

Wayne State University

Gender Equity Advances Retention in STEM

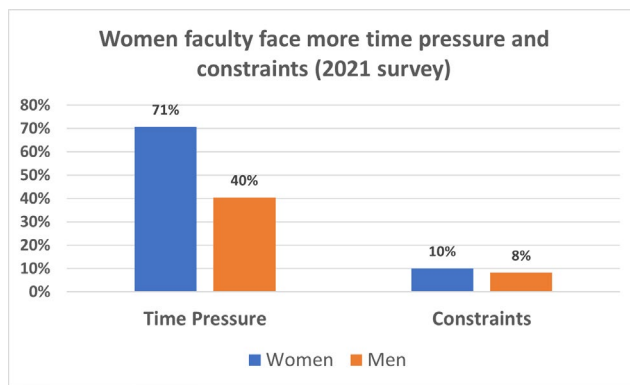
Drives • Shifts • Accelerates

Hidden and Uneven Faculty Workloads

A WSU-GEARS mini brief

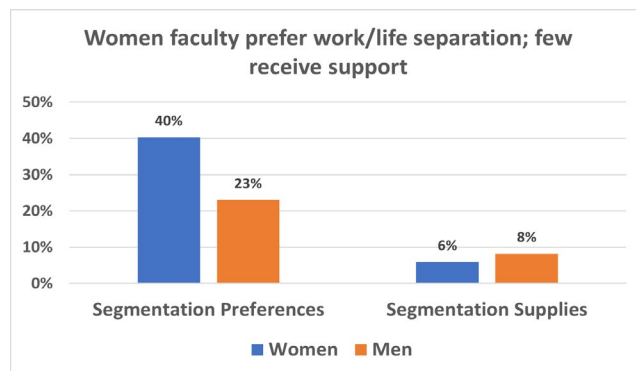
Hidden and uneven workload is a barrier to success for women faculty. On average, women faculty receive more requests than men faculty for teaching, student advising, and service,¹ and perform more service tasks.² At times, these tasks are non- or low-promotable work in the sense that they are “largely invisible, often routine, less instrumental to the university’s currency, and rarely developing one’s skills.”³ Compared to teaching and research, these tasks do not significantly impact tenure and promotion. The NSF WSU-GEARS program asked faculty about their workload in a 2021 survey, in focus groups with 29 women faculty, and in the Workload Equity Pilot Project,⁴ and subsequent workload workshops. This mini brief highlights gender and rank disparities in hidden and uneven workload.

Women Faculty Experience Heightened Time Pressure and Emotional Exhaustion

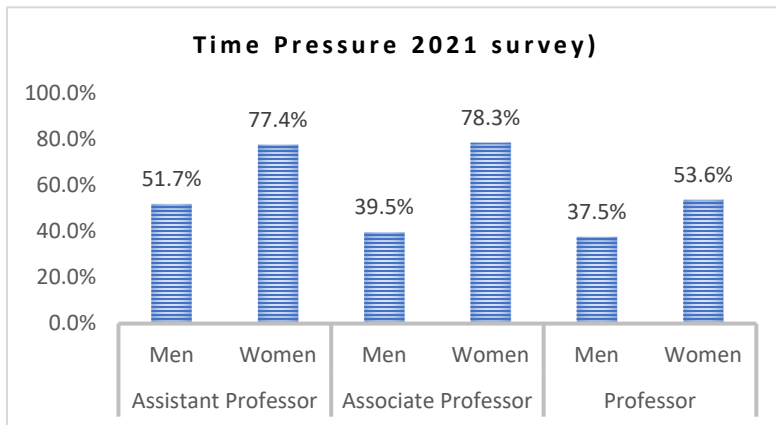


Time pressure assesses whether employees believe they have more work than what time allows.⁵ Women faculty reported higher levels of time pressure: 71% of women compared to 40% of men.⁶ Time pressure from work may stem from work-related difficulties due to work processes, resources, or colleagues.⁷ Time pressure increases may also be a result of emotional exhaustion (see graph, p. 2). Women and men reported only a slight difference in perceived constraints on their workload.⁸

Underpinning workload is the larger cultural context on work and non-work lives. Meeting the demands of academia amidst family/other non-work demands can be difficult for both women and men, particularly parents and especially women with children.⁹ Heightened time pressure can occur if faculty perceive a lack of support for managing work and non-work responsibilities.¹⁰ More women reported high preferences for separating work and non-work (40%) compared to men (23%). Yet, few women and men faculty reported sufficient support from the university to do so. The lack of recognizing and modeling work/family/life balance encourages a “long work hours” culture, but faculty often have considerable autonomy over their daily stop/start times (e.g., schedule control or flextime) and where they work (e.g., remote or in-person; flexplace). This flextime may reduce conflicts around competing work and family/life demands (e.g., medical appointments, children’s school schedules). Remote work benefits may also aid workers; however, the boundary between work and family/home spheres may blur.¹¹ For those who prefer segmenting their work and non-work lives, this can be more challenging to navigate without sufficient support.



Time Pressure Disparities between Men and Women Faculty of Same Rank



Women faculty at every rank reported a higher degree of time pressure than their men colleagues. This gender gap was most pronounced at the associate level.

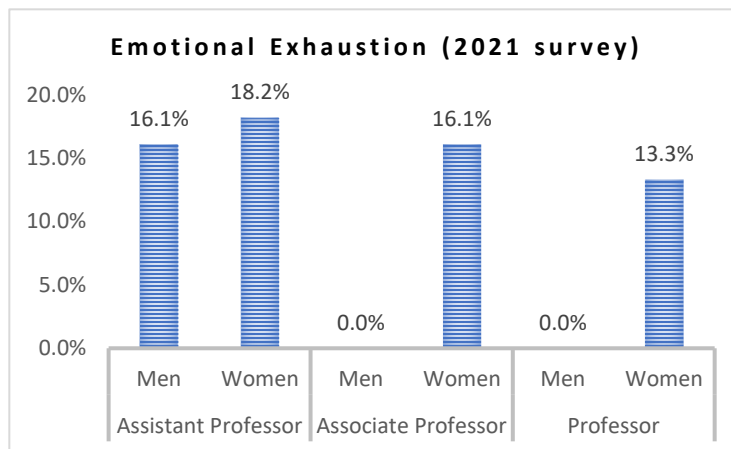
For women assistant professors, some expressed support from their chairs and colleagues to protect their time while they were still assistant professors. However, others mentioned inequities due to the lack

of engagement, as one explained, “half the people just don’t really participate...someone has to do the work of the department.” Associate professors discussed increased expectations of service after earning tenure. One woman faculty flatly stated: “The service, the way it worked for me was congratulations, you’re tenured now. Can you take over this committee managing [activity], can you run for this college committee?” Another woman explained: “In terms of advising, no explicit conversations about that. I think there’s an implicit expectation in our department that after tenure you seek positions on college and university committees.” Yet, another women professor drew attention to the increased service load outside of Wayne State: “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 [department] service might have stayed at the same level, but the service outside of the university has gone up.”

Women Faculty Report Higher Emotional Exhaustion

A consequence of work overload may be emotional exhaustion. More women faculty reported higher emotional exhaustion at all ranks, especially at the associate and full professor level. An associate professor described the impact of a higher than anticipated teaching load on her health and wellbeing:

“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 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...I was not expecting to teach this much.” A full professor stated that



they had “taught first years every single year because they want the first years to have women. It becomes an issue because what happens then is because I’m the only woman the women students come to me, particularly when my male colleagues, we’ll just say, behave badly.” Another woman

associate professor summed up the issue expressing: “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.”

Women Faculty Highlight Hidden and Uneven Advising and Service Work

Regardless of rank, focus group data suggest that compounding time pressures is the sense of the lack of recognition and value of work that is often hidden and uneven. Women faculty characterized some advising tasks as unrecognized, such as “shadow” or “ghost” advising. An assistant professor described: “I wouldn’t consider myself their formal mentor anymore, but they still need letters of recommendation; they’re still asking me questions. There’s still these ongoing mini sorts of commitments that I have, that take a lot of time.” Highlighting racial differences, another woman assistant professor stated: “There’s also the mentoring of undergraduate students that comes into play and for someone who’s a woman of color I want to add that there is a lot more that goes into that when it comes to mentoring undergraduates who are also students of color. There is that emotional work that is involved. There is that comfort and support that is involved that many people don’t typically see. That’s another aspect of mentoring that I would say would come into play.”

Service work was similarly characterized as uneven, as a woman associate professor’s example summarized: “So, who’s appointed to these other positions I think is not very equivalent, right? It means people step up. And I will say that I do feel that one of the problems in our department is that those service positions are very, very unequal, right? There’s people who will do the bare minimum, but beyond the service position in order to get kind of the credit for it, and then there are people who have put in awful lot of work into it. But I will say that the balances is uneven; then there’s not real recognition for the amount of workload.” Committee work also was frequently described as highly variable. Focus group participants reported that some committees are known as a light workload and others can require extensive work, as a woman associate professor described: “Not 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.”

However, focus group participants recognized that there were benefits to serving on some committees such as those deciding on promotion and tenure or selective salary, which allowed faculty, particularly new or assistant faculty, to learn about these processes and expectations firsthand. Especially committees discussing selective salary were seen as the only tool to learn about expectations and recognition of various aspects regarding research, teaching, and service in their departments. Some women faculty also pointed to a different valuing of internal and external service, with, as an associate professor put it: “external [service] being more beneficial to one’s career, reviewing papers, being on the editorial boards, or organizing a symposium at a conference. You develop those networks. And then those people could write you letters when you’re going up for full professor.” At the same time, the labor going into external service was not always recognized. While a full professor felt they were “at that wonder crossroads now, where there is more than two paths,” other women faculty expressed uncertainty, despite knowing that leadership roles can be beneficial for promotion. An associate professor told us: “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.”

A Snapshot of Workload Equity

Analysis of workload equity yielded a complex picture of how teaching, advising, and service tasks are distributed.¹² Specifically, the Workload Equity Pilot project examined the number of courses taught, number of courses taught for the first time, and number of students taught at both undergraduate and graduate levels. For graduate teaching and advising, we examined the number of graduate courses, number of advisees, and number of dissertation and thesis committees served on. For service, department, college, and university committees were analyzed. Analysis of these tasks by gender across ranks suggested that overall men, on average, had a higher teaching load and women, on average, had a higher service load.

However, analyses by *rank* and then by the intersection of *rank and gender* complicated the results. Associate faculty taught more courses and more courses for the first time than assistant and full faculty. Associate faculty also taught more students than assistant and full faculty. With respect to tasks with graduate students, associate faculty served as graduate committee members more than assistant and full faculty, and associate and full faculty similarly served as graduate primary advisors. For service in the department, college, and university, associate faculty served on more committees. An intersectional analysis of teaching revealed that men assistant/full faculty taught more graduate courses than women assistant/full faculty. Women associate faculty taught more graduate courses than men associate faculty. In graduate teaching and advising, men assistant faculty served as primary advisor more than women assistant faculty, and at a similar rate to women associate faculty. Women assistant faculty served as members of graduate committees more than assistant men and at a similar rate to men associate faculty. Last, with the exception of department level service by associates, women faculty at all ranks did more college and university level service work than men faculty.

Despite limitations with the Workload Equity Pilot Project data,¹³ this analysis combined with the survey and focus groups strongly suggests that more analysis on workload is warranted, most importantly at the academic unit level. This would allow for evidence-based decision making at the local level, as a one size fits all solution would not be effective.

Obstacles to Workload Equity

In focus groups and in the WSU-GEARS workshops on workload, faculty discussed ways to address solutions for the inequities of teaching, advising, and service work. These included rotation of courses and committees, course releases/reassigned time for research as compensation after taking on greater advising roles, and funds for research or travel for faculty or for that faculty member's student(s). In addition, dashboards, or other tracking mechanisms, to promote transparency were discussed. In fact, a lack of clarity and transparency were highlighted as complicating addressing workload issues. A woman assistant professor explained the situation as many perceived them: "If I were to want to know how I am doing compared to someone in the department I think that would require me to do my own hunting around, looking at C.V.s, looking up other people's teaching ratings." Another woman faculty member linked the lack of clarity to benchmarks at each rank level: "I would say that there are conversations in the hallway about how you should consider getting on department and university-wide committees to increase your visibility on campus. I certainly did not have conversations with anyone to change that when I went from assistant to associate professor."

This was particularly concerning when linked with questions regarding promotion and tenure. Faculty members stated there were not clear enough guidelines about how much to do in terms of teaching and service and heard conflicting opinions. A woman assistant professor commented that: “there’s not a lot of really explicit language around what the expectations are.” Another one similarly said: “In service I again don’t know that there’s anything explicit. It’s more of a ‘do something but don’t let it overtake your research’ kind of attitude.” And yet another woman faculty member agreed that the “mechanisms aren’t very explicit. I can’t think of any specific mechanisms in place around that, with the exception of the merit review [selective salary], which is more of a reactive assessment of what’s happening and less of a proactive ‘This is what should happen.’” Conflicting information on research was also discussed, for instance when one woman faculty member said that unlike another one [faculty colleague], she had been told “at the beginning there isn’t any explicit requirement for the number of papers, for example, for research, but we should have at least 15 by the time we go for tenure. That’s what I was told so that’s a bit different.” Another woman assistant professor stated she had “talked to two different chairs and then I think there is no specific guideline for tenure in terms of research.”

Although faculty in the focus groups said that they talked with others, this was usually relying on their informal networks inside and outside their academic unit. However, not all faculty members may have the same breadth or depth of networks, which may disadvantage some faculty members. Further, a lack of information may lead to unevenness in recognition and access to resources or missed opportunities that may benefit faculty. For instance, in the Workload Equity Pilot Project, evidence showed that men, at some ranks, engaged in a higher workload, such as graduate advising; however, this is a recognized formal leadership role. In contrast, women served on the committees, which in some units is further devalued as fulfilling service, not teaching. Additionally, women stated “shadow advising” exists in their units which gives formal recognition to the advisor on file, but not to faculty that students turn to when they feel their advisor is not accessible or knowledgeable enough. While being thesis chair is more time consuming, women’s lower access to that role limits their professional development in ways that could lead to other leadership roles, beneficial important for promotion, particularly to full professorship.

Conclusions

In sum, women faculty report that they are struggling to manage high time pressures with limited institutional support. Many tasks within faculty service, advising/mentoring, and teaching are often experienced as invisible, yet critical labor in support of the department and university. For instance, our findings on unrecognized work provided by women faculty in terms of internal and external service and student mentoring are illustrative of low-promotability tasks, which are seldom reported on a curriculum vitae. 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 transparency and formal methods on a department and/or university level to distribute workload; and a cultural resistance to address and change workload distribution. These results mirror research on higher education. Studies consistently show women and underrepresented minorities bear an unequal workload burden in academia for teaching and service, summarized as cultural taxation.¹⁴ Several factors contribute to workload inequities – how someone is asked, who is asked, who volunteers, who agrees, who negotiates for resources, who receives the resources, and who is noticed and rewarded.¹⁵

The consequences of workload inequities result in women faculty spending less time on research; having lower rates of achieving tenure and promotion to full professor; taking a longer time for promotion to full professor; having less career satisfaction; withdrawing from colleagues and the campus community; and departing from the university.¹⁶ Women, particularly women of color, are disadvantaged when the practices and policies around allocation and evaluation of workload are not clear.¹⁷ A recent study finds that men of color faculty are more likely to see workload as fair, followed by white men, white women, and last women of color; women of color faculty are less likely to feel their teaching, mentoring, and service are valued in their departments.¹⁸

Creating the conditions to improve workloads can benefit *all members of the academic unit*. It builds institutional memory as administrative leaders and faculty change over time. Units may identify areas for improvements, but also recognize existing equitable practices. Engagement with faculty members creates ownership over the process, which, in turn, can help units to plan for future growth and goals, sustaining change in the long-term. The data generated from the workload analysis can help to develop a rationale for change and may be used for an academic review or accreditation.

¹ O’Meara, K., Kuveava, A., Nyunt, G., Waugaman, C., & Jackson, R. (2017). Asked more often: Gender differences in faculty workload in research universities and the work interactions that shape them. *American Educational Research Journal*, 54(6), 1154–1186.

² Guarino, C. M., & Borden, V. M. (2017). Faculty service loads and gender: Are women taking care of the academic family? *Research in Higher Education*, 58, 672–694.

³ Babcock, L., Peyser, B., Vesterlund, L., & Weingart, L. (2022, p. 32). *The no club: Putting a stop to women's dead-end work*. Simon and Schuster.

⁴ The WSU-GEARS Workload Equity Project was adapted from the model at the University of Maryland. O’Meara, K.A., Culpepper, D., Misra, J. & Jaeger, A. (2022). Equity minded faculty workloads: What can and should we do now. <https://www.acenet.edu/Documents/Equity-Minded-Faculty-Workloads.pdf>.

⁵ Johson (unpublished), adapted from Karasek, R. A. (1985). Job Content Instrument: Questionnaire and User’s guide, revision 1.1. Los Angeles: University of Southern California.

⁶ The percentages are faculty who reported a high endorsement percentage, which is the percent of employees with average responses of four (4) or higher on a given measure. As most measures were on a five-point scale (1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree), high endorsement reflects an average response of agree to strongly agree.

⁷ Spector, P. E., & Jex, S. M. (1998). Development of four self-report measures of job stressors and strain: Interpersonal conflict at work scale, organizational constraints scale, quantitative workload inventory, and physical symptoms inventory. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 3(4), 356–367.

⁸ We recognize that gender is not a binary. The sample size for this study, however, was not large enough to include other gender categories.

⁹ Morgan, A. C., Way, S. F., Hoefler, M. J., Larremore, D. B., Galesic, M., & Clauset, A. (2021). The unequal impact of parenthood in Academia. *Science Advances*, 7(9). <https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.abd1996>; Misra, J., Lundquist, J. H. & Templer, A. (2012), Gender, Work Time, and Care Responsibilities Among Faculty. *Sociological Forum*, 27, 300-323. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1573-7861.2012.01319>. The COVID-19 pandemic had an uneven impact on faculty caregivers, as well. For more, see Myers, K. R., Tham, W. Y., Yin, Y., Cohodes, N., Thursby, J. G., Thursby, M. C., Schiffer, P., Walsh, J. T., Lakhani, K. R., & Wang, D. (2020). Unequal effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on scientists. *Nature Human Behaviour*, 4(9), 880–883. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-020-0921-y>.

¹⁰ Kreine, G. E. (2006). Consequences of work-home segmentation or integration: A person-environment fit perspective. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 27, 485–507.

¹¹ Allen, T. D., Cho, E., & Meier, L. L. (2014). Work–family boundary dynamics. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior* 1(1), 99-121.; Kaufman, G., & Taniguchi, H. (2021). Working from home and changes in work characteristics during COVID-19. *Socius*, 7, 1-12.; Golden, T. D., & Morganson, V. J. (2023).

When the time-space continuum shifts: telework and alterations in the work-family interface in Lucy L. Gilson & Thomas O'Neill & M. T. Maynard (ed.), *Handbook of Virtual Work*, chapter 7, pages 130-145, Edward Elgar Publishing.

¹² This project analyzed the professional records of 20% of tenured or tenure-track faculty in the following disciplines: physical and natural sciences, social sciences, engineering, and humanities. Of the 393 eligible for the study, the pilot study sample size was 78 faculty members. The sample only included faculty who volunteered to be part of the pilot study. Teaching faculty were also included in the pilot but for the purposes of this report only tenured and tenure-track faculty data are reported, for consistency with the survey and focus groups.

¹³ These include a small sample, selection bias by respondents, disciplinary differences, and at times a lack of consistency in the information on the professional record not only across units but within.

¹⁴ Padilla, A. M. (1994). Ethnic minority scholars, research, and mentoring: Current and future issues. *Educational Researcher*, 23(4), 24–27.; Domingo, C. R., Gerber, N. C., Harris, D., Mamo, L., Pasion, S. G., Rebanal, R. D., & Rosser, S. V. (2022). More service or more advancement: Institutional barriers to academic success for women and women of color faculty at a large public comprehensive minority-serving state university. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education* 15(3), 365.; Guarino, C. M., & Borden, V. M. (2017). Faculty service loads and gender: Are women taking care of the academic family? *Research in Higher Education*, 58, 672–694. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-017-9454-2>; Guillaume, R. O., & Apodaca, E. C (2022). Early career faculty of color and promotion and tenure: The intersection of advancement in the academy and cultural taxation. *Race Ethnicity and Education* 25(4), 546-563.

¹⁵ Babcock, L., Recalde, M. P., Vesterlund, L., & Weingart, L. (2017). Gender differences in accepting and receiving requests for tasks with low promotability. *American Economic Review*, 107(3), 714–747.; O'Meara, K., Kuveava, A., Nyunt, G., Waugaman, C., & Jackson, R. (2017). Asked more often: Gender differences in faculty workload in research universities and the work interactions that shape them. *American Educational Research Journal*, 54(6), 1154–1186.

¹⁶ Babcock, L., Peyser, B., Vesterlund, L., & Weingart, L. (2022a). *The no club: Putting a stop to women's dead-end work*. Simon and Schuster.; Guillaume, R. O., & Apodaca, E. C (2022). Early career faculty of color and promotion and tenure: The intersection of advancement in the academy and cultural taxation. *Race Ethnicity and Education* 25(4), 546-563.; O'Meara, K., Bennett, J.C., & Neihaus, E. (2016). Left Unsaid: The Role of Work Expectations and Psychological Contracts in Faculty Careers and Departure. *The Review of Higher Education*, 39(2), 269–297.; Eagan, M. Kevin, Jr., & Garvey, J. C. (2015). Stressing Out: Connecting Race, Gender, and Stress with Faculty Productivity. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 86(6), 923–954. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2015.11777389>.

¹⁷ Domingo, C. R., Gerber, N. C., Harris, D., Mamo, L., Pasion, S. G., Rebanal, R. D., & Rosser, S. V. (2022). More service or more advancement: Institutional barriers to academic success for women and women of color faculty at a large public comprehensive minority-serving state university. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education* 15(3), 365.; Guarino, C. M., & Borden, V. M. (2017). Faculty service loads and gender: Are women taking care of the academic family? *Research in Higher Education*, 58, 672–694. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-017-9454-2>.

¹⁸ Misra, J., Kuveava, A., O'Meara, K., Culpepper, D. K., & Jaeger, A. (2021). Gendered and racialized perceptions of faculty workloads. *Gender & Society*, 35(3), 358–394.