus where faculty retirees can convene to share intellectual ideas, presentations, and so forth with one another and the campus community. Find appropriate ways to continue to engage retired faculty.

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