Faculty Service: The Gender Divide

National and institutional faculty data show women typically perform significantly more service than men, even when controlling for rank, race, and discipline (Guarino & Borden, 2017). Many faculty studies using different datasets and methods have found that women engage in more service compared to men (see O’Meara et al., 2017).

What does the research show?

- There are large gender differences among associate professors in time spent on service (Misra et al., 2011).
  - Both genders worked about 64 hours per week, but men spent 7.5 hours more per week on research than women, whereas women spent one hour more on teaching, two more hours on mentoring, and nearly five hours more on service per week.
- There are gender differences in when faculty had major service roles (Misra et al., 2011).
  - 75% of female associate professors versus 50% of male associates had been in major service roles.
- Women’s service roles are often more time-consuming and less prestigious (Misra et al., 2011).
- Women are less likely to be asked to head a department or program (Mitchell & Hesli, 2013).
- Women do significantly more internal service to the university or department, whereas there are fewer gender differences in external service to the local, national, and international communities that enhances visibility and reputation (Guarino & Borden, 2017).
- Women receive more frequent requests for service than men (O’Meara et al., 2017) and are asked to perform more service (Mitchell & Hesli, 2013).
- Some research finds no significant gender differences in the frequency of saying “yes” (O’Meara et al., 2017) whereas other research finds women say “yes” more frequently to service requests (Mitchell & Hesli, 2013).
  - Faculty may feel vulnerable saying “no” to service requests (O’Meara et al., 2017).
  - Because women are asked more frequently to do service, even if they do not say “yes” at a higher rate to requests, they still end up performing more service (O’Meara et al., 2017).
- This is not just a gender issue. Research suggests faculty of color also do a disproportionate share of service, and this may be especially true for women of color (see O’Meara et al., 2017).

Why does it matter? It hinders women’s academic careers.

- Service is less valuable in tenure and promotion at research universities (Misra et al., 2011).
- There are fewer hours available to devote to research (Mitchell & Hesli, 2013).
- When faced with too many demands, faculty consistently note they sacrifice research first (Misra et al., 2011).
- Most faculty receive no extra compensation for internal service activities because being good citizens is part of their job. Uncompensated service is typically factored into reviews, but generally carries less weight than teaching or research (Guarino & Borden, 2017).

Why do women do more service?

- It’s not because women want to do service more. Both genders expressed a preference for research. Most faculty viewed service as impinging on their time and expressed frustration at how service is distributed (Misra et al., 2011).
- Women do not volunteer more often for service without being asked (Mitchell & Hesli, 2013).
- Instead, research suggests women are asked to do service more often because colleagues and administrators:
  - want to diversify a committee;
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- anticipate women will say “yes” to the request;
- perceive women as being good at service and teaching;
- expect women to be committed to the service activities; and
- see women as critical to caretaking and institutional housekeeping tasks (O’Meara et al., 2017).

What can heads and colleagues do?
- Be aware of how your unconscious biases may shape who you’re asking to serve the department and University (O’Meara et al., 2017).
- Carefully monitor service requests and allocations (Guarino & Borden, 2017).
- Ensure an equitable and fair distribution of service, including of advising loads (O’Meara et al., 2017).
- Require rotations for time-intensive service roles (O’Meara et al., 2017).
- Reward faculty who take on more than their share in promotion, tenure, and review processes (O’Meara et al., 2017).
- Hold faculty accountable who are not contributing to internal service.

What can women do? (Rockquemore, 2010)
- Avoid saying “yes” on the spot and don’t make “yes” the default response
  - “Let me check my calendar/workload and I’ll get back to you”
- Consult mentors, heads, or chairs of P&T committee and check your calendar first
- Figure out how to say “no” when appropriate
  - “I am in the middle of [status-enhancing service] and if I hope to get tenure/promoted, I’m unable to take on this additional service.”
  - “If you can find a way to eliminate one of my existing service obligations, I will consider your request.”
- Say “yes” when exciting opportunities come along
  - Serve strategically – where do you want to make your mark?

Citations


