

A path toward equity for women faculty in higher education

Just over 50 years ago, Congress passed Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (Title IX), barring gender-based discrimination in schools that receive federal financial assistance. Since then, affirmative action programs have greatly improved conditions for women faculty in higher education, but gender-based discrimination remains pervasive in U.S. higher education and demands corrective action. Although women now constitute the slight majority of faculty in the academic workforce, federal figures show that among full-time faculty members in the United States,¹ a woman earned 83 cents for each dollar a man earned in 2021–22, consistent with U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics findings of median earnings across all sectors. Women faculty members are not only more likely than men to hold appointments in lower-paying academic ranks and types of institutions but are also paid less than men within the same academic ranks and institutions, on average. Researchers have shined the light on these and other gender inequities for years, but progress has been slow for women faculty, particularly women faculty of color.^{2,3}

In the late 1960s, University of California, Berkeley statistician Elizabeth Scott began developing groundbreaking statistical modeling techniques for salary equity analyses, culminating in 1977 with the publication of a higher education salary evaluation kit, commissioned by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP).⁴ Those techniques were expanded and applied with great success by Lois Haignere, whose innovative book *Paychecks: A Guide to Conducting Salary-Equity Studies for Higher Education Faculty*, also commissioned by the AAUP, remains

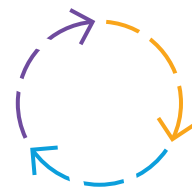
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How do we break the cycle of discrimination against women faculty and faculty of color in higher education?



1 Figures in this report represent full-time non-medical instructional staff in nonprofit degree-granting institutions participating in Title IV federal financial aid programs in the United States (50 states and Washington, D.C.) and are based on data from the IPEDS Human Resources survey, 2021–22 provisional release. Additional details, historical data, and up-to-date figures are available on the [AAUP Data](#) website.

2 Finkelstein, M.J., Conley, V.M., & Schuster, J. (2016). *Taking the measure of faculty diversity*. TIAA Institute.

3 Turner, C.S.V., González, J.C., & Wood, J.L. (2008). *Faculty of color in academe: What 20 years of literature tells us*. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 1(3), 139–168.

4 Scott, E.L. (1977). *Higher Education Salary Evaluation Kit*. Washington, D.C.: American Association of University Professors.

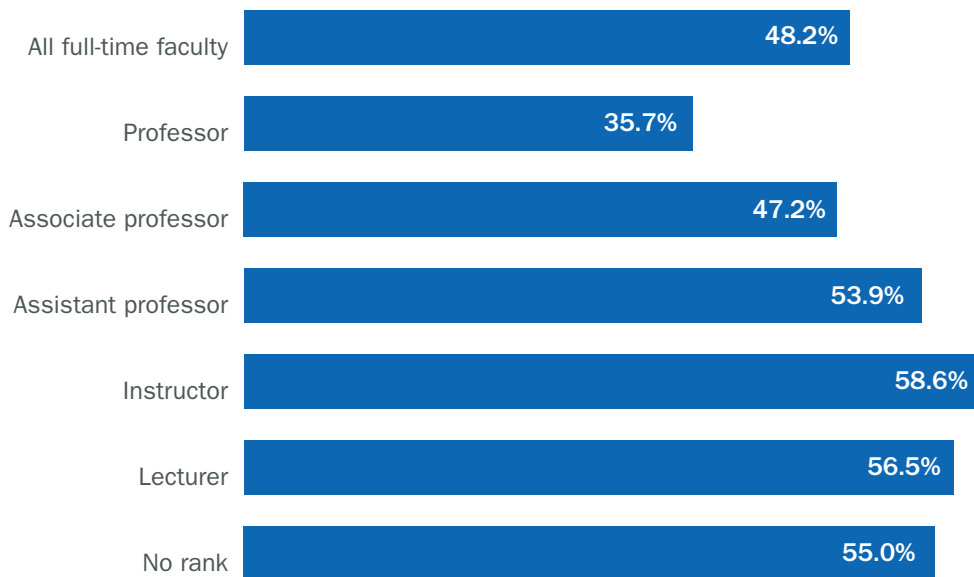
the primary resource for universities and researchers to identify salary inequities.⁵ The pioneering work of Scott, Haignere, and others has helped uncover discrimination against women faculty in higher education, but women faculty have not attained equity despite all the affirmative action efforts undertaken.

The facts: Gender and racial disparities in faculty ranks, salaries, and employment status

Women comprised 48% of all full-time faculty in fall 2021, compared with 27% in fall 1987.⁶ However, only 36% of full professors were women, as shown in Figure 1.

Representation of women faculty was disproportionately high among instructor, lecturer, and unranked positions: women comprised more than 56% of full-time faculty among those lower academic ranks. Opponents of affirmative action have argued that such figures are not due to discrimination but instead to a lack of qualified applicants. However, that argument has largely been debunked: In each year since 2006, women have earned the majority of doctoral degrees in the United States,⁷ and more than half (54%) of all full-time assistant professors were women in fall 2021.

Figure 1. Percentage of full-time faculty members who are women, by academic rank, fall 2021



Source: IPEDS Human Resources survey, 2021-22, provisional release (Dec. 2022)

5 Haignere, L. (2002). *Paychecks: A Guide to conducting salary-equity studies for higher education faculty*. Washington, D.C.: American Association of University Professors.

6 National Center for Educational Statistics (1997). *1993 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF-93). Instructional faculty and staff in higher education institutions: Fall 1987 and fall 1992* (NCES Publication No. 97-470).

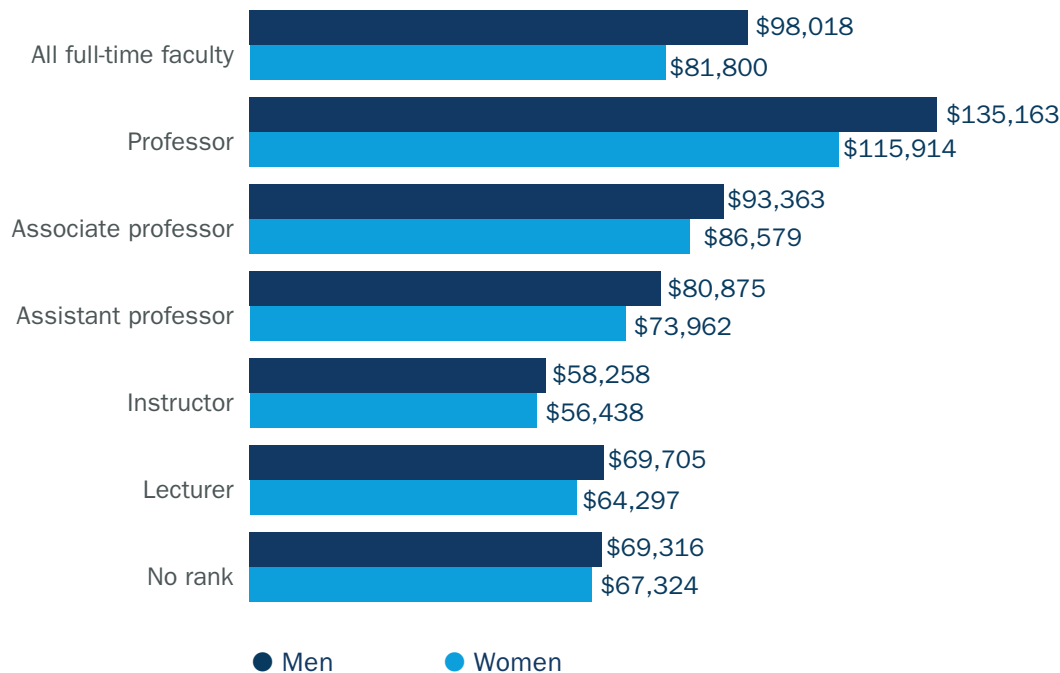
7 National Center for Education Statistics. (2018). *Degrees conferred by postsecondary institutions, by level of degree and sex of student: Selected years, 1869-70 through 2030-31* (Table 328.10). Digest of Education Statistics.

Figure 2 shows that full-time men faculty members also hold a salary advantage over full-time women faculty members across all academic ranks; the advantage is held across most institutional types with a few exceptions among lower academic ranks in public community colleges. The gender pay gap is greatest at the full professor rank, where full-time women faculty members are paid, on average, just 86% of what full-time men faculty members are paid.

disparities are due to the tendency for women to be clustered in lower-paying disciplines. Admittedly, there is an association between academic discipline and salary; however, scholars still find persistent gender pay gaps even after accounting for differences in education, experience, productivity, institutional characteristics, and academic discipline.⁸ Such findings lead us to wonder, “Are women paid less because they are clustered in lower-paying disciplines, or are some disciplines lower paying because there are women clustered in them?”

Opponents of affirmative action with respect to gender pay gaps in higher education often argue that the

Figure 2. Average salary of full-time faculty members, by gender and academic rank, fall 2021



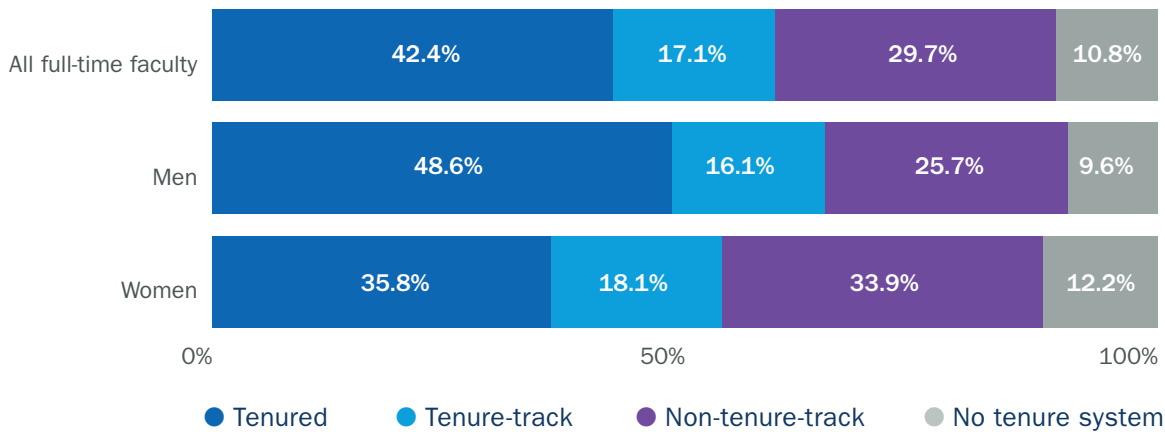
Source: IPEDS Human Resources survey, 2021–22, provisional release (Dec. 2022)

⁸ Nettles, M.T., Perna, L.W., & Bradburn, E.M. (2000). *Salary, promotion, and tenure status of minority and women faculty in U.S. colleges and universities*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement. (NCES 2000-173)

Among full-time faculty, women faculty members are more likely to hold non-tenure-track appointments than men, as shown in Figure 3. Only 36% of full-time women faculty members are tenured, compared with 49% of

men. Although 51% of tenure-track appointments are held by women, just 41% of tenured appointments are held by women (not shown in Figure 3).

Figure 3. Percentage of full-time faculty members, by appointment type and gender, fall 2021

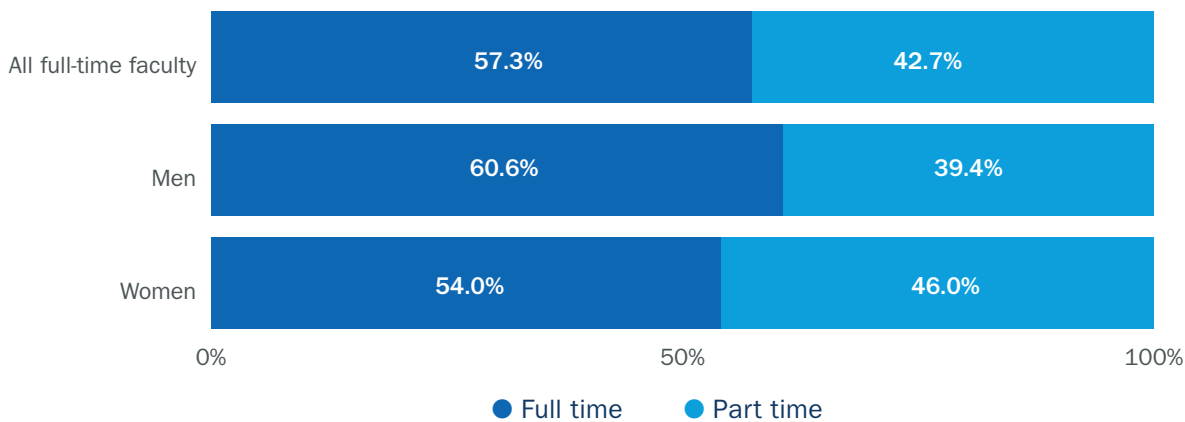


Source: IPEDS Human Resources survey, 2021-22, provisional release (Dec. 2022)

Over the past 50 years, the academic workforce in U.S. higher education has shifted from one of mostly full-time tenured or tenure-track faculty to mostly contingent faculty who are appointed off the tenure track, often on a part-time basis with less security, remuneration, and support. Nearly 43% of faculty members are employed

part time, and a much higher proportion of women are employed part time than men, as shown in Figure 4. Forty-six percent of women faculty members are employed part time, compared with just 39% of men.

Figure 4. Percentage of faculty members, by employment status and gender, fall 2021

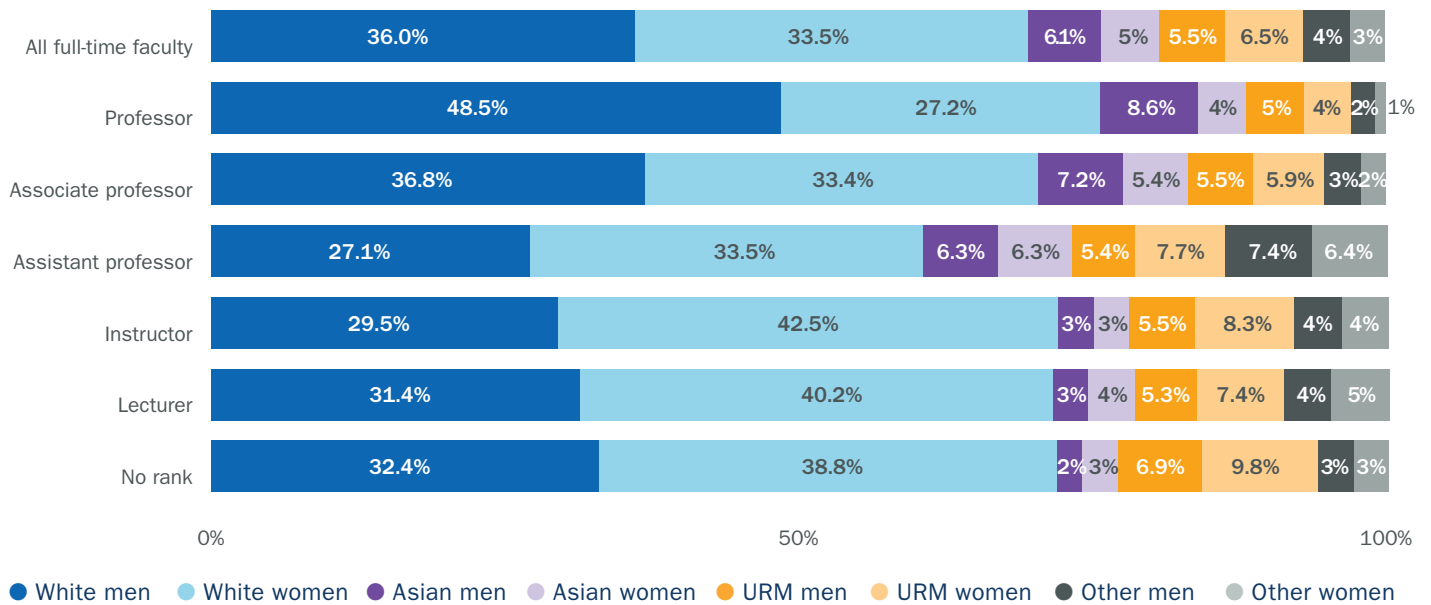


Source: IPEDS Human Resources survey, 2021-22, provisional release (Dec. 2022)

The employment patterns of underrepresented minority (URM) faculty in higher education have largely paralleled those of women since Title IX was enacted in 1972. For example, representation of URM women among full-time faculty members generally decreases with progression in rank, as shown in Figure 5. The stories of women faculty

and faculty of color in higher education are nuanced and cannot be fully unpacked in this brief commentary.⁹ But clearly, one must ask, “Why do underrepresented minorities comprise 33% of the U.S. population but only 9% of full professors?”

Figure 5. Percentages of full-time faculty, by academic rank, gender, race, and ethnicity, fall 2021¹⁰



Source: IPEDS Human Resources survey, 2021–22, provisional release (Dec. 2022)

What can be done?

How do we break the cycle of discrimination against women faculty and faculty of color in higher education? To begin with, researchers must continue publishing findings in reports like this one and developing interactive data exploration tools.¹¹ But to produce findings and tools that better inform policymakers, faculty members, and administrators, researchers need access to more complete and reliable data on faculty employment beyond just the handful of variables readily accessible in campus payroll systems. That would include, for example, more complete information on fringe benefits and working conditions. Full transparency by all institutions—public and private—is critical.

Beyond calling attention to the disparities in pay, promotions, and working conditions of women faculty and faculty of color in higher education, a growing body of literature points to steps that institutions can take to foster equity. To begin with, institutions must recognize that women faculty are often less mobile than men and are often more constrained by family-care responsibilities. Institutions must address their social

9 For a full discussion, see *The Faculty Factor: Reassessing the American Academy in a Turbulent Era* (Finkelstein, Conley, & Schuster, 2016). Also, see *Faculty Women of Color: The Critical Nexus of Race and Gender* (Turner & Wong, 2011).

10 “URM” (underrepresented minority) is used to facilitate direct comparison with prior reports and includes the IPEDS race and ethnicity categories of Black, Hispanic, Pacific Islander, and American Indian/Alaska Native. “Other” includes the IPEDS race and ethnicity categories of two or more races, race/ethnicity unknown, and nonresident alien.

11 Readers may further explore the IPEDS data presented in this report using a variety of interactive data exploration tools on the [AAUP Data](#) website.

practices that unfairly disadvantage women in academe (e.g., lack of adequate and affordable child care) and recognize the invisible labor that women faculty and faculty of color engage in to support diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts.^{12,13,14} Institutions must also provide ongoing professional development opportunities—mentoring, resources, and support—to women faculty and faculty of color throughout their careers in academe.¹⁵

Finally, institutions must examine their faculty hiring and tenure practices and standards for implicit bias. For example, implicit bias in tenure criteria include requiring research publications in journals that do not focus on topics that are more often researched by women faculty

and faculty of color, systematic bias in student course evaluations, and failure to account for undue burdens of service placed on women faculty and faculty of color.¹⁶

Changing institutional policies does not guarantee that institutional cultures will change. Institutions also must monitor the implementation and effect of policies over time by developing procedures and key indicators, setting quantifiable and verifiable goals, and periodically adjusting policies to help reduce gendered, ethno-racial, and other social discrimination in the faculty profession. We call on faculty members and administrators to work together to achieve equity for women faculty and other marginalized faculty groups in U.S. colleges and universities.

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- 12 Jimenez, M.F., Laverty, T.M., Bombaci, S.P., et al. (2019). Underrepresented faculty play a disproportionate role in advancing diversity and inclusion. *Nature Ecology & Evolution*, 3, 1030-1033. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41559-019-0911-5>.
 - 13 Main, J.B., Tan, L., Cox, M.F., McGee, E.O., & Katz, A. (2020). [The correlation between undergraduate student diversity and the representation of women of color faculty in engineering](#). *Journal of Engineering Education*, 109, 843-864.
 - 14 Rideau, R. (2019). [“We’re Just Not Acknowledged”: An Examination of the Identity Taxation of Full-Time Non-Tenure-Track Women of Color Faculty Members](#). *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 14(2), 161-173..
 - 15 For example, National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity (NCFDD) provides tools and mentorship to help faculty of color thrive in academia.
 - 16 Tiede, H.J. (2022). [The 2022 AAUP Survey of Tenure Practices](#). Washington, D.C.: American Association of University Professors.

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