SU ADVANCE White Paper: The Gendered Academy and Seattle University

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Gender and the Academy

Overt gendered discrimination has plagued American institutions of higher education since their inception. Some institutions have experienced more, some less, but none has been exempt. In this, the academy reflects the larger sociocultural and political economic contexts of which it is a part, contexts that also are riddled with gendered biases and inequities. Reports, articles, and associated interventions situated within institutions of higher education have spent decades attempting to grapple with and resolve gendered inequities affecting faculty and students alike. The MIT reports of the mid- to late-1990s (see *MIT Faculty Newsletter* 1999) are well-known examples, in which high-ranking and mostly male administrators talked – often in tones of appalled amazement – about the issues facing women faculty in STEM fields at MIT. Gendered discrimination, as the MIT authors noted twenty years ago, can be overt: a woman engineer, for example, being told that she just can't think as logically as a man. In 2019, however, gender bias in the academy often manifests in more subtle ways, which are more difficult to track. Both overt and subtle forms of gender bias remain deeply entrenched, however, inside and outside the academy. The result: women working across diverse professions in the US today, including within higher education, don't advance in their careers at the same rate as do men, and are systematically less rewarded for their work.

Many observers consider the problem to be a pipeline issue: women are simply more likely than men to leave the profession before achieving full advancement. As sociologist Dana Britton points out, however, research on the ways in which organizations are gendered suggests that other factors are at play, including formal policies and practices, networks, and informal interactions and expectations (Britton 2010, 2000; Britton and Logan 2008). In her work, Britton builds theoretically from Acker's influential work on gendered organizations (1990) and elaborates it with Ridgeway's theory of "gender frames" (2011). Acker (1990) points out that gendered inequalities in organizations are most often produced and reproduced by policies that actually look, at first glance, gender neutral. Ridgeway states that the joint effects of a gender frame and an organizational frame will vary, depending on institutional culture and context. Based on her own research across multiple institutions of higher education, Britton (Britton 2010, 2000; Britton and Logan 2008) highlights the power of a gender frame – in which women perceive their choices to be constrained by cultural ideas that women are mothers and wives first and faculty members second – in conjunction with an organizational frame characterized by vague policies. If the organization does nothing to counter the effects of the gender frame, it will remain salient for faculty and, in combination with lack of clear, transparent policies for promotion, is likely to favor men and disadvantage women.

In STEM fields, discrimination issues have often been characterized by using the "leaky pipeline" metaphor: women leave STEM fields in greater numbers in undergraduate and graduate school, as well as from faculty and industry positions (see Alper 1993, Berryman 1983, Ceci et al. 2009, Dasgupta and Stout 2014 for more information; see Cannady 2014; Stoet and Geary 2018 for critiques of the metaphor). Plugging the leaks has been a source of great concern for many STEM-based initiatives focused on gender equity over the past two decades, including many funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF). Federal policies and the support of funding agencies such as the NSF have had considerable impact on research aimed at increasing the participation of women in science and the social science fields (Schiebinger 2008). More recent initiatives, such

as the NSF's ADVANCE program, have focused on the transformation of institutional structures to make them more accessible and supportive of women in these fields.

As Britton (building from Acker and Ridgway) suggests, gender equity issues extend beyond increasing numbers and representation, important as that is. Several observations are worth making with respect to this assertion. The first is that certain fields in the social sciences and humanities now have a majority of women scholars. In these instances, the language often used to assess this trend identifies this improvement in numbers as a problem, noting that there are "too many" women (Stewart and Valian 2018). Data shows that in some instances, the more women in a field, the less that field is valued (measured in expressed attitudes towards the field and in associated salaries) because of persistent perceptions inside and outside the academy that women are less competent (Gutierrez y Muhs et al. 2012; Stewart and Valian 2018). The second important point here is that when given an option, faculty still overwhelmingly try to hire and/or promote white men (Stewart and Valian 2018). This tendency is also seen amongst faculty – men and women – who express support for gender equity in general and their women colleagues in particular and who will respond with the "appropriately" equitable perspective when they are cued to do so (Stewart and Valian 2018; Williams and Smith 2015). Lastly, women faculty overwhelmingly are tasked with "taking care of the academic family," i.e. they are disproportionately asked to take on time-intensive teaching and low-prestige institutional service work (Cummins 2017; Guarino and Borden 2017; Misra et al. 2011; O'Meara 2016; O'Meara et al. 2017; Winslow 2010).

Scholars of women in the workplace note that many of the activities that are integral to the strong reputation and everyday functioning of an organization are often performed by women and, accordingly, are taken-for-granted as a "natural" expression of women's preferences for this sort of work (e.g., Acker 1990; Bird et al. 2004). This "hidden work" (Bird et al. 2004; Cummins 2017; Guarino and Borden 2017; Gouldner 1957; Winslow 2010) is unrecognized and unrewarded despite the fact that it is foundational to the healthy functioning of the organization. Women faculty in primarily undergraduate colleges and universities contribute significantly through their leadership, community engagement activities, and their focus in areas such as science education research. These activities sustain the educational mission of the university.

One obvious and ongoing disparity amongst faculty illustrates the ripple effects of such attitudes. In her work, Britton charts the significant gap between women faculty at associate and full professor ranks (Britton 2010, 2003; Britton and Logan 2008). These data indicate a steady decline in the percentage of women faculty represented at the level of PhD, assistant professor, and associate professor, but this gap jumps significantly in the transition from associate to full professor. This decline is apparent in many STEM fields, but also in fields as diverse as economics and philosophy. In an NSF-funded project focused on women faculty at associate rank in major STEM departments across the U.S, Britton analyzed policy documents and work/family balance patterns. She found that the guidelines for promotion in most of the universities represented are vague and her interviews suggest that women are more likely to be making choices about work/family balance in ways that are deterrents to promotion and, notably, that their expectations of achieving promotion may be lower relative to male colleagues.

Other research in this vein suggests that the entire concept around what constitutes research excellence remains very stereotypically masculine, reflecting "an absolute engagement in science with no other responsibility outside academia, making it possible to work around the clock," while also focusing on research and "avoiding everyday administrative tasks" (Salminen-Karlsson et al. 2018, 53). In this context, women are often still perceived to be in need of special treatment if their career and workload do not reflect this model. The result: many women faculty members in institutions of higher education remain "stalled" at the associate professor rank (Buch et al. 2011; Giesler et al. 2011; Rocque and Laursen 2007).

Seattle University

Three years ago, we received an NSF "institutional transformation" ADVANCE grant to study and attempt to change policies at our own institution with an eye on equity. We proposed that women faculty at Seattle University disproportionately perform "hidden work" within our university and that this work is absolutely essential to the continued functioning of the university but is not recognized or compensated within current faculty reward structures around tenure and promotion. In our proposal, we stated that organizational culture at our institution is informed by both a "gender frame" and a "mission frame." We hypothesized that the "mission frame" interacts with gender in ways that reflect and reinforce an organizational context that systematically directs women into service-level and community engagement activities.

Because Seattle University is a Ph.D.-granting but primarily undergraduate university founded in the Jesuit Catholic educational mission of social justice and education of the whole person, the university places a premium on service, community engagement, and active-experiential teaching. This unique, mission-focused "branding" is sustained through the commitment of faculty who emphasize these values in their scholarly activities, teaching, and service to the institution. SU ADVANCE's orienting framework at the outset of our project was based on the observation that values for service and community engagement foster an institutional climate in which leadership service is seen as a reward in its own right (mission frame). Corollary to this is the gendered expectation commonly observed in organizations that women's service and community work is "natural" and inherently where their talents life (gender frame). This gender frame includes the perception, typically operating as an unconscious bias among both men and women, that women are naturally drawn to these activities with the consequence that the institutional maintenance work they provide is hidden and undervalued (Bose et al. 1987). Our orienting hypothesis was that expectations for and processes pertaining to promotion at SU reflect a two-track organizational frame where full academic standing is equated with prioritizing research, and mission-centered activities are considered a reward in their own right, but not part of the promotion track. The result: an institutional hierarchy that prioritizes research over mission activities, and associates mission-related activities with "women's work."

The SU ADVANCE Program is now in its third year. Its first two years were characterized by data gathering across the SU community, including extensive participant observation, 76 individual semi-structured interviews with faculty, focus groups with faculty, and analysis of many of the documents (e.g., promotion statements and CVs) by which faculty are assessed. Our findings indicate that faculty at Seattle University across rank, gender, and race are highly involved and engaged in a variety of activities that, when taken together, fundamentally contribute to the vibrancy of the institution and enhance the university's stated mission and, yet, are not "counted" on any assessments. In its embodiment of this seeming contradiction, Seattle University is far from unique; indeed, evidence indicates that a rift between stated mission and actual policy now characterizes most other Catholic institutions in the United States today (e.g., Wagner 2017). Moreover, because SU tends to attract faculty who are passionate about teaching and community engagement, we observe very little difference between men and women faculty in terms of how much time they devote to classroom-based teaching and community-engagement centered scholarship. For example, in one interview, a male faculty listened to a description – drawn from another programmatic ADVANCE report – of the ways in which gender structures work allocation at many R1 universities, with women faculty devoting significantly more time per semester to teaching, mentoring, and institutional service and men faculty spending more time on research. He then responded, saying, "Then I am a woman." He pointed out that if teaching was the rubric by which he was judged, than his workload looked like that of the women faculty described, because he put such a priority on his students and on teaching.

Within these overarching findings, we nonetheless did uncover some clear gendered differences in line with our initial hypothesis. These include a trend whereby women faculty are more likely to spend extensive time mentoring students (especially students who do not register as traditionally high-achieving academically), more likely to engage in department-level administrative work (low prestige but pivotal), and less likely to say no when asked to participate in institutional service work. One woman remarked, "I now intentionally do what I was doing without mindful intention before – mentoring specific types of students who are perceived

institutionally as 'needy.' My male colleagues tend to get the more directed, 'successful' students who look better on a CV, whereas I get more students who don't have a clear path mapped out for themselves. I think it's more rewarding, but their 'success' isn't measureable in the same, highly visible way that others are." Many other women interviewed also commented on the emotional labor that women faculty, in particular, were expected (by students, by themselves, and by their colleagues) to do as part of mentoring students.

One very encouraging sign in this regard, however, is that many administrators and faculty who are active in the larger university community (as opposed to just their department) seem aware of the disparity. The Dean of Arts & Sciences, for example, in one of his monthly *Memos,* which he sends out to all A&S faculty, referenced the "hidden work" done by women faculty. Similarly, the College of Science and Engineering has recently added a more extensive assessment of service contributions to their Annual Performance Reviews, the annual assessments that all SU faculty must complete.

Interviewees with broad-based experiences across the university also commented on this. One male faculty, for example, said: "As I think about... work[ing] with people all over the university. It's one of the things I really loved. I think of a variety of people at this institution who are devoting huge amounts of time to service and to their teaching. I can certainly see a strong gender correlation with that ... I think of people like ... Martha, bless her heart. This university couldn't run without Martha ... Thinking of my female colleagues over the years, certainly Mary—wow, this was so true of Mary. I mean, Mary gave her time to her students unselfishly ... Just, I mean, incredible in that way ... I think of a couple of my male colleagues ... who were much more for themselves. Much more into either their research or their teaching." A woman faculty agreed with this sentiment, saying, "I do think the men protect their time better, and I bet they are getting bigger chunks of time to do ... research as opposed to service."

Women faculty were also far more likely to express uncertainty that they measured up to college- and university-level guidelines for full professor and less likely to have sought out and/or received constructive mentoring in terms of when and how to put their file in for full professor. One woman, for example, described her discernment process over whether to apply for full professor as very confusing: "I talked to my [male mentor] and he said to wait and let myself 'marinate' for a while longer. But I thought I was ready and I talked to a [woman colleague], who was encouraging. I was concerned that my service ate my research time, but I sounded others out, and I seemed ok, comparatively speaking." That's all the direction she received. Another woman faculty argued that she was content with her current (not promoted) status, because, with several children and a spouse and a desire for hobbies outside of work, she had never devoted herself completely to the institution ("I was never all-in," was the way she kept phrasing it). While this perspective perhaps sounds sensible on the face of it, analysis of this same woman's workload reveals that she works more than forty hours a week, carries a full teaching load, devotes considerable energy to institutional leadership activities, and has an extremely collaborative and active scholarship record. She also enjoys considerable respect and trust across campus. Thus, her career may not reflect "an absolute engagement in science with no other responsibility outside academia, making it possible to work around the clock" (Salminen-Karlsson et al. 2018, 53) but by many other rubrics, she would certainly be considered "all-in."

In our other interviews, we heard more women than men express uncertainty about themselves as scholar-experts, compared against the guidelines for full professor. The two phrases in the current faculty handbook describing the ideal SU full professor that caused the most worry among interviewees were "attainment of national stature" and "sustained record of significant scholarly and professional activity." As one woman said, "What exactly does that mean? I mean, it's not as if hundreds of experts across the country are referencing me… But maybe I'm overthinking it?" Many women expressed confusion over what "national stature" and "significant" contributions meant when applied to their own professional activities and worried that their colleagues would find them wanting if they did apply for promotion. Examining these individual concerns through the theoretical lenses provided by existing scholarship is illuminating. On the one hand, we see a clear example of Britton's argument that vague policies favor men and disadvantage women (Britton 2010, 2000;

Britton and Logan 2008) at our own institution. On the other hand, the existing research also suggests the women associate professors at SU who are "overthinking" the language may, in fact, be correct to worry because they may well be assessed with more unconscious bias if they do put themselves forward for promotion (Gutierrez y Muhs et al. 2012; Stewart and Valian 2018).

Once again, there are encouraging signs that there is greater awareness in the SU community around this disparity. The SU Provost, for instance, began his Convocation speech in the Fall of 2018 by noting the case of Donna Strickland, an associate professor at the University of Waterloo when she received notice in early October 2018 that she had been awarded the Nobel Prize in Physics – only the third women to ever receive this honor. When asked by reporters why she was still an associate professor, Strickland famously responded, "I never applied." Our Provost told this story as an indication of a gendered inequality pervasive to the academy that needs to change in order to better "reimagine the professoriate" (his words) for the twenty-first century.

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