

# Wayne State University

Gender Equity Advances Retention in STEM

*Drives • Shifts • Accelerates*

## Focus Group Research Report

### NSF-ADVANCE Project “Wayne State University Gender Advances Retention in STEM” (WSU-GEARS 2020-2023)

February 23, 2023

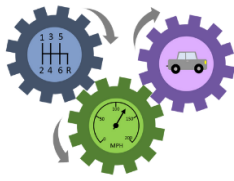
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#### Abstract

This report summarizes the WSU-GEARS data collection via eight focus groups with 29 tenure-track/tenure women faculty members across the ranks of assistant, associate, and full professor in STEM and non-STEM fields at Wayne State University regarding their experiences with the three barriers of hidden and unequal workload, work/family/life strains, and toxic work environment. The focus groups were conducted online between February and March 2022. Findings showed repeated and long-standing issues. Regarding workload, participants pointed to an inequitable distribution of workload regarding the quantity of teaching, the size of classes, time spent on real mentoring of graduate students and advising, and non-promotable or low promotable service tasks on and beyond committees. They noted a lack of tools at the department, college, and university level to efficiently address, monitor, and correct workload inequities. Regarding work/family/life strains, participants spoke of a lack of consistent leave policy implementation for care work, a lack of support for childcare, and a lack of recognizing care work beyond children and parents. In terms of toxic work environment, participants talked consistently about a culture that tolerates and even enables perpetrators of sexism, racism, and other hostile behaviors, and a lack of effective ways to hold perpetrators accountable. Participants pointed to a system that rewards perpetrators by reducing their service workload (e.g., committees) or eliminated student advising/mentoring to avoid problematic colleague’s behaviors, leading to a burdening of other faculty members picking up their work. Moreover, across the three barriers, participants brought up the dependency on chairs and the lack of university-wide policies to guarantee minimum agreements beyond a chairs’ helpful or not helpful attitudes and behaviors to address issues of hidden and unequal workloads, work/family/life strains, and toxic work environment.

#### 1. Introduction and WSU-GEARS background

The project Gender Equity Advances Retention in STEM at Wayne State University (WSU-GEARS) adapts evidence-based strategies and programs with the goal of increasing the hiring, retention, and advancement of women and under-represented minorities (URM) in NSF-defined STEM fields. WSU-GEARS is funded by a \$992,495 grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF) ADVANCE program. The goal of ADVANCE is to broaden the implementation of evidence-based systemic change strategies that promote equity for STEM faculty in academic workplaces and the academic profession.



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WSU-GEARS adapts proven approaches from other ADVANCE institutions to transform the campus climate at Wayne State University and reduce inequities for diverse women and URM faculty members in STEM<sup>1</sup> disciplines through systemic change. The WSU-GEARS interventions tackle three barriers to the hiring, retention, and advancement of women and URM in STEM on the WSU campus: (1) hidden and unequal workload, (2) work/family/life strains, and (3) toxic work environment.

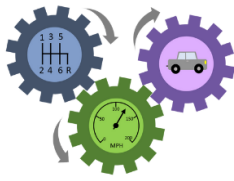
WSU-GEARS features three interrelated components: 1) Wayne Drives, 2) Wayne Shifts, and 3) Wayne Accelerates. While Wayne Shifts and Wayne Accelerates focus on enhancing existing programs and creating new programs, respectively, Wayne Drives focuses on data collection. As such, Wayne Drives is at the core of understanding how institutional context and existing initiatives contribute to individual and shared faculty experiences and perceptions. Wayne Drives data collection efforts include an annual faculty survey and focus groups with women faculty.

Previous data collection efforts at WSU established a baseline understanding of the experiences of faculty in general and provided some insight into the experiences of women in STEM and URM faculty at Wayne State University (Brumley et al., 2017; Brumley & Toman, 2020; Owens & Farrar, 2019).

A faculty support survey focused on faculty experiences with teaching, research, and professional development was conducted in 2017, sponsored by the Faculty Affairs Committee of the Academic Senate and the Office of the Provost (Brumley et al., 2017). Approximately 350 faculty members participated. Overall, these data suggested an overarching theme that “it shouldn’t be this hard.” As one faculty member stated: “How, might you ask, can someone who loves their job feel burnout? Well, that is how I feel right now.” Faculty pointed to issues with workplace culture, bullying and harassment, unequal, overburdened, and devalued service work, lack of support post-tenure, and a lack of training and support for administrators (particularly chairs) to mentor/support faculty in their career goals. Three areas suggested gendered experiences. First, when asked about the support received at the university for their research, men faculty were more likely to strongly agree (19%) than women faculty (11%). Second, men (21%) and women (13%) faculty strongly agreed they were satisfied with the mentoring they had received. Finally, women were less likely (9%) than men (21%) to feel they have been supported for their professional development. That women faculty felt less supported for their career advancement may be partly explained by their sense of workload inequities. As one woman stated:

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<sup>1</sup> WSU-GEARS considers the following 23 departments in its definition of STEM, based on the definition of STEM fields by the NSF: In the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences we include Biological Sciences, Chemistry, Geology and Environmental Science, Mathematics, Nutrition and Food Sciences, Physics and Astronomy, Anthropology, Communication Sciences and Disorders, Criminology and Criminal Justice, Economics, Political Science, Psychology, Sociology, Urban Planning. In the College of Fine, Performing, and Communication Arts, Communication is included the Department of Communication. All departments in the College of Engineering are included: Biomedical Engineering, Chemical Engineering and Materials Science, Civil and Environmental Engineering, Computer Science, Electrical and Computer Engineering, Engineering Technology, Industrial and Systems Engineering, and Mechanical Engineering.



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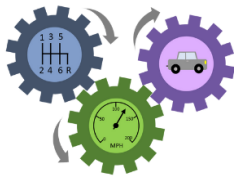
The biggest problem preventing female associate professors (specifically) from advancing, is the incredible amounts of service they shoulder, with few institutional rewards. There needs to be more “carrots” in rewarding exceptional service and sticks for those who do not take part. I’d like to see the university research this issue and strategize about solutions.

Others highlighted overall gender treatment: “There has been both hidden and visible pressure against women in my college and limited mentoring support.” Or inequities on support during tenure:

Was a very bitter pill to swallow when I found out that certain faculty in my unit taught half-filled classes AND had a full course release the entire time leading up to tenure. I lost sleep and participating in my children’s lives for six years. This type of inequality needs to stop.

Women faculty tended to point out issues surrounding bullying and harassment: “One of the areas where I think the university needs to do a better job is addressing cultures of harassment and bullying, which are based on gender, class, sexuality, ability, nationality, etc. It is pervasive....” The lack of attention by the university was highlighted: “Unfortunately faculty bullying, particularly towards junior faculty, has been unrecognized and/or tolerated for many years in multiple schools and colleges.”

In 2018, a first-ever campus-wide climate study at Wayne State University was administered to all faculty, staff, and students. Specifically, respondents were asked to share their perceptions of the atmosphere on campus, or the university’s “structures, policies, and practices; the demographics of its members; the attitudes and values of its members and leaders; and the quality of personal interactions. It includes perceptions of diversity, inclusion, respect, accessibility, support, and opportunities for advancement” (Owens & Farrar, 2019). The climate study was meant to assess key areas of interest to provide future committees and initiatives with baseline data regarding areas in need of improvement. Of the 2,387 eligible faculty members, 586 responded (24.5%). One major conclusion of this climate study found that while diversity was a strong value and was supported by faculty, the effectiveness of efforts to recruit and retain was viewed less positively. In addition, 89% of faculty members reported they were moderately to extremely satisfied with their jobs; however, approximately one quarter of faculty members were not happy with their opportunities for career advancement. Women faculty were less positive on respect and less satisfied with career opportunities. Faculty with disabilities were less positive on belonging and respect. One in six faculty members reported having experienced some form of hostility in the prior 12 months, most often identified as bullying and microaggressions. Women faculty witnessed more hostility and unfairness and were less positive on their departments/units to address unfairness. Similarly, African American faculty members were less positive about their departments/units to address unfairness. Faculty with disabilities also witnessed and experienced hostility and unfairness more and were less positive about their departments/units addressing unfairness.



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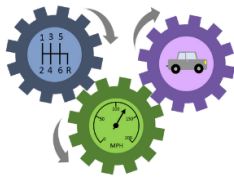
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In addition to the closed-ended survey questions in the WSU climate study, participants were also asked a series of open-ended questions. Of particular interest to the WSU-GEARS qualitative data collection via focus groups was the survey's accompanying qualitative report (Brumley & Toman, 2020). The report analyzed the faculty responses to open-ended questions on six main areas: 1) experienced, reporting of, and witnessed behaviors including bullying, microaggressions, and threats of violence; 2) fairness of promotion, salary, and the allocation of responsibilities; 3) belonging, being treated with respect, and being themselves; 4) expectations to represent the point of view of their particular identity (such as ability, ethnicity, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, etc.); 5) freedom of speech, and; 6) overall campus climate.

Data analysis included 108 pages of faculty responses to questions in these six areas using a priori, focused coding and inductive, open coding techniques (Chamaz, 2014; Emerson et al., 1995; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2017) to identify the emergent themes and sub-themes within each question category. The qualitative report noted the methodological limitations of the primarily quantitative climate survey and emphasized a future need for focus groups to engage more deeply with some of the themes and concerns expressed in the faculty commentary (Brumley & Toman, 2020). The qualitative analysis (Brumley & Toman, 2020) concurred with the quantitative findings from the WSU climate study (Owens & Farrar, 2019), particularly regarding the gendered and racialized experiences and perceptions by faculty on unfair treatment, limited advancement, and the lack of diversity in recruitment and retention. However, the recurrent theme in the faculty open-ended questions was the issue of bullying/intimidation. This was closely followed by the theme of ineffective and problematic administrative processes and leadership, and then uneven workload. Below is a brief summary of these key areas (Brumley & Toman, 2020).

## Gender and race/ethnicity inequalities

Concerns on gender and/or racial/ethnic inequalities were most present in the question on identity representation and the climate questions. In the unfair treatment section, issues around favoritism and personal prejudices were often cited because of the chair or dean. Favoritism was present on decisions about promotion, salary, access to opportunities, workload, and space allocation. There were numerous comments in response to the climate questions that revealed pervasive concerns on gender, race, and ethnicity. Faculty were evenly split on positive and negative feelings about representing the viewpoint of their identity. Positive feelings focused on it as an opportunity or feeling honored. Negative comments focused on faculty bullying, being burdensome, and the reduction to a cultural stereotype. There were also several statements about acknowledging all ethnicities and cultures. Further, faculty expressed resentment of tokenism – most often in response to their racial or ethnic identity. Faculty stated they were tired, burned out, and overwhelmed by being the only one in their department or on a committee. They were also clear that they cannot speak for a whole group, and resented the expectation to do so. There were very few comments that specified gender was related to a positive experience; rather, when there were gendered experiences, the comments specified that they were made by women. Biases in the academy, as they are related to promotions, salary and workload were most often cited issues. Numerous comments cited gender in relation to intimidation and bullying. Another



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pattern in the data was the lack of faculty from underrepresented minorities and the lack of women and URM in leadership roles. Faculty also highlighted the lack of retention of URM.

## Bullying/intimidation

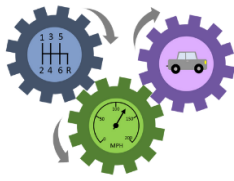
One of the most frequently observed comments was the experiences of retaliation, intimidation, and bullying. Faculty cited that this has occurred from individuals in administrative positions (chairs; deans), senior faculty, and other colleagues more generally. There were also comments about the behavior of the leadership in the WSU Academic Senate. This theme was present in response to questions on unfair treatment, identity representation, climate, and even reporting because of the fear of repercussions. This theme was present in almost every question with open-ended responses. In fact, it was the number one reason cited for offensive conduct witnessed and experienced as well as why faculty did not report the behavior, and third reason that faculty had considered leaving WSU. In this latter question, faculty repeatedly cited that it was because the behavior is common, normalized, and pervasive. There were many calls for the administration to address this behavior, such as creating a policy of bad behavior that does not fall under the legal requirement of Title IX. Further, there were several critiques leveled against the ineffectiveness of the WSU Office of Equal Opportunity (OEO) to handle issues of bullying and intimidation.

## Ineffective/problematic administrative processes and leadership

Most commonly, faculty expressed concerns about ineffective and problematic processes in relation to recruitment, salary review, and promotion processes. Cited frequently were inadequate leadership and lack of consistency of decisions; also noteworthy was the perception that teaching is undervalued. Faculty also indicated that WSU was overly bureaucratic and that its antiquated processes were impeding progress. Another recurring theme within this broad area was a critique of the role of administrators. Several comments questioned the costs associated with administrator salaries. Faculty also pointed to discord between the administration and faculty, which has stymied progress, initiatives, and the overall mission of the university. Faculty raised concerns over inadequate evaluation of those who hold administrative roles, particularly chair and deans. There were numerous calls for training of chairs and deans, particularly in leadership and management, how to handle harassment and bullying, and a better understanding of diversity. Comment said that the treatment of faculty by chairs often was gendered and racialized. In addition, there was a perception that deans favored some disciplines over others – the humanities and social sciences most often cited. Finally, another theme faculty drew attention to was the lack of communication and transparency from the administration around financial conditions and decision-making. There were numerous calls for greater accountability.

## Uneven workload and undervaluing

It was clear many faculty perceived that “no good deed goes unpunished” and that “bad behavior is rewarded” as they expressed concerns on workload. This theme intersects with both gender and race/ethnicity. Faculty also believed that service work was undervalued, even though often this work was vital to the mission and functioning of the university. There were several comments about the uneven distribution of workload by seniority and rank. There were several comments about faculty taking advantage of their tenured status and not being held accountable for all aspects of the job – teaching, research, and service.



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Building on these findings and recommendations of the 2017 faculty support survey and 2018 climate survey, the conceptual framework and narrative underlying the current grant proposal as well as the focus group design were developed as small groups are conducive to discussing topics that participants deem important, are experts in, and have strong feelings about, all of which applied in the case of our study (Krueger & Casey, 2015). The WSU GEARS team—faculty from sociology, communication, chemistry, and engineering technology, and administrators from the Office of the Provost and the Office for Faculty Development and Faculty Success—will use the focus group findings to inform WSU-GEARS programming on campus. These findings will also inform WSU-GEARS’s recommendations to the university on gender equity efforts in hiring, retention, and advancement of women and URM faculty members.

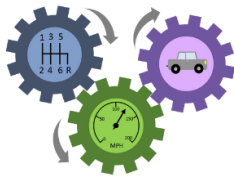
## 2. Method

### 2.1 Recruitment

Given the mandate of the WSU-GEARS grant to focus on the retention of women faculty, the focus group research team recruited as focus group participants tenure-track and tenured women faculty from across the university, including the NSF-defined STEM fields and departments outside of these disciplines in other colleges and schools including the schools of medicine, law, nursing, and business.

After gaining IRB approval, participants were recruited through emails sent to each eligible faculty member as well as follow-up email reminders. The focus groups were also advertised by posting a flyer and a link to a Qualtrics sign-up page on the WSU-GEARS Twitter (@WayneGEARS) and Instagram (@WayneStateGEARS) accounts. The recruitment flyer included the list of the 23 STEM departments by college and a link and QR code to the Qualtrics site. The recruitment flyers were also posted on the WSU-GEARS website (<https://s.wayne.edu/gears-advance/>) and in the January 2022 WSU-GEARS newsletter. Additionally, the recruitment flyer was shared with the 23 STEM department chairs, with a request to send it to all tenure-track and tenured women faculty in their departments. Finally, WSU-GEARS team members shared the flyer with their department colleagues and networks and encouraged participation through word of mouth.

In 2021-2022, 206 Non-STEM tenure-track and tenured women faculty and 105 STEM tenure-track and tenured women faculty were eligible for the focus group data collection at Wayne State University, resulting in a total of 311 eligible women faculty members. We recruited 29 women faculty to participate (9.3% of all eligible women faculty). The breakdown by category and rank is displayed in Table 1.



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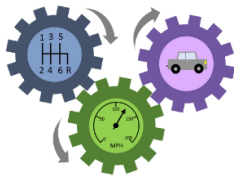
	<b>NON-STEM</b>	<b>STEM</b>
<b>ASSISTANT PROFESSOR</b>	47	25
<b>ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR</b>	94	53
<b>PROFESSOR</b>	65	27
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>206</b>	<b>105</b>

## 2.2 Sample

A total of eight focus groups with 29 participants were conducted between February 18, 2022 and May 13, 2022 via Zoom (Table 2). Each focus group included three to five participants, with the exception of one which included two participants given an unexpected no-show; each focus group meeting lasted between 90 and 120 minutes.

	<b>ASSISTANT</b>	<b>ASSOCIATE</b>	<b>FULL</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>STEM</b>	9	7	3	19
<b>NON-STEM</b>	2	3	5	10
<b>Total</b>	11	10	8	29

Based on input from previous faculty support and climate studies (Brumley et al., 2017, Owens & Farrar, 2019), focus groups were stratified by rank. Additionally, based on the NSF distinction of and STEM vs. Non-STEM focus groups were stratified by STEM/Non-STEM. This resulted in three focus groups with assistant professors (11 participants, two STEM groups, one Non-STEM group); three focus groups with associate professors (10 participants, two STEM groups, one Non-STEM); and two focus groups with full professors (eight participants, one STEM group, one Non-STEM) (Table 3).



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	ASSISTANT	ASSOCIATE	FULL	Total
<b>STEM</b>	2	2	1	5
<b>NON-STEM</b>	1	1	1	3
<b>Total</b>	3	3	2	8

Demographics for all 29 participants were collected through a screening tool. Information collected included: race/ethnicity, marital status, LGBTQIA identification, caregiver status, the number of age of children (if applicable), number of years at Wayne State University, and current department and rank (including number of years in rank). Participants from 20 departments across five colleges participated in the focus groups (Table 4).

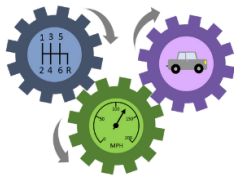
<b>RACE</b>	21 white; 8 URM; 1 no response
<b>MARITAL STATUS</b>	19 married; 4 other (divorced, annulled, or never married); 5 living with partner; 1 other
<b>TIME AT WAYNE STATE</b>	11.96 years (mean); 9 (median)
<b>YEARS IN RANK</b>	5.3 years (mean); 3 (median)
<b>BIRTH YEAR</b>	1974 (mean); 1976 (median)
<b>LBTQIA PLUS</b>	6
<b>CAREGIVING and CHILDREN</b>	16 faculty had children. Of these, 12 identified as caregivers; 6 had children 0-5 years old. Mean number of children living at home and under 18 years was 1.7.

## 2.3 Process

Participants were granted confidentiality and pseudonyms were used for reporting findings. Direct quotes by participants presented in this report were slightly edited to protect the confidentiality of our participants. Edits did not change the substantive nature of the quotes.

Each focus group was conducted by three members of the WSU-GEARS focus group research team, including two co-moderators and a technical assistant. A semi-structured questionnaire asked participants about their experiences with hidden and unequal workload, work/family/life strains, and toxic work environment at Wayne State University. The question route prioritized questions centered on workload and work/family/life issues, but also provided space to share experiences regarding toxic work environment and left room to bring up other concerns. All participants were asked the same questions across rank, with slight adjustments made to





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language when probing concerns of tenure-track vs. tenured faculty member, for instance, addressing the transition from assistant to associate and/or full professor. Moderators and assistants wrote memos after each focus group for the development of themes and codes for analysis. Each focus group session was recorded via Zoom and transcribed by a transcription service.

## 2.4 Coding and Analysis

We used textual analysis (McKee, 2006) to discover main themes in the responses to the three overarching research questions regarding hidden and unequal workload, work/family/life strains, and toxic work environment as provided in the transcripts. In the following, a codebook for in-depth qualitative analysis were developed through an inductive, open coding process by the focus group research team (Glaser & Strauss, 2017; Strauss & Corbin, 1990), which met weekly to discuss and compare repeatedly arising themes and exceptional aspects (Fram, 2013; Glaser, 1965) raised by focus group participants. Additionally, three team members systematically read through and coded three transcripts for initial code development which were then discussed by the team. In the next step, a preliminary codebook was developed which was subsequently refined and finalized into code families and sub-codes for coding in the qualitative text analysis software NVivo. In the following, NVivo coding was conducted by three coders; each transcript was coded in detail by a primary coder. A secondary coder then filled gaps or added codes.

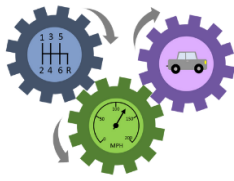
## 3. Findings

The findings are structured along the three barriers that were identified by the WSU-GEARS project and are at the core of its mission/mandate: hidden and unequal workload, work/family/life strains, and toxic work environment. Main themes within each of these barriers, as well as overlapping themes across them, are presented in detail below.

### 3.1 Hidden and unequal workload in teaching and service

Within the barrier of hidden and unequal workload several larger overarching themes arose such as obstacles to achieving a more equitable workload, concerns over the amount of service work provided by participants, and a variety of issues relating to teaching, advising, and mentoring. In consideration of tenure and promotion, women faculty said they found themselves struggling to allocate and manage their time to meet department and university standards given the uneven distribution of teaching and service assignments and the hidden and unrecognized work attached to these assignments. As such, faculty members implicated administrative leaders in hindering women's opportunities in academia and their research productivity through unfair workload distribution.

Participants' narratives indicated that teaching and service are main areas where workload inequities persist. For teaching, participants' concerns centered the recognition of differing workload regarding class sizes, if and how teaching assistants are assigned to faculty members,



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and redesigning classes they adopted. Two participants spoke to issues regarding teaching workload that came up across focus groups:

I just met [my chair] last week, because ...I had not slept more than four hours a night, if I slept at all, because I was just overwhelmed with the semester ...and so [my chair] is now taking two courses, or is planning on, transitioning two courses off of my plate so that I can do what [my chair] needs me to do, which is to bring money into the institution. So in terms of expectations, I was not expecting to teach this much. (Associate Professor, Non-STEM)

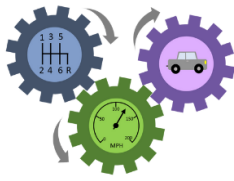
I finished like 37 dissertations and many more master's theses. Again, those are kind of unsung activities especially since a number of our Ph.D.s weren't really ready to be in the program so they needed a huge amount of mentoring and I was sitting down with them and showing them how to do...analysis. So that's kind of a snapshot of what I'm done. (Full Professor, STEM)

Regarding service, participants noted a lack of transparency: how service assignments are distributed among department faculty; who is, or has been, serving on which committees; a lack of recognition for service work that is not connected to a leadership position; and considerations of internal versus external service requests. For instance, two associate professors' statements highlighted concerns on the differing amounts of work that go into different service assignments. These statements raise questions around what should count as service although it is research-related work, such as participation on study sections or grant review committees for external funding organizations.

[N]ot all committees are equal in terms of the work that they take up. Like the grad[uate] committee is a ton of work; undergrad[uate] committee is a little bit less work. The personnel committee is once a year. Our budget used to be a [separate] committee, now it's rolled into [the] executive [committee]... yes, people had an equitable number, but the actual work was not the same. (Associate Professor, STEM)

Service can actually take quite a bit of time. So, if you care about the university, or, if you serve on study sections, that really also eats a lot of time, and it's only 10% of your evaluation, but it's also critical towards your scholarship or your research efforts...I'm not clear on how they decided that, because to me, a lot of the service is research... If you look at it from a practical point of view that service is only supposed to be 20% of your time, it can often be more than that at any given moment, like, if you're on study section, you're just embedded in that for two to four weeks, and so that is a time sink that in the long run, the university does not officially recognize. (Associate Professor, Non-STEM)

Additional concerns that participants across all focus groups brought up were fatigue, physical strain, unequal distribution of workload in areas based on research specialties, the devaluation of service assignments, and the amount of time consumed by service work. The main narrative that developed across focus groups was that service tasks were considered a "time-sink" due to the "unrecognized work" and low promotability attached to many service commitments.



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## 3.1.1 Specific obstacles to equitable workload

Participants across all focus groups said that the main obstacles toward a more equitable workload distribution were a lack of recognition of work that goes into teaching, advising, and mentoring; a lack of recognition of a variety of service; a lack of formal methods on a department and/or university level to distribute workload; and a cultural resistance to address and change workload distribution. Each of these concerns is addressed separately below.

### *Unrecognized work: Class size, advising, and mentoring*

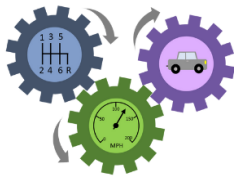
Almost all participants brought up concerns around unrecognized work when it comes to advising and mentoring students, and unrecognized work in classroom teaching. For instance, several participants brought up aspects of the quantity of teaching: the size of a class, the improvements made to existing courses, and the work that goes into mentoring teaching assistants (TAs):

The expectation is that you teach 12 credit hours a year, which for most people works out to be two three-hour credit classes every semester on the teaching. What they don't tell you when you come in is how that actually plays out in practice, [how it] varies greatly by faculty members. We have classes that are three-credit classes that have ten or fewer students, and then we have classes that are three to four credit classes that have anywhere from 50-150 students. Whether you are teaching ten people or you are teaching 150 people they all count the same. (Full Professor, Non-STEM)

The class I inherited was just crap when I got it. It was just absolute garbage ...even just to get it to a point where I was "I'm okay enough using this in class" took a lot of effort, let alone putting in enough effort to actually feel like I'm putting on a good class. That was frustrating. (Assistant Professor, STEM)

I am over my teaching load, and I think the reason they're able to do that is because there are TAs but I'm supervising the TAs. I have extra load and it is extra work even though I do have the TAs there. I don't really know why it's like this. I know we have older faculty members who teach under their load. I don't really know why this happened but it's what happened, and I don't feel like I have any place to push back against that. I'm not going to push back against that. (Assistant Professor, STEM)

Regarding mentoring, participating faculty members discussed the work involved in writing recommendation letters, "shadow advising," and additional mentoring due to specialty expertise. For instance, an assistant professor in a non-STEM department summarized the "never-ending" commitment in mentoring graduate students, both current and former:



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I have students who did graduate their degree program. I wouldn't consider myself their formal mentor anymore, but they still need letters of recommendation; they're still asking me questions, because I'm a research methodologist. They're asking me questions on the research methods at their new institution because they're not getting properly mentored in their dissertations or whatever, who were my master's students. So there's still sort of these ongoing, mini sort of commitments that I feel I have that do end up taking a lot of time.  
(Assistant Professor, Non-STEM)

The term "shadow advising" was used by several participants to describe how advising work falls on faculty members who are not formal advisors to graduate students as other faculty members would fail to prioritize their advisees. In some departments, the "shadow advising" responsibilities fall primarily on women faculty:

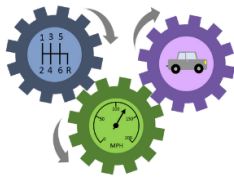
I've had the experience of doing shadow advising for both master's and doctoral students. And I've now recognized it as a pattern. And I'm not doing it, which now means I advise more students, but I'd rather do that than the shadow advising. So it feels that's a mechanism of ensuring the work gets done is other people in the department kind of informally to formally checking on, like seeing if the work is happening or not.... ghost advising is another term. The person who is the official advisor of record is not actually advising the student and so then the student seeks out another faculty member to ask advising labor of them, but that person is not recognized or is recognized in a committee or a second reader kind of role. That is a very common pattern among women faculty in our department. There are some men who are well known, like, not very... closely working with their student advisees.  
(Associate Professor, STEM)

Another assistant professor in STEM expressed a similar sentiment:

Other faculty have called [it] like shadow advising with older male faculty in particular... Since we were talking about advising and things and picking up that slack, I'll be on a committee and someone will say, "That's a red flag committee. Watch out. You're going to get pushed. You're going to get all the work, so be careful to say no," and that kind of thing where someone will advise. Then the younger faculty takes on the major role because the other person isn't doing anything. (Assistant Professor, STEM)

This issue around advising went beyond specializations and fields of study, according to participants: Faculty members who were perceived to be more approachable not only bore the brunt of this type of work, but they were also required to help students who were in emotional distress.

[E]ven before the pandemic, we had a lot of students at Wayne State University who are in distress. But they need to pass their exams. They need to pass their courses. And they disproportionately come (to) faculty members who are being perceived as helpful and understanding and empathetic. And this is the kind of service that's absolutely below the radar. (Associate Professor, STEM)



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The same professor added:

So, the more students know you, the more reputation you have that you are understanding and a normal faculty member, the more you will have people telling you – basically like I find myself functioning as CAPS. I'm not CAPS. (Associate Professor, STEM)

This type of unrecognized mentoring extended to peer and junior faculty members, as two participants pointed out:

[O]ne of my research partners is [out of state] .... She asked me to help her write some proposals, but I'm not funded on them. So it's not recognized by the university that I'm helping her with these. But this is an important relationship for me. I couldn't have done any of my past projects in her community without her. So I'm not going to just say no, and she needs it. So I feel that's underrecognized kind of, too. (Assistant Professor, Non-STEM)

We've had a mentoring system so when an assistant professor comes in, they get assigned. Sometimes that can be problematic but most of the time it works quite well. (Full Professor, Non-STEM)

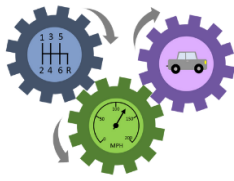
In sum, advising and mentoring are ill-defined in terms of the concrete workload requirements and the recognition of the amount of time, quality, and emotional labor that flow into their many related tasks. Advising and mentoring of undergraduate students, graduate students, and peers need to be more strongly recognized as part of the teaching workloads of tenure-track and tenured women faculty members.

*Unrecognized work: No or low promotability service work and service to the discipline*

Within service work, participants addressed the idea that junior faculty members should be protected from taking on too much service, that committee work with no or low promotability value is a problem, and that tensions around the recognition of service to the discipline that requires labor outside of Wayne State University exists. One participant's statement exemplified the concern regarding junior faculty members:

[Our chair] is trying to change some of that and it seems like it's going to work, ok, so I'm curious. That's going to be in terms of service: junior faculty are supposed to be on two committees, two internal department committees. And then I think after tenure it's supposed to go to three, however, not all committees are equal in terms of the work that they take up. Like the grad committee is a ton of work. (Associate Professor, STEM)

Additionally, a full professor in STEM described how some service assignments are outside official committees and come with little incentive other than a moral responsibility to students and the university:



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A lot of junior faculty in particular get sucked into student organizations or events or clubs that they will sponsor. And often times, on one hand it's very good if you want to establish those relationships with students that will help you potentially with your teaching and lead to potential teaching awards and such. But if it doesn't lead to those things, it could also just take up way too much of your time and it could be a real drain on you. Ad hoc committees that don't even have credits somewhere, those are difficult, too. So I'm always, especially these days, serving on tons of committees. Ad hoc committees up the wazoo. And I'm like, I don't even know first off, are we even accomplishing anything? And secondly, do you really get credit for it? Because most people don't even understand how much work goes into it unless you build that into your C.V. And that's what I encourage junior faculty to do...put little bullets in there, like this is how many times we met. This is what we did. Because that way people will appreciate that a little bit more. (Full Professor, STEM)

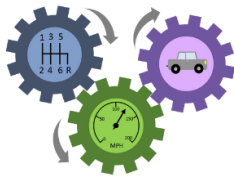
Unrecognized work in service also addressed external vs. internal service commitments. The workload for internal and external service shifts with promotion to associate professor rank and tenure, which several participants noted. For instance, an associate professor in STEM described how her labor distribution changed:

It's also post-promotion [that] the demands on the service outside of the university tend to grow, right...I'm now chairing several professional groups and things like that. That is a huge chunk of time. And it's also national or international service. So, the domestic service might have stayed at the same level, but the service outside of the university has gone up. (Associate professor, STEM)

Additionally, an associate professor in a Non-STEM department noted that external service is not sufficiently recognized:

...study section is very important, reviewing other papers is very important, reviewing other grants is very important. Organizing and reviewing abstracts for conferences. It's a lot of time. Completely unrecognized by anyone, except for [being] known in the field, that it's essential. We kind of rely on the field, the sciences, relying on that...it's done because it advances us and it kind of benefits back. But once we start counting how many committees you've been in at the university for example, it's equally important to count how many papers you reviewed, how many study sections you sat on. How many other ad hoc reviews you've done in terms of the amount of effort and time that is devoted to this. (Associate Professor, Non-STEM)

Another associate professor in Non-STEM elaborated on the work involved in an important external service position in her field:



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So that you have a full picture, if you sit on study section, you usually get something like seven to twelve grants, depending on whether you're junior faculty or more senior faculty, and, so each grant you have to, even though it might be in your field, each field is pretty enormous, and so you have to learn a new language, and a new topic for every grant that you review, and then you have to write the reviews, and then you present them when you meet as a group, and you discuss them and evaluate whether they're going to be scored or not.  
(Associate Professor, Non-STEM)

If faculty members were interested in moving up in their career or in the production of scientific knowledge as part of their research mandate, then some service assignments are important. For example, external service to the discipline is crucial for faculty members to gain national and international leadership experience and recognition, which is needed to make the transition from associate to full professor. This service needs to be more recognized by WSU. Service to the university might provide faculty with working knowledge of WSU and/or their department of college and recognition outside their unit. However, some service was considered a "time-sink," if devalued by their department or college. Ultimately, unrecognized work led faculty members to consider exiting specific positions as succinctly put by one participant:

Some of us are considering leaving those leadership positions just because we don't feel that the contribution is being recognized and valued by the department.  
(Associate Professor, STEM)

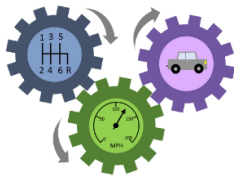
## *Lack of formal methods and transparency in understanding workload distribution and requirements*

A prominent theme across focus groups was the participants' concern that little to no formal methods and little transparency exists regarding the workload distribution as well as requirements in terms of quality for fulfilling specific work tasks. Some participants pointed to chairs as holding a lot of decision power regarding service assignments, as the following quote demonstrates:

I think one of the issues is quantify how much work is done and how we can reward it. Because we don't have any metrics. We don't have any way to describe it on a professional record certainly. (Full Professor, STEM)

For service assignments, participants described the significant role of the chair in deciding who serves on particular committees and noted the importance of the chair knowing who has served on what committees. Their comments shed light on the consequences of lacking formal methods of tracking and assigning service work:

In terms of service assignments, it's kind of who volunteers or who leads the different committees; they are tapped from the chair. (Associate Professor, STEM)



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A full professor in a Non-STEM field described the informal ways in which faculty members learn which committees are important to serve on:

But in terms of the assignments, I never get assigned to a committee. I volunteer. I might be encouraged to get on more committees, but I have to find them myself and I frequently have to compete, run for committees...Nobody's ever telling me what committees to be on. There is an expectation, though, that I'm on department, university, and national committees, including study sections or whatever, but as long as I'm doing that then that's considered to be enough service for me as a researcher. But it's very much social norms and it's determined by the Promotion and Tenure Committee in your department.  
(Full Professor, Non-STEM)

Another participant voiced frustrations regarding the election process for committees in her department, resulting in the same set of faculty members running committees:

In terms of service, it's either the elected positions or voluntary positions. So elected position, I don't know why and how people get elected. It's hard for me to say. I think it's some sort of a popularity contest, or who people trust to represent them. But what I have seen at least in recent years is that the same people get elected on multiple committees. So, policy and personnel, salary review, so if there is an election you can pretty much say that it's going to be the same people. (Associate Professor, STEM)

In sum, little to no formal mechanisms exist across a variety of departments in STEM and Non-STEM fields at Wayne State University for individual faculty members to assess if their workload is equitable compared to colleagues of the same rank, especially regarding service load and advising and mentoring labor.

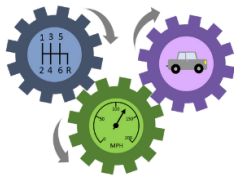
### *Resistance to change*

The examples above overwhelmingly show a need to talk about hidden and unequal workload issues, which took up the biggest portion of every focus group and demonstrated a desire by women faculty members to address unfair workload distributions. At the same time, a connected theme was that participants observed a resistance to address workload issues among some colleagues in their departments, as the quotes below indicates:

I could imagine the issue of workload policy, trying to balance things. I feel like, and this is not, I'm not trying to generalize – on some more senior faculty there is more of an attitude of, "I've put the work in, and I've earned the ability now to be pickier about what I chose to do or to say no, I won't cover that intro or lower level course because I did that years ago."  
(Assistant Professor, STEM)

Another participant described how even department leaders struggled to convince faculty to pick up courses they do not usually teach:





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In terms of the teaching, we have our associate chair and our graduate coordinator, who also does the course schedule. Together they mostly work on that, but most of us in the department have our courses that we've been teaching pretty much since we got here. Every now and then there'll be a need for someone to teach one of our service courses...

Unfortunately, the associate chair will have to beg a little bit and plead and try to get new people into the course because some of the former people have left who used to teach that course. So, we don't necessarily have a great system for those situations in terms of who teaches, but the teaching is pretty upfront. (Associate Professor, STEM)

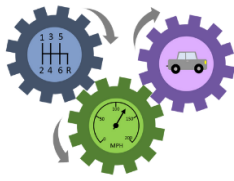
### 3.1.2 Solution suggestions and reform ideas regarding workload issues

Several participants noted that their departments and colleagues are starting to have conversations about workload issues. Some participants shared best practices and suggestions for establishing more formal mechanisms to address workload inequities in teaching and serving on graduate student's thesis committees, as the quotes below exemplify:

In more recent years there's been a shift to looking at the distribution ...the executive committee and a new different administrator now look at the kind of distribution of courses and to make sure that over a couple of years that full-time faculty are teaching Gen[eral] Ed[ucation] courses and that it's not always the same full-time faculty and making sure that people get a seminar every once in a while because I have some colleagues, for instance, women who went through the whole tenure track experience with no grad[uate] seminars, which is quite unequal. That was not my experience. I have a half-time teaching load, so it's a little different in the curriculum, but there are definitely some quite senior faculty who have their classes and that's just what they teach. (Associate Professor, STEM)

For graduate student committees, though, like thesis committees, we actually have a graduate studies director who assigns professors to committees to make sure that no one has too many and keeps track of that. So I think that's something that has really helped, because as the new person I suspect that you get a lot of requests because you're new. (Assistant Professor, STEM)

But the existence of such best practices varied across departments and was largely dependent on leadership prioritization of issues. For some faculty members, it was evident that workload issues could not be handled properly by department leaders alone and needed more support from university or college level administration, as the quote below shows:



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I feel like every department is going to have its own internal politics, and the department chairs, their job is just to essentially keep the peace and if they're making themselves the bad guy by being, "Oh, we need to make sure everyone's contributing equally, blah, blah, blah," then that would just cause more issues within the department. So if it were a higher up thing where it's just like, we have to do this; it wasn't my idea, that might make it easier – the politics and interpersonal issues minimized if it did not seem like it was the department chair trying to make sure everyone's doing their fair share. (Assistant Professor, STEM)

In most cases, managing workload fell to individual faculty members. Participants said that they had to find creative, individual ways to solve hidden and unequal workload requests and situations, as indicated in different strategies shared below: learning to say no, serving on salary and promotion and tenure committees, building support groups, and one-in-one-out systems for assignments.

It's about whether you for yourself actually meet your goals, not stretching yourself in directions that are not relevant to you. So it doesn't matter if other people do more or less of that. If it's not relevant to you, you shouldn't be doing it. (Associate Professor, Non-STEM)

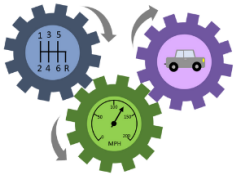
[F]or the past six years I've been on our Promotion and Tenure Committee, and then you really begin to understand what it is people are looking for. (Full Professor, Non-STEM)

I've had colleagues who told me not to, that I would become a very bitter person if I sat on our salary committee, that it would really, really upset me because I would be exposed to the fact that this is what actually happens, that we all basically get the same across the board raises even though there's huge disparities in how much work people do. (Full Professor, Non-STEM)

In order to gain a better understanding of how service and teaching work is being valued among colleagues and institutionally, many participants pointed to the fact that it would be important to serve on selective salary committees, as exemplified by this quote:

If in our selective salary considerations it made a difference if I sat on the Academic Senate, then I might have some incentive. I may not for personal reasons. I have two kids at home that demand a lot of attention so there's reasons why for me it doesn't make sense, but it might change the calculus for some people. But there's no material [or] immaterial incentive and I know that no matter what I do there's no difference; everybody gets the same raise. (Full Professor, Non-STEM)

A full professor in STEM described the kind of information you learn when serving on the selective salary committee:



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So, one of the things that I recommend to junior faculty in our department, you need to start on the salary committee because that way you get a sense for what people are doing with regard to number of publications, type of service as well as grants, teaching scores. All that information is shared in the salary committee which is interesting because other universities don't have salary committees, too, especially at non-unionized universities. Other colleagues that I'll meet with at professional conferences and they're like, what? You get that information? We don't have any of that information. But you only get it if you search it out yourself. (Full Professor, STEM)

Another participant suggested peer-support groups in order to better utilize informal information sharing among women faculty on campus:

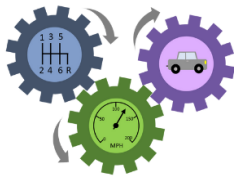
So it would be great if we had this sort of like just standing coffee hour for women at Wayne, right. Right down to little groups, maybe it's Mothers at Wayne or whatever. You could just drop in and you could listen to people talk about issues that relate to them and how they've overcome certain challenges. And maybe part of that could be online, maybe part of that could be live. But it seems like if we could develop some of those circles of interests, I think it would be very beneficial, especially for junior faculty to be a part of that. But it has to be something that we know involves all the different rank levels so that people can say, OK yeah, I remember having that challenge and here's how I dealt with it. Or this is available now. Did you know about that? Because often times, we didn't realize what resources are here. (Full Professor, STEM)

For mentorship programs, an assistant STEM professor discusses how mentors or advocates can further protect junior faculty:

The second is I think we could do a better job at advocacy. Earlier I mentioned that one of the ways I was protected from even more service was by my mentor who stepped in. I think that if we are providing more or stronger advocacy or mentorship to a junior faculty in particular, that might be helpful to support or to protect us a bit more strongly from inequity as it relates to workload. So having – and I use the word “advocate” as opposed to “mentor” because I think an advocate would be in better position to provide that support.

(Assistant Professor, STEM)

Last, faculty discussed the importance of editing and removing some service or teaching obligations when new ones are added, either at the departmental or individual faculty level:



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I have personally started implementing a one-in, one-out policy in my own workload. I would actually like to see this be implemented on a more departmental or university-wide basis. Like, ok, we're going to hold a new event? Well, great. We need to get rid of one of our current events. We're going to ask you to develop a new course, great, we need to let one of our existing courses go from our curriculum. I think that would really help departments make really specific decisions and not overstretch our faculty as much. It's my understanding that most of the people in our departments are at maximum capacity right now...I don't optimistically see big bundles of money or admin support coming. I would love those recommendations and I would love to continue to push them up to the administration. (Associate Professor, STEM)

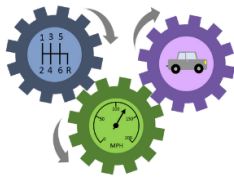
Beyond individual strategies to cope with workload issues and prevent overload, several participants voiced frustrations that even written-out workload policies are only useful if they are tied to monitoring and enforcement, as the quote below exemplifies:

We did and do have a workload policy in the department...And so it's a document that exists, that outlines workload expectations and opportunities to make changes to workload based on previous performance. But honestly, I haven't seen the impact of that. For example, I don't know how that's monitored. I don't see that being monitored and so my gut reaction to that is that I don't know that that would – unless it's something that is required at university level – I don't see that being effective or previous workload policy. (Assistant Professor, STEM)

## 3.2 Work/family/life strains

The work/family/life strains findings yielded these overarching themes: how chair variability, inconsistent administration, and WSU policies impact work/family/life strains; how childcare and paid leave impact work/family/life issues; and how proposed solutions and resources would address issues related to work/family/life strains.

Overwhelmingly, participating faculty members expressed concerns about inconsistent institutional processes, resources, and support related to work/family/life strains; a lack of transparency about such institutional resources and support; and a lack of institutional support of existing resources. Faculty members in the focus group expressed anger and confusion about how the institution responded to issues related to family/work/life strains. They noted several barriers to addressing faculty concerns with family/work/life strain. Finally, participating faculty members recommended several institutional level solutions the university could and should implement to improve family/work/life strains.



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## 3.2.1 Impact of chair variability, administration, and WSU policies on work/family/life strains

An overwhelming theme across participating faculty members and focus groups was that support for time off and accommodations for care work were dependent on the department leadership, which participants reported varied greatly. Participants raised their concerns about the lack of consistent policy across Wayne State University as an institution, and offered numerous examples:

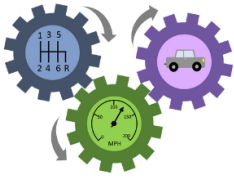
I do think our current policies leave a lot of leeway up to the chairs with how they enforce things or don't enforce things, which can be good if you have a good chair, but if you a bad chair... And I've been in departments in the past where I had a bad chair who was not very helpful, so I was nervous. But yeah, I do think the quality of the supervisor and that our current policies allow them a lot of power to do good things, but also probably bad things.  
(Assistant Professor, Non-STEM)

Participants repeatedly brought up how chair variability and a lack of consistent institutional policies and procedures impact several issues related to work/family/life strains including in relation to teaching and personal safety. A full professor in STEM noted how inflexibility regarding teaching schedules impact women faculty:

We don't have to have a class at 3 [pm] if that's when you have to pick up your child from school. And some department chairs were solicitous to that, but others were not. I mean I was always attuned to that because of what I went through. But it makes you more productive if you can have a schedule like that rather than getting stuck in well, we've always taught this course at 3 [pm] so we have to teach it at 3 [pm]. And there are a number of women faculty who were uncomfortable about coming down to campus at night. And some department chairs were more understanding of that than others. (Full Professor, STEM)

[R]ight before I went on maternity leave my former supervisor was going to put a new course for me to teach in spring/summer, so a new prep and another course or two courses right when I returned from maternity leave, even though I have enough funding to not teach at all.  
(Assistant Professor, Non-STEM)

The same assistant professor noted how the Wayne State University's policies and inconsistent department responses impacted not only faculty's ability to take leave, but also put the financial costs to faculty:



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I have a friend who had a baby, and she was sort of midway through a semester, this was like a few years ago at Wayne State. Her chair said, ok, you're having a baby in [month] or whatever. For you to get out of teaching in the [following semester] you either have to pay – because this is a weird thing in our contract, where you have to use your salary to pay your adjunct for something – or you can come back and teach it yourself. So she came back to work at Wayne State after six weeks with her baby. And I just think that that's not good. So if your chair is that person, and I still think our policies would allow that, that's a problem. (Assistant Professor, Non-STEM).

Another participant summed it up this way:

Even then things seem to have potentially changed since the prior chair and so I think there's a lot of murkiness, I guess, at the department level of how you go about the formal process of getting time off or utilizing, capitalizing on these resources that are meant to promote family/work balance. (Assistant Professor, STEM)

Several faculty members also raised concerns about the lack of consistent institutional support for faculty who do not have children:

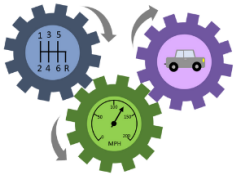
I'm having a hard time...how to articulate this, or my response or my position or the context. I'm partnered but single and childless. However, I have a life. I think I do. I would say that from my perspective there's been no practices or resources or mechanisms in place to support my life/work balance. (Assistant Professor, STEM)

### 3.2.2 Impact of childcare and paid leave on work/family/life strains

As already noted in the previous section, childcare and paid leave were prevalent themes. Faculty members in the focus groups noted huge frustrations and anger about the type and quantity of leave available and confusion about the university's policies and the process. Finally, the findings indicated that women faculty feel the impact more than their colleagues, perhaps best put by this participant:

I don't think that as an institution Wayne State understands that caregiving still primarily falls on the mother. (Full Professor, STEM)

Along with this gendered pattern of care work, participants noted that the COVID-19 pandemic, which impacted Wayne State University starting mid-March 2020, exacerbated the lack of childcare solutions and the inconsistent nature of administrative and institutional support. The same professor said:



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I've had to find daycare solutions, none of which were ever provided by Wayne. It was always my problem. It's not that I expected it to be Wayne's problem; I'm just saying that's the way that it has worked. Being a parent became much harder when the pandemic hit. I don't think my unit has had any understanding of how hard the pandemic hit parents.  
(Full Professor, STEM)

Inconsistent and inflexible institutional policies and mechanisms related to childcare and paid leave produced emotional responses by faculty across several focus groups, as for instance this assistant professor in Non-STEM indicated:

Well, a barrier to that is how crappy our parental leave looks, especially for clinicians who don't have a flexible schedule as a research faculty does – like I do. And they sort of said, oh, we have mechanisms for that. No, you don't. Having your colleagues donate leave is not a mechanism. It's insulting. It's embarrassing to beg your colleagues for that. And I really don't think they understand how big of a problem it is, that it looks bad, that if you're planning on having kids before you take a job, you often look up what their parental leave is. And I would not take this job if I had to be in the hospital every day, I wouldn't have done it.  
(Assistant Professor, Non-STEM)

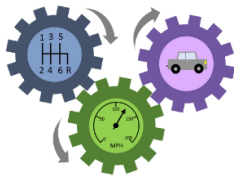
### 3.2.3 Recommended solutions to barriers to improving work/family/life strains

A lack of consistent institutional processes, support, and resources posed significant barriers to better addressing work/family/life strains. These included a lack of transparency about university processes and resources; inconsistent support of accommodations such as remote work, remote teaching, and online teaching post-pandemic; and insufficient parental leave or leave to care for loved ones. The pandemic magnified existing work/family/life strains and highlighted the need for more flexibility in terms of university policies, practices, and resources available to faculty.

An associate professor in STEM noted the need for more flexibility in university policies toward remote work:

I would say and this is kind of a pandemic comment, but I think that also is applicable to the before times as well, that the possibility for remote work or online teaching is really I think important both for the fact of Wayne State is such a Metro Detroit school, right? People live an hour away, people live an hour and a half away. There's a pretty broad distribution of our faculty. And I think allowing for remote meetings, possibilities for accounting for online teaching, for those who want it. (Associate Professor, STEM)

A full professor in non-STEM expressed similar support for remote work:



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The pandemic, once I started working at home, I realized my [family member] needed a lot more care than I thought so working at home has been fantastic because I can manage [family member]. I feel like I have been able to manage my career, but I am very much focused on my family. I've been lucky to do that but there's no question that I've had to really fight for that balance. (Full Professor, Non-STEM)

Faculty members offered practical solutions to help address such work/family/life strains. They called for the continued support of resources that were made available to faculty during the pandemic, such as remote work and online teaching, counseling and mental health services, as well as a child-care subsidy, and university-sponsored daycare. Several faculty members in the focus groups also called for the university to expand its definition of care, as for instance these participants did:

I guess I would say explicit recognition of other forms of care, labor, expanding the category of the kinds of persons that count as care labor. And I know the current union contract now includes care for parents, but it's parents, which is super important, but you know, uncles, et cetera, in-laws – all of that, just to name a few other kinds of care work that happens. So, I think explicitly counting that. (Associate Professor, STEM)

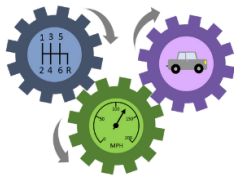
Another participant suggested that WSU leadership recognized that working at the university is also “just” a job, meaning that faculty members have other aspects to their life as well:

I would actually look to see more from leadership about taking mental health days, taking weekend vacations, spending the evenings doing a hobby or spending time with your family. Things that encourage a more regular work/life balance. The understanding that...in the academy, again, this is just a job. It might be a job that we feel passionate about, but it's a job at the end of the day. And we are not obligated to work this job 60 hours a week, or 80 hours a week. So that's one of our biggest hurdles that I see. Not only in our department but just across academic thinking. (Associate Professor, STEM)

Isolation emerged as another concern, especially for faculty members who were new to Wayne State University and Detroit, and who joined during the pandemic. Participants recommended that Wayne State University should address this issues also:

I do think at the university level, having some sort of structured recurring opportunities for especially junior faculty to connect for attending events together or something, because I think it can be tough to initiate those connections on our own when you don't really know the landscape well. (Assistant Professor, STEM)





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## 3.3 Toxic work environment

Questions related to faculty members' experience with a toxic work environment at Wayne State University created a set of findings that showed how hostile treatment on campus is shaped and even enabled. Gendered and racialized power dynamics, a lack of checks and balances, and the influence of toxic leaders have resulted in a perception among faculty members that perpetrators are tolerated, if not also supported, at Wayne State University. Secondly, participants highlighted the importance of solution-oriented conversations in tackling toxic issues as they emerge on the ground. Incidents discussed show how toxic encounters evolve and can even grow over time creating an institutional barrier for minoritized faculty members.

### 3.3.1 Defining toxic workplace environments

Participants spoke of an atmosphere of bullying and toxicity, which they mostly understood as a form of systematic mistreatment in the workplace. Overall, participants described direct, but more often subtle patterns of a toxic work environment regarding sexism, racism, and religion. For instance, examples of direct toxicity were given by two assistant professors who felt particularly unwelcome by colleagues:

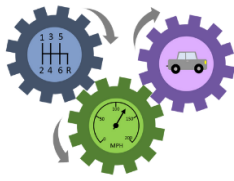
I had a colleague who refused to acknowledge my existence for about two years.  
(Assistant Professor, STEM)

[M]y former supervisor saying that to me that people can control when they get pregnant; it's not fair to your employer to have a baby in your first year. To me that's incivility. But is it hostile in this sort of, like, very explicit way? Maybe not. To me it felt a little hostile.  
(Assistant Professor, Non-STEM)

Several others discussed how incidents of harassment negatively affected their work tasks with "just a couple of bullies" in their work environment, as this participant's statement showed:

I would say the vast majority of people are warm and supportive and helpful; we do have a couple of bullies. And it can make your life just really miserable. Like you dread going to meeting situations or you feel like you'll be targeted, or humiliated, or mean things will be – you know, mean, untrue implications to kind of undermine ...So if you're a popular teacher or something like that, it's like people don't think there's enough love to go around. And many people can serve that purpose. And so, there's kind of this almost desire to cut you down or undermine you. If somebody says something nice about you and the first thing out of their mouth will be, well that's not really a big deal. (Full Professor, STEM)

This last direct quote not only suggests work tensions arising from bullying, but also highlights the devaluation of teaching, exacerbating discussions around teaching workload as discussed above.



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Faculty also discussed hostile treatment in relation to marginalized identities and sexism as well as implicit and explicit micro-aggressions. Participants said that subtle forms of toxicity are often brief but involve commonplace indignities while communicating derogatory slights toward underrepresented individuals contributing to hostile encounters as the quotes below demonstrate:

[S]ometimes the white male colleagues feel entitled... they have this sense of confidence... But that entitlement sort of feeds into them being perceived differently from women *and* faculty of color. (Full Professor, Non-STEM)

I got a grant and happened to mention it. And it was a prestigious grant at that particular time, and I happened to mention it to actually a colleague that I really, really, really respected and has intellectually really helped me out with bouncing ideas, et cetera, et cetera. But the response was, ‘Oh, I guess what it takes to get a grant these days is to be a woman.’ I mean, I was so shocked because it was somebody that otherwise I felt like I had a pretty good relationship with. (Associate Professor, STEM)

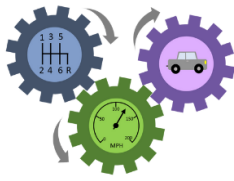
[H]iring decisions have been opportunities for faculty to say and make decisions that have racist and sexist assumptions under them about whose work is important and why. And I think that it is linked to other forms of control over resources and the department. (Associate Professor, STEM)

While sexist remarks were subtle in nature, participants suggested that collectively they all operated to sustain institutional inequities in hiring and promotional opportunities. Faculty in focus groups also discussed the impact of discrimination due to intersections of gender and race. While participants understood racism and discrimination as intolerable, participants indicated that racism – like sexism – is subtle and exists in “every day” forms such as brief encounters that are ambiguous and difficult for some to identify as racism and would therefore not be prioritized:

I have personally been involved in two cases, but they were racism and explicit or micro-aggressions or things like that. In both cases a complaint was filed and then everything shuts down because once the complaint is filed there’s just a super amount of secrecy and there’s a lot done to protect the person who the complaint was filed against. (Full Professor, Non-STEM)

Discriminatory attitudes and behaviors can influence the hiring process for new faculty and other departmental funding and promotion decisions:

And then there’s sexism and racism that happens and is directly because of explicit moments of certain people with their hands on the purse strings deciding who gets hired and rallying votes among other faculty through racist and sexist comments in order to hire the white dude. (Associate Professor, STEM)



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Like sexism, accumulated incidents of racism across the university lead to disparate numbers in upper ranks. The racism is perceived as toxic, indicated through participants' use of the terms "exhaustion" and "bitterness":

I'm also speaking from a place of real personal exhaustion and bitterness about this particular topic right now, even though actually at Wayne, despite everything that I said, I think the workplace climate is mostly good. I would also say, though, that our department is so white. Like, what are we doing? And I don't know all of it, I think there's a lot of history before I got here of stories that I don't know, that are referenced about people of color being hired and not getting tenure, and those tenure processes being shady and stuff. And so I think that, I don't know, has to be explicitly part of conversations that we're addressing here.  
(Associate Professor, STEM)

Participants also noted issues with dimensions of identity that often go unnoticed due to lack of cultural competency, including concerns over nationality, ethnicity, and religion:

[P]eople ask me, "Can you speak English?" It's a kind of – that's kind of more offensive.  
(Associate Professor, Non-STEM)

I'll mention that I think across the university tolerance for misogyny and for gender type things...tolerance for that behavior in that regard is low. But there's still bastions of well-tolerated, micro-aggression, especially for things like religion, where I think people are often really unaware of the kinds of things that they do and say. (Full Professor, STEM)

### 3.3.2 Institutionalization of toxic behaviors

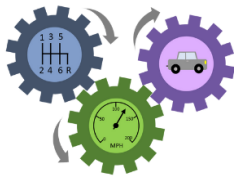
Participants indicated that incidents accumulate over time and perpetuate asymmetrical representations of white women and women of color at higher ranks, while also creating and maintaining an organizational culture that becomes difficult to change. Participants talked about toxic behaviors at all levels of Wayne State University and focused on how other faculty members abuse their power, how the administration tolerates toxicity, and how these discussions often involve references to a "culture of academia" at Wayne State University,<sup>2</sup> succinctly put by one participant:

Wayne State has done a terrible job at supporting [victims of] sexual harassment and bullying. (Full Professor, Non-STEM)

Faculty members in focus groups discussed how toxic work environment involved power dynamics. This occurred when faculty members in positions of leadership or power engaged in toxic treatment of others or turned a blind eye to how incidents unfolded and women seeking help. For instance one participant described bullying in faculty mentorship relationships:

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<sup>2</sup> The focus groups were conducted before Wayne State University widely publicized its Anti-Bullying Statement of Values: <https://provost.wayne.edu/pdf/wsu-anti-bullying-statement-of-values-proposal-01-03-2022.pdf>



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I had a mentor read a manuscript for me, a draft, because I was submitting it to a journal that he used to be the editor of, and he gave me feedback on it. Some was helpful, some was less helpful. I incorporated the feedback, and I resubmitted it. And he then chastised me for submitting it without his permission. This was work I did in my dissertation. He was not part of the research. It was it was a totally wild and patronizing comment. That just kind of clarified it. I was, like, oh, wow, ok. Now I see this is all very problematic.... I didn't feel like I had any recourse and I just had to kind of follow the guidance of that person until I did enough stuff on my own. (Associate Professor, STEM)

Other examples included bullying by administrative leaders:

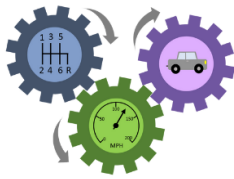
You run across misogyny and it's rampant. [This man in leadership] is completely toxic. He is the kind of personality that I don't understand how anybody has retained him for all these years. He's racist; he's sexist; he's just every ism. The man is detestable. ...And he was so racist in his conversations...I was shocked that people would tolerate this kind of behavior. (Full Professor, STEM)

Participants across focus groups also said that when toxic behavior occurs, structures and divisions of labor across colleges prevented accountability for toxic behavior. Several participants suggested that there is a passive, "quasi institutionalization" of toxicity at Wayne State University:

[I]t almost seems at the level of the institution there needs to be greater accountability because I've seen instances where students have spoken up or faculty has spoken up and still nothing has been done. I don't know who's – chair or who is – responsible for accountability at the level of the department. But it seems like there's no-one there who's holding us accountable and so it almost seems like we need a greater presence of folks who might be responsible for holding [individuals for their] comments accountable when reports are made of cases of incivility at department levels. (Assistant Professor, STEM)

I also know of cases of sexual harassment being reported and then not actually dealt with and kind of informal mechanisms of, like, we just won't assign students to this person, but that doesn't actually prevent the behavior. (Associate Professor, STEM)

If there are no consequences to anyone's job, why can't we bring in arbiters to help departments deal with bullying issues across the board. All I heard was, "We can't do that, we can't do that." I don't believe that's completely true and that it would necessarily conflict with the [AAUP-AFT union] contract. But I think there's a big lack of support generally for those kinds of issues. (Full Professor, Non-STEM)



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I filed sexual harassment in the past and I think there is a bigger question of how the institution historically has dealt with issues that affect women and the LGBTQ community and students of color. I know other universities will have a women's resource center or a sexuality resource center, something like that ...I think all of those are signs that Wayne State historically just has been very bad at supporting gender equity issues on campus.  
(Full Professor, Non-STEM)

Hence, participants pointed to the particular history and culture of academia at Wayne State University where toxic work environments were largely perceived as an accepted aspect of the employment landscape. Additionally, some participants brought up that women were still framed as still not belonging in specific fields or academia at large:

[T]hat was really the first time in my life that I was told by more than one person, and it was understood by most of the post-docs in the lab, that women just don't [do science well], they're sub, they're not men. And men do science better than women, and they have better ideas. It was the first time I ever felt that way. And it was really blatant.  
(Associate Professor, Non-STEM)

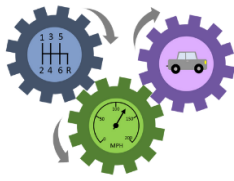
So that's something that unfortunately is not a Wayne State thing. It's across all of academe because I hear all sorts of horror stories from other institutions as well, especially when it comes to sexism. (Full Professor, STEM)

### 3.3.3 Solution suggestions and discussions

Similar to workload and work/family/life strains issues, faculty members in the focus groups said they were burdened with having to develop individual strategies in order to navigate and respond to racism, sexism, or other forms of hostile treatment by adopting coping mechanisms to operate in the social, cultural, and academic environment of Wayne State University. Participants said that one way was to find sources of support such as mentors, colleagues, and faculty members from other departments. Again, discussions of peer support groups indicated that these helped faculty members navigate specific hostile situations and issues without much or any help by Wayne State University. While these support groups can help reduce anxiety or stress about incidents, they do not offer much recourse for systematic change, which participants indicated was very much needed at Wayne State University. And participants offered solutions that Wayne State University could implement such as:

[Ha]ving a women's resource center shows that you care about those issues and that there's a support system, even if that's for students. We don't have that for anybody right now.  
(Full Professor, Non-STEM)

At the same time, participants were also cautious when asked about the impact of measures such as bystander training:



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[My] view is just slightly different because I feel like we have had training but it's a willingness to be receptive to it. In some ways I think that the attitude is set at the top of, ok, done that box, checked it, right, but we're not actually willing to make any tangible changes to make this better. So I honestly feel like it's just checking the box, got that training – can move on now. And so I don't know what the answer is. I mean, it's got to be a little bit of – I think it is this kind of old-school phenomena of this just wasn't an issue in those days so why is it now, right? (Associate Professor, STEM)

[We] asked for department-wide faculty feedback on it and that's when we saw that there was very strong polarization and perceptions on it. Since then, we've had discussions with folks at the university office of equity and inclusion, and it sounds like the university, their office is actually trained to implement something like that at a wider level for the university. (Assistant Professor, STEM)

But unless administration is willing to actually discipline and de-tenure people – and that's a bad word here at a union university, I don't see how we overcome some of these struggles. (Full Professor, STEM)

## 3.4 Themes across all three barriers (workload, work/family/life strains, toxic work environment)

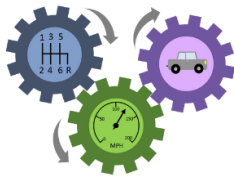
Several themes emerged across the three barriers of hidden and unequal workload, work/family/life strains, toxic work environment: chair variability, lack of transparency, moving between ranks, and COVID-19 pandemic related issues.

### 3.4.1 Chair Variability

Perhaps the biggest theme across all three barriers that faculty members discussed in the focus groups was the issue of chair variability. Participants offered numerous examples that cut across work/family/life strains, inequitable workload, and toxic work environment, where chairs were not helpful, for instance regarding teaching and service assignments:

[S]he was having a baby ...and was asking for reduced teaching load and it's like she had to fight with the chair. The other one gave up and paid someone out of her pocket to teach for her. And so again I think there's this problem of it shouldn't depend on whether I'm chair or someone else is chair. (Full Professor, Non-STEM)

In terms of how committee chairs are appointed within the department, it's totally at the discretion of the chair. And so it was we've had the experience in our department where junior, like, recently tenured male faculty were getting appointed to the committee chair positions, which then prepares them for more leadership positions later on, whereas the women faculty would be put on the committees or given kind of behind the scenes work that was not formally recognized. So, yeah. At the discretion of the chair I think leaves a lot of room for nonsystematic stuff to happen. (Associate Professor, STEM)



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In turn, other participants provided examples of chairs or associate chairs being helpful:

I went into maternity leave frustrated with the university for not allowing you to have the leave, frustrated my former supervisor for I think being a jerk at teaching. My chair stepped in and allowed me to just teach one class upon return, which was helpful, but it just still feels like really insulting for the university to not grant 12 weeks, which is still not long enough, of paid leave the second you walk through the door. (Assistant Professor, Non-STEM)

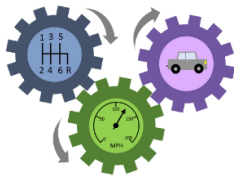
[W]e've got someone in our associate chair position now who's pretty good at diplomatically handling things when they happen in the moment in meetings and then figuring out ways to still get done what she wants done, which is admirable because we've got some strong personalities. (Assistant Professor, Non-STEM)

But the strongest narrative emerging from the focus groups participants was a call for more consistent and transparent institutional policies across the entire university that make up for changes in leadership roles. Faculty members provided examples again and again on how changes in the position of department chair meant significant changes to how issues of workload unfold, including how faculty are assigned to committees, consideration of the types of work involved in committee work, and how teaching workload is distributed, or if and how previous agreements are honored, or not. The following quotes demonstrate this narrative:

I think that maybe a bit of the problem is that a previous chair had policies in place and then the next chair decides maybe to do it a little differently. And then there are people that never really got compensated or recognized for something that happened under a previous administration, you know what I mean. (Associate Professor, STEM)

But you can have other years where you have a leader who is just literally warming the seat and getting paid to do nothing. So I've had both extremes. Some who have been very transparent and proactive in disseminating information and I've had others who disclose things only if you force them to in a faculty meeting where everybody has to make a motion and make this a formal process in order for that person to reveal information. So I found it's very frustrating here if you don't actively pursue your own information to benefit your career. (Full Professor, STEM)

[E]ither way it's not necessarily fair because you might have a chair who is very biased in favor of white males or you might not, but the same thing with people being elected. You've got a selection process that is inherently biased against women and people of color. (Full Professor, Non-STEM).



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## 3.4.2 Lack of transparency and lack of enforcement of rules

A lack of transparency was also a significant trend in discussions across all three barriers. Faculty addressed tensions arising from the perceived lack of transparency in various aspects of workload and selective salary:

I think that's what I resented the most is that for lack of transparency and communication took up a lot of my time as a new professor. (Assistant Professor, STEM)

It's totally not transparent either. I get a letter from – I don't know who it comes from, but somebody at the university every year, saying you got your – I don't know whatever it is – 1.25% raise but I couldn't tell you what my ratings were from year-to-year.  
(Full Professor, Non-STEM)

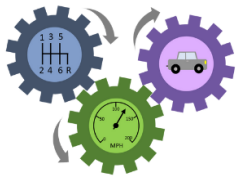
Before [the GEARS workload equity pilot project tool] was shared with the [department] we did and do have a workload policy in the department. This was something that was developed before I joined but I think it was launched the year after I joined. And so it's a document that exists, that outlines workload expectations and opportunities to make changes to workload based on previous performance. But honestly, I haven't seen the impact of that. For example, I don't know how that's monitored. I don't see that being monitored and so my gut reaction to that is that I don't know that that would – unless it's something that is required at university level I don't see that being effective or previous workload policy.  
(Assistant Professor, STEM)

Participants also noted a lack of formal rules and transparency relating to issues of toxic work environment, coupled with the above described unwillingness to tackle such issues:

Where we've left it is let's try to potentially collaborate and it might not be a department-specific procedure but then if there's something at least more formalized that's available beyond – because what we kept hearing, “Well, that's what HR is for. That's what the Title IX is for, that's what ...” but a lot of the time these experiences, especially what we're hearing from the grad[uate] students, are not necessarily at the level that it's related to legally violating something but that doesn't mean that it's not impacting their psychological wellbeing and safety. (Assistant Professor, STEM)

Similarly, participants brought up repeatedly the lack of formal rules and transparency in relation to addressing work/family life strains, particularly when it comes to leave policies and also how work time needed to be shifted during the pandemic:





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HR told me one thing, and then the union told me another. The union was like, “Oh, you have to work it out with your department head.” Then HR was like, “Well, you can take this time off if you find people to substitute for your classes.” That’s what an HR person told me. It was my responsibility to find somebody to fill in. Then the department head works out this plan. It’s like everybody told me something different, and I think that’s what was frustrating. I feel like other people I talked to at the university it’s the same where they’re like, “Everyone told me something different and I just pieced together some plan.” I don’t know, I think that that kind of clarity needs to be a little bit more clear, for any kind of sick leave or anything. (Assistant Professor, STEM)

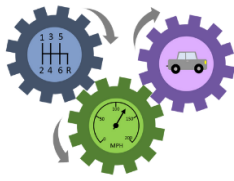
I know from talking to colleagues at other schools that there were people who were able to negotiate reduced loads because of childcare and that there was consideration taken into account for parenting responsibilities during the pandemic and things like that. As far as I could tell the only option that I had was either do things to change my situation at home or basically take a leave of absence which I don’t even know if [my supervisor] would have given me, to be honest. (Full Professor, Non-STEM)

### 3.4.3 Moving between ranks

With respect to advancement, the proportion of women in academic posts has historically diminished at each step of the career ladder, as institutional data from Wayne State University has shown (Institutional Research and Data Analytics, 2022): From 2016 to 2020, there were consistently slightly more women at the assistant professor level (average about 51-52%), but in 2021 and 2022 there was parity between women and men faculty. Women at the associate professor level have represented between 40% and 44% from 2016 to 2020. However, 2022 data show that recently there were more women at the associate rank than men, with an increase from 47% in 2021 to 51% in 2022. Although we have seen a steady increase from 23% in 2016 to 28% in 2022 of women at the rank of full professor, they still fall far short of men full professors. As participants stated, not only have there been limited opportunities, but most have been taken up by men, with little mentorship provided to women on how to move into new positions.

Additionally, faculty members in our focus groups discussed differences in workload when moving from rank to rank. They also described a lack of clarity or transparency when it comes to expectations for promotions, which were exacerbated at higher levels; a lack of mentorship and a lack of colleague/department support; and/or sexist/hostile treatment when going up for promotion. For instance, several participants indicated that service work increased when moving from the rank of assistant professor to associate professor:

For me, the main difference in service from assistant to [associate] professor, the main difference was service in the department level, as well as the college level. So, the dean asked or offered the diversity inclusion committee and leadership. So [I] am also doing for that the last two years. I would say more service. (Associate Professor, STEM)



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Already at the rank of assistant professor, there was a contradiction between the assumption that junior faculty should not do much service work in order to get promoted and the reality of being “pressured” to serve on committees by those who make promotional decisions:

In terms of service, I remember being told at the beginning, oh, pre-tenure you should really not worry about committees that much. And so I think I said the first year, ok, I don’t want to be on a committee. And I was told, yes, you will be on a committee. And so I think it’s sort of ostensibly said people under pre-tenure should not be on that many committees, but I don’t necessarily in practice know that it works out that way. It’s a little bit volunteering, as well, I will say, but there is some expectation. (Associate Professor, STEM)

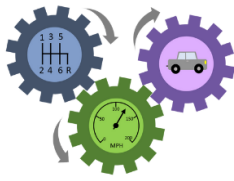
Earlier we were talking about how there’s the tension between being told, “Oh, you’re junior, you’re protected from service,” which I was also told, and therefore I joined a committee I was interested in. Upon starting my position within one year I was asked to be the chair of that committee and so it felt like there was a contradiction between, “Oh, just get your feet wet and do a little bit,” and so I joined something and then by joining it’s like, “Oh, well, now we need someone to lead this so can you take ...” And then you feel pressured to say yes. (Assistant Professor, STEM)

As discussed above, in some cases, faculty members strategically served on selective salary committees to make sense of what they needed to do to position themselves well before going up for tenure:

[I]f you serve on that committee you see everyone’s personal records. I’ve only done it for one or for two years...If you’re tenured in our department then you’re automatically on that committee. So all tenured faculty are on that committee. And then there’s one junior faculty representative every year. And at some point, before I went up for tenure, I realized that I had never been on that committee and the other junior faculty had, in part because my service is supposed to be reduced because I’m 50/50 with [another department]. But I have requested to be on that committee because I wanted to see everyone else’s files before putting in my tenure file. (Associate Professor, STEM)

After receiving tenure, expectations for promotion became especially unclear for moving from the rank of associate professor to full professor. Two associate professors described a lack of clarity when reaching the position of associate, creating hidden barriers as one desired to continue to ascend/climb the career ladder:

So honestly, I’ve felt like it’s been okay for me because I haven’t had to step into a lot of new responsibilities. That being said, nobody has really talked to me about it, so maybe I’m not doing something that I should be doing. There’s really been no formal or informal process. (Associate Professor, STEM)



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I would say that there are conversations in the hallway about you should consider getting on the department and university-wide committees now to increase your visibility on campus. I certainly did not have a conversation with anyone about service to change that when I went from assistant to associate professor. (Associate Professor, STEM)

I feel like when it comes to at least promotion from assistant to associate, those are pretty clear, like three to four articles in a book, service in the department – we make it clear that there's different service expectations for assistant, associate, and full [professors]. For instance an assistant professor doesn't need to have college or university service work to get a good score in service. But if you're an associate professor you are expected to serve on college and university committees. That goes into your service score. (Full Professor, STEM)

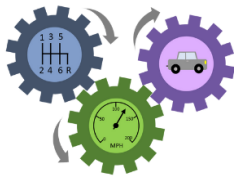
In sum, faculty described a lack of mentorship and transparency of expectations when going up for promotion to full professor, especially in terms of service work. In some cases, participants described being the first woman in their position and having to seek out mentors wherever they could, including outside their departments:

I was the first female hired in my department. Now we have several lecturers who are female and one other tenure track professor who is female as well. So I'm sort of a trailblazer in that respect but I would always go down the hall and ask other people information. So I'd seek those mentors out. And I try to maintain my level of productivity. It's been pretty consistent. I mean I've had some boomer years where I was just way too productive, just the timing of things as far as publications coming out. But generally, I keep a steady flow of publications. I always have something in the hopper. I'm always involved in service and now I'm actually taking on more and more service. (Full Professor, STEM)

Other narratives highlighted hostile colleagues or lack of departmental support when seeking support for tenure and promotion without understanding why:

Two out of the three people wouldn't even share their record with me as I'm going up for tenure [laughs]. They didn't even share or let me see – for whatever reason. Anyways, so not very collegial. I don't know if it's bullying exactly, but despite the fact that there are some friendly people who answer my questions in my department, there are also some unfriendly people who have made me feel pretty shitty. (Assistant Professor, STEM)

In my case, one of the faculty in our department, he's a professor. Before I went for tenure, I learned from my colleagues that he talked to our team at the time and said that me and another faculty we were weak and we shouldn't be hired, and all these other things. It was kind of hurtful, I guess. He can have his own opinions, but I guess it's not really productive. I'm already in the department. Maybe talking to me and maybe giving some suggestions, I would be more open to that, instead of him going to the dean and personally making that statement. (Associate Professor, STEM)



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I went up for full professor. I was denied from my department. It caused a lot of issues. My chair was encouraged to support me, even though [the chair] was quite reluctant to do so, by my dean. My dean is incredibly supportive. It went to the college. The college committee did not support me, but the dean and the dean's office supported me, and my package is moving forward. This has been [an] incredibly challenging time for me. I was told that some people who voted against me had said other people on the committee were saying they were creating a toxic work environment because the person was like, well, this person is a woman, and if you look at her record, compared to the men, she has done more than those men who have been fully promoted....That being said, no one came and told me and said 'You're not doing well.' They just voted against me. (Associate Professor, STEM)

As a result of a lack of support or opportunities for further leadership positions, faculty members at higher ranks described seeking work elsewhere and wanting to leave Wayne State University:

I've been applying for jobs left and right. Next year, I'll be applying for chair jobs everywhere I look. And that means I'm going to have to leave because there aren't any opportunities for administration here. So, I think as far as that next level of what you expect in the career development of an individual who's tenure track, we don't have a lot of that next level stuff, especially for women. We don't have a good process of mentorship as you move from associate to full. There aren't that many of us in the college. There aren't that many of us in the university. I was the first female in my department. (Full Professor, STEM)

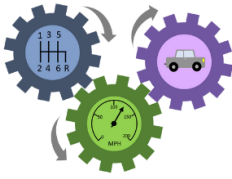
### 3.4.4 Pandemic-related issues

Participants indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic, which has impacted Wayne State University since March 2020, exacerbated the service workload and created issues for faculty in terms of family/work/life strains. Some participants, however, said that dynamics during the pandemic also helped alleviate work/family/life strains.

Many participants highlighted that the pandemic exacerbated teaching workload in particular, creating extra work due to needing to establish brand-new online only or hybrid courses that were both online and in-person:

[In Fall 2021, the decision college wide] was teaching hybrid. And so that was a little bit confusing. Those transition periods...we needed more help, how to manage the hybrid version. So yes, we know how to teach in class. Yes. We learned how to teach online, but hybrid is kind of like, it's very difficult to manage. It was difficult for me. Again, this semester it started online and then switched to in-person class, but students are resistant to [coming to class]. So it's also difficult to manage individual cases. (Associate Professor, STEM)

In other cases, participants said the circumstances of the pandemic increased their research time:



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I will say that the pandemic has been incredible for my research productivity. I am able to devote more time to research, now, being (in) online classes than I have in (the) entire time that I've been at Wayne State. (Associate Professor, STEM)

Moreover, with respect to service, the pandemic halted some low or no promotability service work:

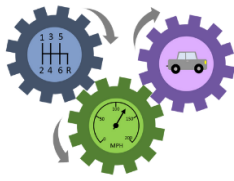
I haven't had to organize our end-of-the-year award ceremony. That usually takes a lot of time to be quite honest. I know our students and their families value it, but our department has three award ceremonies. Three separate award ceremonies. So there are three people like me who are each planning these separate events, and I haven't had to do it for the past two years, and that has opened up an incredible window of time for both me and other people. So I don't want to say those things aren't important, but in terms of me being able to be a productive scholar, which is what the university says they want me to do and that's what my job is. I'm not an event planner. I shouldn't be an event planner. I was hired to be a researcher. It's allowing me to focus on the job that they hired me to do.  
(Associate Professor, STEM)

Regarding mentoring, on one hand the pandemic also created undue pressure on women faculty who often helped students or mentees overcome emotionally stressful moments. A professor in a Non-STEM program describes the increased emotional labor in response to managing student stress during the pandemic:

Students go to the faculty that they like and that's never discussed. In my experience there's a huge disparity by gender as to who students go to. But like I said, we don't regularly have conversations about this and it's something that the pandemic has completely exacerbated. I can tell you things about the students I had last fall that I don't even want to know because they're on such an incredibly personal level because so many of them reached out to me because I was the only female faculty members they had. They did not do the same thing to my male colleagues. I know that for a fact because they've told me.  
(Full Professor, Non-STEM)

On the other hand, some faculty members described how the pandemic lessened the emotional labor and mentoring obligations:

I do continue to update course materials; I do connect with students. But what I'm finding is that I'm not providing the emotional support to students. I'm not serving in the CAPS capacity that [the other faculty members] talked about. I'm not just sitting in my office during office hours and waiting for some student to walk by and spend 45 minutes talking to me about all of the problems in their life. So I'm finding that I'm really able to better devote my time, let alone the commuting costs and just getting prepared for the day. That shaves two hours, easily, off of my day that I can now devote to research, that I can devote to my family that just makes me an overall happier person. I know that this experience has not been the experience of many people. (Associate Professor, STEM)



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With respect to family/work strains, the pandemic brought existing difficulties to the fore again, for instance the fact that WSU students and faculty are distributed across the broad Detroit Metro Area and beyond:

I would say and this is kind of a pandemic comment, but I think that also is applicable to the “Before-times” as well, that the possibility for remote work or online teaching is really I think important, both for the fact of Wayne State is such a metro Detroit school, right? People live an hour away; people live an hour and a half away. There’s a pretty broad distribution of our faculty. And I think allowing for remote meetings, possibilities for accounting for online teaching, for those who want it – I mean, this is a whole other can of worms I don’t want to open but during the pandemic we are all being encouraged to teach online as much as possible and now we’re not, right? (Associate Professor, STEM)

In this light, faculty members discussed significant differences in how service obligations could be fulfilled during the pandemic that made maneuvering through family life much easier:

A lot of at least my service being online with a young child has made it doable for me...I am able to jump on calls. I’m able to have phone meetings with students. So that has been something that has been incredibly helpful. Not having to drive all the way to campus for this hour-long meeting in the middle of the day that is a waste of your entire day. So I think that’s something that faculty or the departments can do to help faculty, moving forward. (Associate professor, STEM)

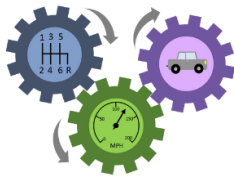
The associate professor in STEM also mentioned that ‘dual-career’ couples in academia often must live apart and called for allowance for remote work to better address work/family/life strains for these couples:

Some accommodations for online teaching who want it both, because of the metro Detroit [context], but also because of the academic context in which the fact of academic life is that people often have partners who are also academics and may have jobs elsewhere because that’s how the academic market works, right, quote, unquote, to be equal. (Associate professor, STEM)

Similarly, participants addressed the overall changes in work culture due to the better use and implementation of technology since the pandemic,

I have a handful of friends already who are leaving since the pandemic, leaving academic life or looking at taking online only jobs, virtual new jobs, and I think that the changing labor conditions have to be accommodated...So I think the in terms of work, family, life I think not accommodating remote work can be a real constraint in both the before and pandemic times. (Associate Professor, STEM)

However, having a “virtual office” that can be accessed at any time can also amplify workload issues and blur the work/family/life boundaries in an unhealthy way, as some participants noted:



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[My colleague's family member] just passed away, and [the colleague] was able to do a lot of meetings from his hometown while [the colleague] was making arrangements. I don't know if this fosters this problem of actually getting time off. We don't want to be with our colleagues in their hospital beds, or in their [family member's] funerals, but I do think making accommodations to make participation in campus life, virtually, more accessible will help somewhat. (Associate Professor, STEM)

Additionally, the pandemic pushed colleagues to find new ways to converse and share pertinent information with each other – a possible source of support for workload issues and a way to build relationships in a fast-paced environment:

I think for me, personally, the net benefits of having this flexibility and having an online alternative have just been incredibly helpful. I can now connect with my colleagues much faster because everybody is familiar with Zoom. So, what used to be a back and forth asynchronous email exchange can now be a quick 20-minute catch-up over Zoom and we update on our projects, and we move forward. So my research productivity has been really incredible during this time. (Associate Professor, STEM)

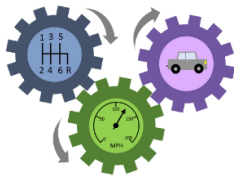
## 4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the focus group data collected provided valuable insights into the experiences of 29 women faculty members who are on the tenure track or are tenured at Wayne State University. The conversations with them in eight focus groups conducted online via Zoom from February to May 2022 showed repeated and long-standing issues regarding hidden and equal workloads, work/family/life strains, and toxic work environments at WSU.

In sum, narratives from participants strongly pointed toward an inequitable distribution of workload when it comes to the quantity of teaching, the size of classes, time spent on real mentoring of graduate students and advising, and non-promotable or low promotable service tasks on and beyond recognized committees. They also noted a lack of tools at the department, college, and university level to efficiently address, monitor, and correct workload inequities. Further, they indicated there was resistance by administrators and colleagues alike to meaningful address the inequities.

Regarding work/family/life strains, participants noted a lack of consistent leave policy implementation for care work, a lack of support for childcare, and a lack for recognizing care work beyond children and parents, and no avenues pointing toward better solutions in the near future.

In terms of toxic work environment, participants spoke consistently of a culture at Wayne State University that tolerates and even enables perpetrators of sexism, racism, and other hostile behaviors, and a lack of forums or effective ways to hold perpetrators accountable and to reduce hostility. Subtle as well as directly made hostile comments and moves, according to our participants, contributed to a climate in which many felt not wholly welcome and appreciated by



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colleagues, dreaded doing parts of their work due to bullies, or had to realize that their work's worth was questioned due to them being a woman. Additionally, participants pointed to a system that in fact rewards perpetrators for reducing their workload in terms of committees or not having to work with students anymore in order not to have to deal with problematic colleague's behaviors, leading to a burdening of other faculty members picking up their work.

Most notably, across all barriers was the dependency on chairs, and the lack of university-wide policies to guaranty minimum agreements beyond a chairs' helpful or not helpful attitudes and behaviors to address issues of hidden and unequal workloads, work/family/life strains, and toxic work environment.

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