

THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

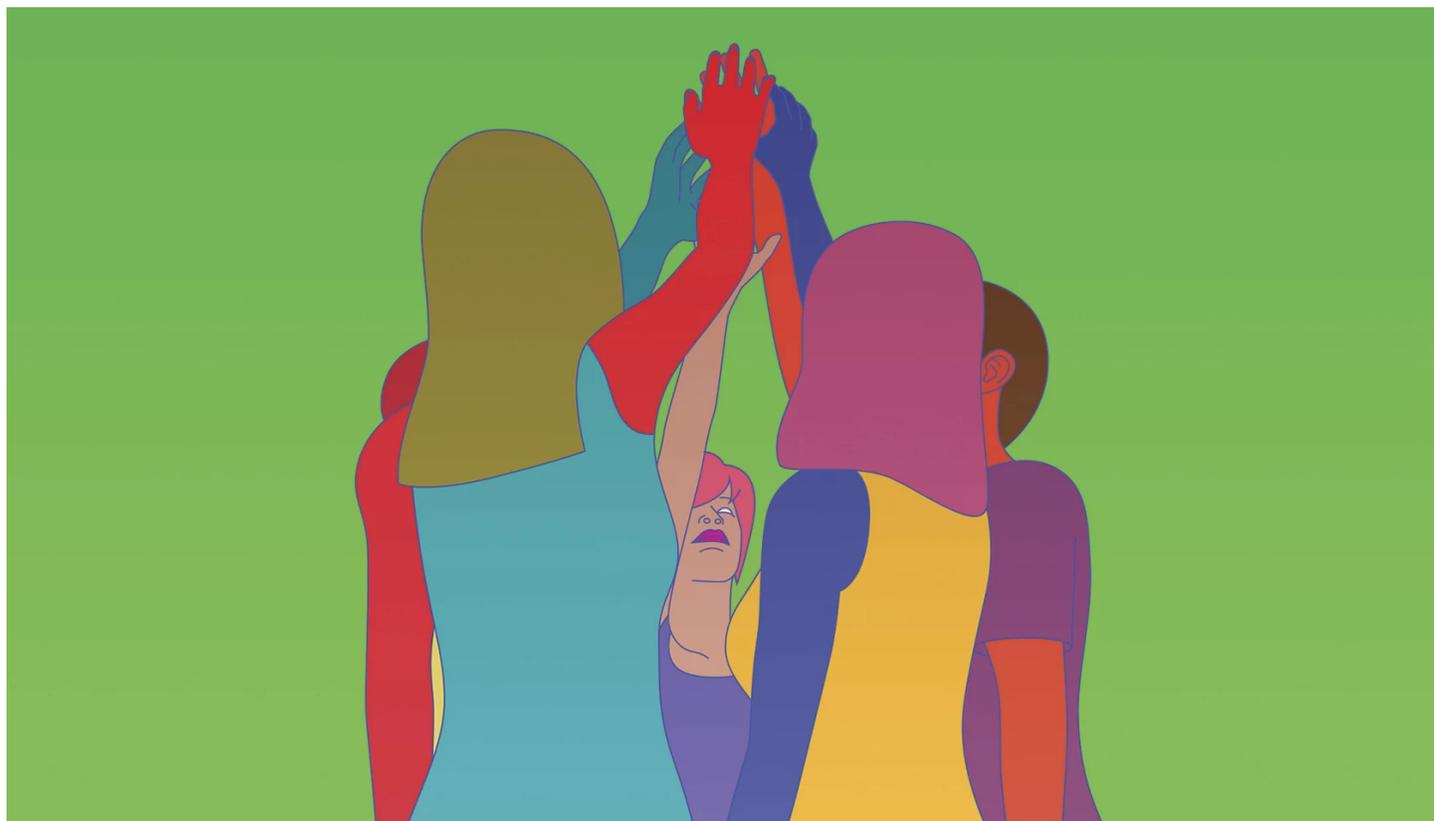
ADVICE

We Raised Our Female Faculty Numbers. So Can You.

Tips from a university that once drew national attention for its dearth of tenured women.

By Cali Anicha, Canan Bilen-Green, and Alan Denton

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ERIC PETERSEN FOR THE CHRONICLE

Fifteen years ago our university flirted briefly with academic infamy. In 2006 the American Association of University Professors ranked 1,445 institutions based on their proportion of tenured faculty members who were women. Among the 222 doctoral institutions listed, we came in second to last. A [Chronicle article](#) the following year focused on our poor showing and tried to determine the reasons — institutional and otherwise — that were to blame.

That harsh public censure hit home because we saw ourselves as a university that valued fairness and equity; many of us were surprised and embarrassed. It also motivated us to do better, and since then we have made steady progress in moving women faculty members through the ranks. In 2006, 13 percent of our tenured faculty members were women. Today 33 percent are. In 2021 more than half of faculty promotions went to women (61 percent of promotions to associate professor and 40 percent of promotions to full professor).

We attribute those gains to key changes in policies and practices that determine merit, and so our focus has been on increasing equity within annual performance, promotion, and tenure reviews. Here is our advice for other colleges working to reach gender parity:

1. Increase equity and transparency. The college or university should:

- Make promotion to full professor less of a moving target by letting associate professors choose whether to be evaluated based on the current criteria or those in effect at their last promotion.
- Mitigate the potential for bias by allowing candidates, or anyone participating in the review of a candidate, to identify conflicts of interest and by referring cases of involuntary recusal to a faculty-rights committee.
- Make tenure-clock extensions automatic in cases of childbirth and adoption. In other

circumstances, make the process more streamlined and confidential by routing requests directly to the provost or other upper administrator. Clearly remind members of promotion and tenure committees that tenure-clock extensions must not raise expectations for productivity.

- When evaluating teaching, rely on more than student ratings, which are known to be prone to gender bias. Broaden sources of evidence to encompass student, peer, and client evaluation of course materials, expertise, and ability to communicate knowledge.
- Require annual evaluations of probationary faculty members and associate professors to include an assessment of the faculty member's progress toward promotion and/or tenure, and recommendations for improvement.

2. Require chairs of promotion and tenure committees to participate in regular

trainings. These should include information about implicit bias in faculty evaluations and equitable practices for the benefit of all faculty members, including those in marginalized and underrepresented groups. The trainings, which are distinct from search-committee trainings, should focus attention on appropriate evaluation criteria, strategies to recognize and correct bias, rubrics for maintaining consistency, and the use of checklists and forms to review the evidence provided by the candidates and to evaluate their performance against written expectations, standards, and criteria.

3. Establish a promotion-to-professor task force. Its goal should be to clarify the process and encourage more faculty members to successfully apply for promotion to full professor. Membership of the task force could consist of a faculty representative from each of the academic colleges and an academic dean or associate dean. The task force might:

- Offer workshops and panels on promotion, and provide tips on when and how to prepare for promotion.
- Discuss policies related to promotion, and recommend changes.
- Serve as a liaison to the academic colleges on matters of promotion and tenure.
- Review relevant institutional data on promotions.

- Organize two or more interactive panels per year featuring current and past department chairs, deans, members of the promotion and tenure committees, recently promoted professors, and the provost. Panelists might discuss how faculty members can know when they are ready to apply for a promotion; the promotion-to-professor process; tips on preparing a successful dossier; the role of mentoring; achieving work/life balance; and trends in promotion and tenure.

All of those strategies should be regularly assessed and updated when necessary. We use both climate surveys and surveys of those who have gone through the promotion and tenure process to identify gaps and areas for improvement. Since 2014 we have modified our policy about once a year in order to respond to the needs identified by our standing committees and to make our policies and procedures more equitable and transparent.

Of course, the context in which policy changes are developed matters, and it may be that the three approaches detailed here tackle only a small number of the changes needed. Bias is unavoidable in all types of evaluations, so our policy changes are backed up with continuing professional-development and training opportunities, which are also continuously updated to better reflect perspectives of underrepresented individuals and groups. Although the approaches described here are not overt efforts at diversity, our experience suggests that a trend toward increased gender parity in promotion and tenure practices portends a more broadly diverse, equitable, and inclusive campus workplace.

We welcome your thoughts and questions about this article. Please [email the editors](#) or [submit a letter](#) for publication.

EQUITY & DIVERSITY

FACULTY LIFE

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