Extended Length in Rank Among Associate Professors:
The Problem, Its Implications, and Strategies to Address It

Abstract

Career advancement is vital to job satisfaction. However, in academia, many faculty—especially women faculty—remain at the associate professor rank for an extended length of time or are never promoted from associate to full professor. Why does this problem exist, and what are its implications? What are best practices for addressing this issue? This paper will review data on the career advancement and satisfaction of associate professors at RIT, and it will address these questions. It will describe initiatives to broaden the definition of scholarship and consider the merits of doing so. It will show how both faculty and their institutions will benefit from effective strategies to reduce the length in rank as associate professor.

I. Introduction

Research has shown that the vast majority of full professors are men and that it takes women faculty longer to be promoted than men faculty. West and Curtis (2006) found that at all institutions nationwide in 2005-2006, women held only 24% of full professor positions. A Modern Language Association Survey (2009) found that on average, and across institutions, the average time to promotion for female associate professors is 8.2 years, compared with 6.6 years for men. At Penn State University (2007), a study found that for associate professors who had not been promoted in the first 6 or 7 years at that rank, the likelihood of promotion gradually tailed off. For faculty who held the rank of associate professor for more than 12 years, relatively few were subsequently promoted. Men had higher rates of promotion than women.

For most faculty members, mid-career is the stage at which most scholarly achievements occur and they assume important leadership and management roles (Baldwin & Chang, 2006). It is in the best interest of institutions to support post-tenure faculty, so that they remain productive and vital (Trower, 2011b).

II. Data on the Career Advancement and Satisfaction of Associate Professors at RIT

Two key data sources related to the career advancement and satisfaction of associate professors at RIT are the National Science Foundation (NSF) Indicator data for RIT and the results of the Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education (COACHE) Faculty Job Satisfaction Survey (administered at RIT in 2012).

NSF Indicator Data for RIT
Figure 1 shows the gender breakdown of assistant, associate, and full professors at RIT in 2009 and 2014 (Rochester Institute of Technology, Institutional Research and Human Resources.). The vast majority of full professors at RIT are men. At RIT, men comprised 217 out of 270 (80.37%) full professors in 2009 and 210 out of 273 (76.92%) full professors in 2014. From 2009 to 2014, RIT saw gains in its number of associate and full professors who were women.

Figure 1. Gender Breakdown of Assistant, Associate, and Full Professors at RIT in 2009 and 2014.
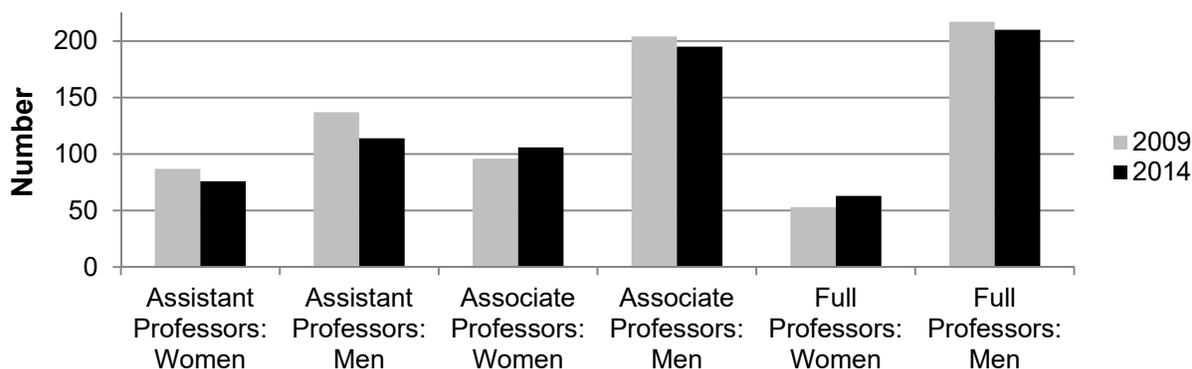
2012 COACHE Faculty Job Satisfaction Survey at RIT

The results of the 2012 COACHE Faculty Job Satisfaction Survey identified promotion as an area of concern among RIT tenured faculty. Respondents rated their satisfaction on a series of items, on a Likert scale of 1 to 5 (with "1" being "Very dissatisfied" and "5" being "Very satisfied"). Table 1 shows the mean ratings for key items related to promotion.

Table 1. RIT Tenured Professors' Mean Satisfaction Ratings on COACHE Survey Items Related to Promotion

Item	Mean Satisfaction Rating
Reasonable expectations: Promotion	2.98
Department culture encourages promotion	3.09
Clarity of promotion criteria	3.17
Clarity of promotion standards	2.89
Clarity of time frame for promotion	3.05

Survey results revealed that another key area of concern for RIT faculty is post-tenure mentoring. The mean satisfaction rating of tenured faculty on the item "Mentoring of associate faculty" was only 2.25. Among all faculty surveyed, 80% rated mentoring from within the department as important. However, among faculty who rated mentoring as important, 16% rated it somewhat or very ineffective, and 16% indicated that they had not received mentoring.

III. Reasons for Extended Length in Rank as Associate Professor

In a survey of 1,775 tenured associate and full professors at seven public universities, Trower (2011a) found that associate professors are less satisfied than full professors on factors such as clarity of promotion criteria. In a survey of faculty by the Modern Language Association (2009), women faculty cited lack of clarity in criteria for promotion to professor and an increasing amount of work as obstacles to promotion. Mid-career years may be marked by exhaustion, doubt, and even depression. Some associate professors feel trapped by a tight, competitive academic job market (Wilson, 2012).

Researchers at Michigan State University, through semi-structured interviews of 20 post-tenure professors and 20 department chairs, identified several challenges with regard to promotion (Baldwin et al., 2008). Associate professors cited increased workload, lack of clarity in promotion criteria, neglect, absence of

motivating goals, and confusion as to how their career should progress. Women faced the special challenge of having higher service demands than men. Chairs and directors noted that they had limited training to understand the needs of mid-career faculty.

In a study of women associate professors at the University of North Carolina Charlotte, Buch and colleagues (2011) found that perceived barriers to promotion included a lack of support for the career development needs of associate professors, a lack of transparency and clarity regarding promotion criteria, and disproportionate service demands that interfere with progress toward full professor. In a study of women associate professors at a major research university, Terosky and colleagues (2014) found that a common theme, especially among those at or above median time in rank, was to resign themselves to one of three possible paths if their service loads did not lessen: "permanently remaining" at the associate level, actively stopping the pursuit of promotion, or investigating career options outside of their university or academia.

IV. Implications of Extended Length in Rank as Associate Professor

Failure to promote associate professors to full professor has a range of implications, including weakening or loss of morale of associate professors, possible weakening of respect from colleagues and institutional leaders for their contributions, and loss of financial gain represented by a promotion. A COACHE report in 2014, based on responses from full-time, tenure-stream faculty at public research universities that had recently participated in its project, found that associate professors rated their satisfaction lower than that of assistant and full professors, with rare exception (Mathews, 2014). The pattern of dissatisfaction was even more pronounced for those at the associate rank longer than 5 years. When large numbers of faculty choose not to pursue promotion, it may have serious adverse consequences for faculty governance (Modern Language Association, 2009).

V. Benchmarking: Strategies that Universities are Using to Address the Problem

This section will describe efforts at universities to address the problem of extended length in rank as associate professor.

Ohio State University
Ohio State University (OSU) is working toward providing options in which some faculty earn promotion based largely on research and others earn promotion based largely on teaching (Jaschik, 2010). OSU is creating alternate paths for promotion to full professor (Wilson, 2012). It has published a guide for full professors and tenure initiating unit chairs/directors on best practices to support promotion to full professor (Ohio State University, n.d.).

Rutgers University
The Rutgers University Policy on promotion states, "Rigorous standards are applied for the assessment of scholarship, artistic accomplishment, librarianship, extension practice, and/or extension scholarship in consideration for promotion to Professor or equivalent ranks" (Rutgers University, 2014). However, for associate professors who have remained at the rank of associate professor for ten years post-tenure, Rutgers allows the balance among the promotion criteria to consider excellent and significant contributions to teaching and service (Rutgers University, 2014). This alternate promotion method is known as the "Ten-Year Rule," but it is not widely used (Rutgers University, 2011).

University of Michigan
In a report, the University of Michigan Gender in Science and Engineering Subcommittee on Faculty Evaluation and Development recommends that faculty who are promoted to associate professor with tenure receive a review in their third year in rank. This results in a formal promotion plan. It recommends

that associate professors receive annual reviews to determine whether they are prepared for a review for promotion to full professor (University of Michigan, 2004).

University of North Carolina Charlotte
The University of North Carolina Charlotte has a mid-career mentoring program for associate professors (Buch et al., 2011). The university developed and implemented a six-step "mid-career planning process" for associate professors that became the focal point of several separate mid-career mentoring initiatives. It focuses particular attention on meeting the needs of female associate professors and creating an environment that is free of gender bias.

University of Arkansas
At the University of Arkansas, the Associate Professor Advancement Program is designed to guide associate professors to become stronger candidates for promotion to full professorship (University of Arkansas, n.d.). Associate professors who have held that rank for at least seven years are selected to participate in this program and receive up to $1,000 to help "jump start" their research agendas. They work with a mentor who will guide them through the promotion process over the course of the year. Full professors who serve as mentors receive $500 for their development accounts.

VI. Additional Research-Based Strategies to Address the Problem

Misra and Lundquist (2015) provide a number of recommendations for how to improve support for mid-career faculty. They recommend providing clear guidelines for promotion that align with the institution's mission, developing mentoring programs that help faculty members focus their work time on the factors that will be evaluated, and developing strategies to lessen service burdens on faculty. In addition, they recommend having standardized policies that regularly assess promotion timing rather than forcing candidates to self-nominate or wait to be nominated by a superior.

Baldwin and colleagues (2008) recommend that institutions hold orientation workshops for new associate professors, provide bridge funding between external grants, offer ample merit raises, and provide grant-writing support. Further, they recommend that chairs alternate teaching loads (one semester heavier, one lighter) to allow faculty to focus on grant writing/research. They recommend that Promotion and Tenure Committees meet annually with the department chair or associate chair to ask how the committee can help each faculty member, provide a mentoring committee that stays intact until a faculty member attains full professor, and give associate professors full reviews every other year. The Modern Language Association (2009) recommends establishing clear guidelines and paths to promotion from associate to full professor, offering a substantial salary increase with promotion to full professor, creating mentoring programs for associate professors, and devoting specific resources to support associate professors' scholarship.

VII. Benchmarking: Factoring In Leaves of Absence in Promotion Committee Decisions

Research shows that two major obstacles to faculty's use of existing family friendly policies are the lack of knowledge about such policies and the fear that using such policies will have negative repercussions on their careers (Mason et al., 2005). Williams and colleagues (2006) found that between 1992 and 1999, more than 500 faculty members at Penn State University became new parents. Only seven parental leaves were reported, none by men. The researchers found that some universities systematically discouraged or penalized faculty who wished to take leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act.

Some universities are taking steps to change this. For example, the University of California has published a Chairs and Deans Toolkit (2007) that provides background, resources, and best practices on the use of family-friendly policies. It states: "Review committees should be directed to focus on quality and total

quantity of scholarly productivity rather than time since degree or job hire so that faculty who slow down due to family obligations are not unduly penalized in the peer review process" (p. 11). In promotion decisions, Virginia Tech limits the "look-back" period of promotion to 5 years. This gives faculty who have been off-track time to get back on course without penalty (Mathews, 2014).

VIII. Initiatives to Broaden the Definition of Scholarship

Many initiatives are focused on broadening the definition of scholarship for promotion. In a seminal book, Boyer (1990) challenges the merits of a reward system that pushes faculty toward research and publication and away from teaching. He proposes that discovery, integration of knowledge, teaching, and service be viewed as scholarship. Based upon a study of data from the National Survey of Postsecondary Faculty 1992-93, Fairweather (2002) found that only a small percentage of faculty in all types of four-year institutions achieved high levels of output in both research and teaching. He advocates that faculty who are less productive in research increase the departmental average teaching productivity, whereas faculty who publish extensively contribute to aggregate research productivity goals.

O'Meara (2006) conducted a national study of Chief Academic Officers (CAOs) of four-year institutions to investigate the impact of policy efforts to encourage multiple forms of scholarship in faculty roles and rewards. She found that campuses that initiated policy reforms to encourage multiple forms of scholarship were significantly more likely than their counterparts to report a broader set of criteria used to assess scholarship. In addition, CAOs at campuses that initiated policy reforms reported a greater congruence between institutional mission and faculty priorities.

One initiative that has gained ground in recent years is a teaching tenure track. A report by the American Association of University Professors (2010) rebuts the idea that tenure is solely for research purposes and provides models for a teaching tenure track. According to a report by Sanders (2011), versions of teaching-stream positions exist in many publicly funded universities in the Canadian province of Ontario and are increasingly common elsewhere. The University of British Columbia has a tenure-track "teaching stream" (University of British Columbia, n.d.). Teaching-stream professors spend up to 80% of their time teaching and have little or no research obligation (Chiose, 2015).

At RIT, discussions have emerged on the possibility of adding more flexibility in the path to promotion to full professor. Provost Haefner (2014) wrote a thought paper that explores the possibility of having flexible pathways to promotion at RIT. Candidates would <u>not</u> need to be evaluated as excellent in all three areas (teaching; research, scholarship, and creative work; and service including leadership) to warrant promotion. Professor Patrick Scanlon (2014) advocates applying flexible criteria for promotion to full professor at RIT.

IX. Conclusion

This paper has reviewed the reasons that the problem of extended length in rank for associate professors exists, as well as the implications for faculty and their institutions. It has provided examples of initiatives at several universities and other research-based recommendations for addressing this issue. Moreover, it has examined the benefits of initiatives to broaden the definition of scholarship. It is critical to improve support for post-tenure faculty, so that they are fulfilled in their careers, productive in their work, and vital in advancing the mission of their institutions.

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