

BARRIERS TO ADVANCEMENT

for Women and Women of Color Faculty in STEM Fields

More Service or More Advancement

As a part of San Francisco State University's goal to increase equity in advancement for all faculty, IT-CATALYST examined the role of service in the career advancement of women and women of color in STEM fields. The project focused on the formal and informal practices of service, how different forms of service are valued, variations in the rewards for service, the satisfaction of faculty in the activities, and the assessment and evaluation of different service roles.

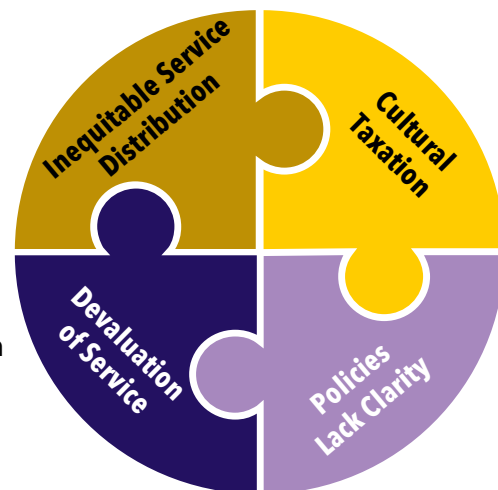
This research brief reports findings from three data collection efforts: a survey of STEM faculty members; focus groups conducted with women faculty in STEM fields; and interviews of members of the University Tenure and Promotion Committee (UTPC) and interviews with college deans.

Inequitable Service Distribution: Women and women of color faculty report an inequitable service burden, spending more time engaging in student mentoring, committee activities, and community service than male faculty. "Hidden service" activities require time and expertise, yet they are not recognized by institutional structures.

Devaluation of Service: Women and women of color faculty report that the service they engage in is often not valued in faculty recognition structures, including Retention, Tenure, and Promotion (RTP) processes. There is little emphasis on service as a contributor to the RTP process relative to other criteria.

Policies Lack Clarity: Service is not assessed consistently across colleges. Women and women of color faculty often engage in unrecognized faculty work outside of professional roles that can be recorded and measured, such as mentoring students.

Cultural Taxation: The university's commitment to representation inadvertently places an overwhelming demand on a small number of faculty. The low proportion of diverse faculty members results in an overreliance on women and women of color to serve on committees and serve student needs. The cultural taxation placed on underrepresented faculty leaves these members to act as de facto cultural experts and ultimately perform more service.



SAN FRANCISCO
STATE UNIVERSITY



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Inequitable Service Distribution

"And then I realize that this is a committee made up of one male, who somehow is chair – I don't remember electing him – and three women. And guess who did all of the writing?"

- Faculty

"It was always the women who were doing the work. And - and the men seemed to have a way of bowing out, for whatever reason. Leaving women to do the bulk of the work."

- UTPC/Dean

All faculty contribute to institutional service, but women and women of color faculty spend more time on service, constituting an institutional service inequity. The service activities contributed by women and faculty of color are often "hidden" activities: outside of formal measures and thus unrecognized and often unrewarded in institutional processes, including formal university retention, tenure, and promotion (RTP) processes.

Hidden service activities are often perceived as valuable by STEM women faculty and women faculty of color, despite lack of visibility by institutional structures.

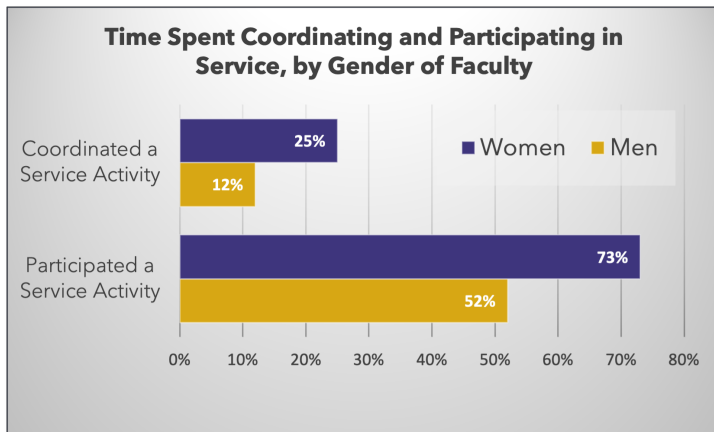
- Women faculty spend more time on committee work (81% women vs. 65% men spend 1+ hours per week).
- Women faculty engage in community service activities more frequently (44.5% women and 26.9% men spend 1+ hours per week).
- Women of color faculty in STEM departments serve on almost all search committees, which drives heavier service roles and ultimately inequity when compared with their white male colleagues.
- However, women faculty are less likely to serve in leadership roles on committees.

Examples of Hidden Service

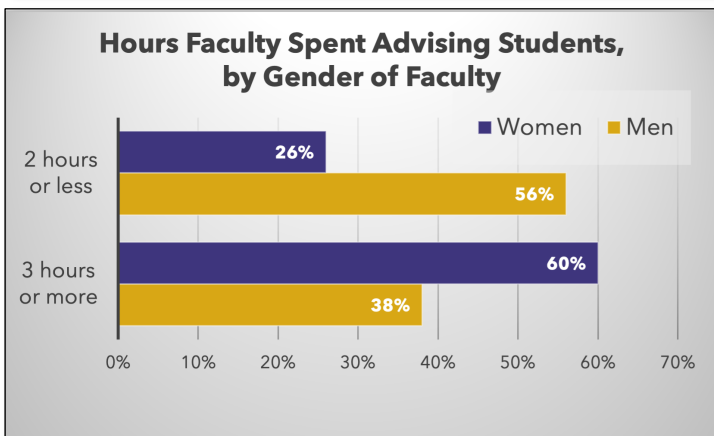
- ✓ Mentoring (outside of advising duties)
- ✓ Writing recommendation letters
- ✓ Providing emotional labor for students and junior faculty
- ✓ Aiding faculty with grant writing
- ✓ Serving on multiple committees (but never as the Chair)
- ✓ Coordinating and assisting in department activities (open house events, outreach and recruitment events, etc.)
- ✓ Showing up for their colleagues' events, seminars and conferences
- ✓ Consulting as an academic expert in non-academic spaces (private or public)
- ✓ Serving as an advisor for student groups

Inequitable Service Distribution

The faculty survey indicates intersectional gender inequity as shown by varying degrees of service activities performed by women and men faculty in STEM.



Women are twice as likely to coordinate service activities as men in their departments (25% women vs. 12% men) and are 21% more likely to participate in service activities. Additionally, there is a higher demand to work with women and women faculty of color. This disproportionate time spent advising students further demonstrates inequity in service.



Survey results also showed more women dedicated 3+ hours to student advising each week (60% women vs. 38% men). While a significant amount of men faculty dedicate time to advising, their time commitments were under 2 hours each week (56% men vs. 26% women).

Agreement exists among faculty, University Tenure and Promotion Committee members, and College deans that women faculty are burdened with a heavier service workload. Systemic barriers, including gendered and racist stereotypes and norms, shape the inequity. This is exemplified by how some service practices are visible and rewarded while others remain “invisible” and more often performed by women and women of color faculty. Actions are needed to address this pervasive trend with structural change.

Conclusion: The inequitable service distribution, hidden service, and the differential value placed on service create barriers to professional advancement for tenure-track women and women of color faculty. Raising institutional awareness of how faculty elect or are assigned service and how intersectional gender, race and racism, sex and sexism, and homophobia and sexual identity shape differences in service can lead to improvements at the departmental and institutional levels. Structural change is needed to recognize and value all serve and create institutionalize equity for all faculty.

Cultural Taxation

Data collected by IT-Catalyst shows that women faculty, particularly women of color, hold a heavier service burden than other faculty. Focus groups identify the workings of cultural taxation on women of color STEM faculty. In addition to serving on almost all search committees, women of color faculty act as de facto cultural experts and representatives, taking on the invisible work of diversity in campus life: Women of color are asked to join recruitment events, serve as advisors, mentors and role models for students of color, and do the majority of equity work on campus. Compounding this taxation is the systemic inequity in faculty hiring with continuous underrepresentation of Black, Latinx, and other faculty of color in STEM and across campus.

Cultural Taxation¹

The concept of cultural taxation in higher education asserts the unique obligation and activities required of African American, Latinx, and other faculty of color as their responsibilities as university faculty. Cultural taxation includes the added burden to serve the schools' need for diverse representation on committees, to demonstrate a commitment to cultural diversity, and the demands of mentoring diverse student bodies. These service roles may bring accolades to the institution but are usually undervalued and unrewarded for faculty. Cultural taxation acts as a "stealth workload escalator" for faculty and staff of color.

"I know on campus that there's a high proportion of students of color. I'm not surprised that they seek out people who they might feel more comfortable with for the types of service and activities that students need and request in general."

- UTPC/Dean

"Everybody wants their committee to have diverse representation, and because there's fewer folks of color, therefore they get asked disproportionately, which is an ongoing problem of concern."

- Faculty

Conclusion: Cultural taxation and hiring inequities are barriers to tenure-track faculty advancement for women faculty and especially women of color faculty in higher education. Coupled with other barriers such as inequitable service distribution, devaluation of service, and unclear policies regarding the role of service, a structural inequity exists that impacts women of color faculty and creates barriers to advancement. Addressing cultural taxation through policies, procedures, and hiring is needed to create institutional change.

¹ Padilla, A. M. (1994). Research news and comment: Ethnic minority scholars; research, and mentoring: Current and future issues. *Educational Researcher*, 23(4), 24-27.

Devaluation of Service

Data analysis confirmed that service is weighted less, and thus devalued in the university's retention, tenure, and promotion processes. Starting with Department policies, a devaluation of service exists compared with other assessed activities (e.g., scholarship and teaching). Focus group and interview data confirm that while faculty devote time to service activities, campus policies and campus leaders often fail to recognize these commitments. UTPC and College deans acknowledge that service can be vague and hard to evaluate. This confirms a systemic problem of lack of understanding and recognition of service.

Interviews with Campus Leaders

"I think that's absolutely true. And I don't think it has to do only with women. I think it has to do with men, as well. If women do more service, they're more disadvantaged."

"...of the three areas, service for many feels vague, ambiguous, neglected, and - and - and not affirmed."

"Now, I cannot remember in these 75 [RTP packets] a single case where the service was the dominating factor... It's - it's harder to evaluate the quality of service than it is to evaluate the quality of teaching."

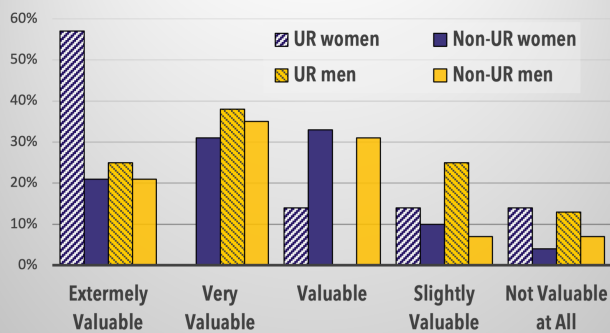
Focus Groups with Faculty

"Because we all know that service is not valued at the higher levels, and so, when we review other candidates on RTP, we tell them to let go of the service. And some people refuse to because we know that's the reason we're here."

"The service component is the - the flimsiest of the three. And I -and I don't think the university values it. It's - it's not on a - it's not an equal standing."

"Nobody's going to say that - but there's a lot of services you could do that, takes about as much time as writing a paper, and I feel it's very valuable, but nobody ever comes out and says like, thank you - we value this."

Faculty's Perceived Value of Advising Students, by Gender and Status

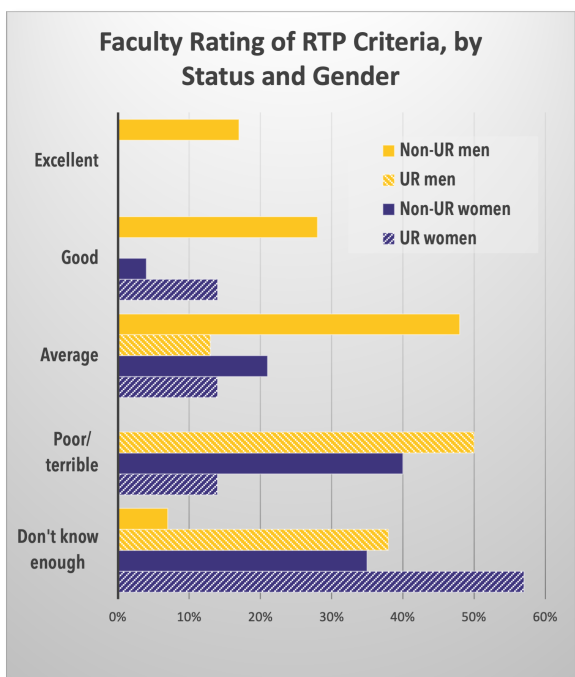


In addition to the value of service in terms of professional development policies, the personal value these service activities hold for faculty differed by gender and race. For example, the underrepresented faculty rated advising students as "extremely valuable" in greater proportion than all other faculty surveyed.

Conclusion: Service devaluation is a structural inequity that results in barriers for the advancement of women and women of color faculty at SF State. While some service activities are highly valued by faculty and contribute to professional satisfaction and impact, these activities' heavy burden and cultural taxation remain high. College Deans and members of the university tenure and promotion committee will need to implement structures for change.

Policies Lack Clarity

All faculty are aware of the expectation to “provide service to the university.” Yet, when explicitly asked about the meaning, types of expected activities, and value of these activities, faculty reported a lack of clarity and overall lack of transparency in these expectations and the formal policies that document them, including department retention, tenure, and promotion (RTP) documents. Importantly, survey results show that women faculty and faculty of color rate the quality of the formal policies associated with RTP much lower than do men and white colleagues.



“Underrepresented” (UR) faculty, especially women faculty, rated the RTP criteria as “poor.” UR men and women rated the criteria well below average. The one group who found the RTP criteria to be average and above were non-UR men, who were also the only group that rated the RTP criteria as excellent.

Given that service to campus and community is one of three criteria for advancement through formal tenure and promotion policies, the lack of clarity and value placed on service represents a source of potential intersectional gender inequity for faculty advancement. This presents a unique barrier when coupled with the ways women faculty outperform their male peers in hidden service.

“We have no idea what goes on behind those RTP doors, like do they just glance at it and then, let’s count how many papers she’s published? There’s no, our department hasn’t come out and said like wow, we really value your service, like this thing you’re doing is so great, we think it’s equal to a paper.”

- Faculty Quote

“I think that it’s really vague what service is. So, I think part of it is just in our process. Our policies, you know?... And a lot of them, I feel ...were purposely written to be vague. But then that can hurt people who are really spending a lot of time on service, which in this case could -- you know, is women.”

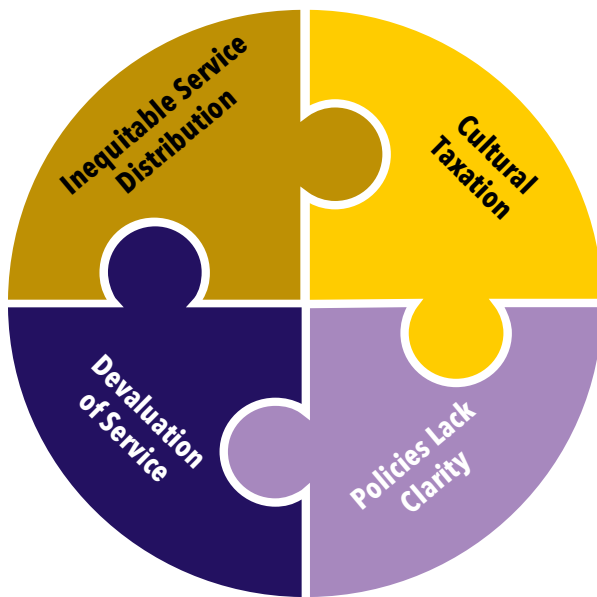
- UTPC/Dean Quote

Conclusion: Faculty and Campus leaders agree that service is not consistently assessed across colleges and departments. There is room for structural change to reduce and eliminate intersectional gender inequity for faculty advancement at SF State.

More Service or More Advancement

Intersectional Gender Inequity at San Francisco State University:

Based on the experiences of diverse faculty, our research documents inequities and barriers to advancement for underrepresented faculty in STEM fields. These findings are confirmed by data collected from the University Tenure and Promotion Committee members and College Deans. Together our research shows the existence of structural barriers for STEM intersectional women faculty in four areas: inequitable distribution of service; cultural taxation of women of color faculty; a devaluation of service informal activities; and policies that lack clarity.



Recommendations:

1. Facilitate revision of departmental Hiring, Retention, Tenure, and Promotion criteria to clarify the role of service in H RTP, and to improve the process of evaluation of service.
2. Recognize and highlight the value of service, not only to the University, College, Department, and Community, but also to professional development and satisfaction among faculty.
3. Identify and mitigate the consequences of hidden service and cultural taxation for women and women of color faculty.

Reference: Domingo, C. R., Gerber, N. C., Harris, D., Mamo, L., Pasion, S. G., Rebanal, R. D., & Rosser, S. V. (2020). 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*.



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