Promoting Gender Equity for Women Employees

Custom Research Brief

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Table of Contents

I. Research Methodology ........................................................................................................... 4
   Project Challenge .................................................................................................................. 4
   Project Sources .................................................................................................................... 4
   Research Parameters .......................................................................................................... 5
II. Executive Overview ............................................................................................................ 6
   Key Observations ................................................................................................................ 6
III. Hiring and Salary Equity .................................................................................................... 7
   Hiring Policies and Practices ............................................................................................... 7
   Salary Equity ...................................................................................................................... 8
IV. Work-Life Balance and Professional Development .......................................................... 9
   Work-Life Policies and Benefits ......................................................................................... 9
   Support for Professional Development .............................................................................. 10
   Promoting Policies and Resources .................................................................................... 11
V. Implementation and Assessment ....................................................................................... 12
   Implementing Equity Initiatives .......................................................................................... 12
   Assessing Equity Initiatives ............................................................................................... 13
I. Research Methodology

Project Challenge  Leadership at a member institution approached the Forum with the following questions:

- What policies and practices promote gender equity in hiring, salary, and promotion for women faculty and staff?
- How do administrators measure existing gender gaps to assess the need for employee equity initiatives?
- To what extent do equity initiatives rely on formal policies rather than practices?
- What benefits (e.g., part-time employment options, parental leave, child care) do institutions provide to promote work-life balance?
- What support structures (e.g., affinity groups, mentorships) do institutions maintain for women employees?
- In what ways do work-life resources impact the recruitment of women? To what extent do administrators publicize them to prospective employees?
- What metrics do administrators evaluate to assess the impact of gender equity initiatives?
- What implementation strategies allow administrators to engage the support of all relevant stakeholders for equity initiatives?
- How do administrators leverage equity initiatives to improve campus climates for women employees?

Project Sources  • Education Advisory Board’s internal and online research libraries (http://www.eab.com)
• National Center for Education Statistics (http://nces.ed.gov)
• Institutional websites
The Forum interviewed administrators who oversee gender equity and diversity initiatives for faculty and/or staff at research universities.

### A Guide to the Institutions Profiled in this Brief

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Approximate Enrollment Total (Undergraduate)</th>
<th>Carnegie Classification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University A</td>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>28,600 (19,100)</td>
<td>Research Universities (very high research activity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University B</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>24,600 (19,300)</td>
<td>Research Universities (very high research activity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University C</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>56,900 (42,900)</td>
<td>Research Universities (very high research activity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University D</td>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>10,300 (5,600)</td>
<td>Research Universities (very high research activity)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
II. Executive Overview

Key Observations

Comprehensive equity initiatives often begin with examinations of hiring practices to promote equal representation for men and women across employee ranks. Centrally administered search committee trainings promote equitable hiring practices across decentralized schools and departments. At University C, administrators from human resources, academic affairs, and the women’s center collaborate to train search committees across all schools to diversify applicant pools and avoid unintentional bias in selection processes.

Policies that allow managers and employees to request salary benchmarking and equity raises reduce salary discrepancies between genders. At the request of individual managers, compensation staff at University D compile charts that summarize salaries across hiring units, often in comparison to local or national standards. Institutions such as University C allow individual faculty to request equity raises if they can demonstrate that peers with comparable duties and tenures receive higher salaries.

All contact institutions provide employees with parental leaves, tenure clock extensions, child care, and lactation rooms to promote work-life balance for new parents. Many flexible work policies also allow employees to request temporary part-time appointments in response to family circumstances. Because staffing needs vary among units, policies rarely define structures for part-time appointments and subsequent returns to full-time work; instead, employees typically establish ad hoc arrangements with their supervisors.

Mentorships, workshops, and networking opportunities promote professional development for women employees. University A and University D facilitate networking through affinity groups for working mothers and women STEM faculty, respectively. University C’s women’s center combines mentorship, networking, and workshops into an 18-month structured leadership program for faculty from underrepresented groups.

Central oversight for strategic planning and diversity programming creates unit-level accountability for equity initiatives. At University D, for example, each school’s faculty diversity officers report to a central faculty development office, and all schools send representatives to an institution-wide diversity committee. University C’s diversity committee reviews the annual strategic plans of all colleges and departments to ensure that they establish metrics to assess progress toward equity.

Administrators track the representation of women across units, in leadership roles, and among new hires to assess the impact of equity initiatives. Although status reports on equity typically present quantitative metrics, contacts also value qualitative feedback from campus climate surveys and exit interviews. Surveys and interviews, which reveal that many women employees leave their positions because of family circumstances, allow administrators to identify the limitations of existing work-life balance policies.
III. Hiring and Salary Equity

**Hiring Policies and Practices**

*University EEO Policies Provide Basic Equity in Hiring Processes*

Comprehensive gender equity initiatives emphasize equity throughout an employee’s time at a university, from recruitment to retirement, to promote equal representation for women employees across faculty and staff ranks. All contact institutions maintain equal employment opportunity (EEO) policies that commit to gender-neutral recruitment, selection, training, and development for employees. These policies also protect against sexual harassment and establish procedures to manage discrimination complaints. Some nondiscrimination policies also provide for:

- **Central hiring oversight**: University A’s vice provost for faculty affairs reviews applicant pools for all faculty searches to ensure the adequate representation of diverse candidates.
- **Diversity representatives**: Every search committee at University C includes a representative who advocates for the interests of underrepresented groups (i.e., women and minorities) during the hiring process.

**Centralize Search Trainings to Promote Consistency in Application Review**

Although EEO policies state a university-wide commitment to gender-neutral hiring, they rarely include implementation procedures and accountability measures. Consequently, hiring practices continue to vary by department.

All profiled institutions offer voluntary trainings in equity and diversity to search committee chairs and members. In many cases, responsibility for training remains decentralized; associate deans or diversity officers train committee members within their schools. At University C, however, central administrators from human resources, academic affairs, and the women’s center collaborate to offer trainings. This promotes consistency in hiring practices across schools and disciplines.

Additionally, institutions may implement the following strategies to encourage the selection of candidates from underrepresented groups (e.g., women in STEM fields):

- **Diversity recruitment funds**: If a search committee at University D identifies an exceptional candidate from an underrepresented group, the dean or department chair may apply to a special opportunities fund. This fund, which can subsidize a faculty member’s salary for up to three years, allows schools and departments to create additional positions for women candidates, or to raise the salaries of women candidates with competing offers.
- **Diversity recruitment exceptions**: University A typically requires that hiring managers post all vacant positions to the human resources website for a minimum of 15 to 30 days. However, search committees that identify exceptional candidates from underrepresented groups may apply for exceptions to this policy. Exceptions, which expedite the hiring process, may allow departments to hire promising women candidates before they receive competing offers.

**Common Elements of Search Committee Trainings:**

- Diversification of applicant pools
- Avoidance of unintentional bias in application review
- Demonstration of cultural competence in interviews
Monitoring Salary Equity

Conduct Regular Salary Studies to Identify and Monitor Discrepancies

University A and University C recently conducted salary equity analyses to examine trends in initial and current compensation levels by gender. Neither institution detected systemic salary inequities.

Strategies for Comprehensive Equity Analyses

Repeat Equity Analyses Every Few Years

In 2011, administrators at University A collected salary data from across the institution to perform a regression that controlled for each faculty member’s title, tenure, and discipline. Administrators then identified and addressed all outliers (most of whom held titles that did not adequately reflect their duties). Administrators plan to repeat this process every few years to monitor salary trends.

Examine Salaries Within Departments

To provide accountability for salary equity at the departmental level, deans at University A conduct routine equity reviews within their schools. They discuss any detected outliers with the relevant chairs, who must justify discrepancies according to valid measures, such as faculty rank or productivity.

Consider Research Funds and Laboratory Space

In 2012, University C’s ADVANCE program, which promotes the recruitment and retention of women in STEM fields, evaluated the starting salaries, research funds, and laboratory spaces that faculty of both genders received upon initial hire. This study controlled for each faculty member’s teaching load and research productivity to ensure fair comparisons.

Institutions such as University C allow individual faculty members to request equity raises if they can demonstrate that peers with similar duties and tenures earn higher salaries. A faculty member typically brings an equity request to his or her chair, who may fund the requested raise from the department’s budget, or escalate the request to the dean for access to the school’s budget.

Provide Managers with On-Demand Salary Benchmarking

At University D, hiring managers may request salary benchmarking from compensation staff. Compensation staff create charts that summarize salaries for relevant positions within the requesting manager’s unit. They can also benchmark unit salaries against local or national salaries for comparable positions; a request on behalf of nurses within the University’s medical center, for example, may include data from neighboring hospitals. These reports allow managers to monitor salary equity and detect discrepancies within their units.
IV. Work-Life Balance and Professional Development

**Work-Life Policies and Benefits**

*All Contact Institutions Offer Parental Leaves and Tenure Clock Extensions*

Many institutions provide benefits that exceed those required under the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA), which ensures that qualifying primary caregivers receive 12 weeks of unpaid parental leave after the birth of a new child. University A, for example, offers seven months of unpaid parental leave.

Institutional policies may also allow employees to receive pay for a portion of the FMLA-mandated leave. Employees at University B, for example, may receive pay for up to eight weeks of maternity leave (or five days of paternity leave), if they deduct the time from accrued sick and/or vacation leave.

Because tenure-track faculty face particular challenges to work-life balance, all contact institutions allow faculty to extend the time before their tenure reviews by up to one year after the birth of a new child. Some contacts advise that faculty may demonstrate reluctance to use tenure clock extensions to avoid impact on tenure outcomes. In response to this concern, institutions such as University D automatically extend tenure clocks by one year unless individual faculty opt to waive the benefit.

*Part-Time Work Arrangements Vary According to Departmental Needs*

All contact institutions allow employees to request flexible work arrangements, including temporary part-time or work-from-home options, in response to family circumstances (e.g., the birth of a child, care for elderly parents).

Employees typically negotiate flexible work arrangements with their direct supervisors. Because an employee’s ability to conduct work part-time or from home varies according to his or her job function, units vary in the extent to which they accommodate flexible scheduling. To promote consistency, human resources administrators may outline options for flexible work arrangements in university policies or guidebooks.

In many cases, employees with temporary part-time appointments may negotiate gradual returns to full-time employment with their supervisors’ approval. Contact institutions do not provide structured phase-back plans because staffing needs vary across units.

*Lactation Rooms and On-Site Child Care Enhance Work-Life Policies*

All contact institutions supplement work-life policies with the following benefits:

- **Lactation rooms**: University policies require supervisors to allow time for lactation, for which institutions provide multiple spaces across campus. University B provides over 35 private lactation rooms and nine semi-private rooms so that all employees work within a 10-minute walking distance of the nearest dedicated space.

- **Child care**: Although all contact institutions offer on-site child care centers, contacts advise that centers may reach capacity before they can serve all interested employees. Accordingly, institutions may also maintain referral lists of community daycare centers, registered homes, and students willing to provide child care.
Support for Professional Development

Introduce Training and Accountability Measures into Mentorship Programs

Although many institutions offer mentoring programs to promote professional development for women employees, programs often lack consistency across departments. To improve the quality of decentralized programs, a recent task force on gender equity at University A proposed an institution-wide mentorship program with the following components:

- **Mandatory participation**: All tenure-track professors across the University pair with senior faculty mentors. To ensure progression beyond tenure toward full professorship, mentorships last until five years after an associate professor earns tenure.

- **Comprehensive training**: Each school establishes training programs for faculty mentors. All training programs include overviews of work-life balance policies (e.g., tenure clock extensions) and resources (e.g., child care).

- **Accountability and self-assessment**: Each mentor/mentee pair drafts and signs a written plan that details their outcomes. Both parties submit annual progress reports to their chair, who in turn reports on all departmental mentorships to the dean.

Facilitate Networking through Affinity Groups and Workshop Series

Two contact institutions offer affinity groups that target subsets of women employees. University A offers a group for working mothers, while University D offers a group for women STEM faculty.

Like affinity groups, frequent workshops facilitate networking among target audiences. University B’s ADVANCE program provides monthly workshops for women STEM faculty. At most workshops, a faculty presenter addresses work concerns (e.g., teaching large classes, responding to student evaluations) to an audience of her peers.

Combine Resources for Professional Growth into Leadership Programs

The women’s center at University C offers an 18-month leadership program for faculty from underrepresented groups. Program components include:

- A series of workshops on leadership skills
- Networking lunches with university leaders
- A mentorship with an academic leader
- An independent project on leadership

One year after program completion, 20 of the 90 participants during the most recent session held titles that reflected leadership positions (e.g., chair, vice provost). Many others served in informal leadership roles (e.g., search committee chair, trade association officer).
Promoting Policies and Resources

Promote Use of Resources through Print and Web Outreach

Contacts advise that employees often underuse work-life and professional development resources because they lack awareness of them. Administrators must publicize available resources to maximize their impact on the recruitment and retention of women employees.

### Strategies to Publicize Work-Life Resources

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<tr>
<th><strong>Distribute Brochures to Prospective Hires</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>Contacts emphasize the need for outreach early in the hiring process to enhance recruitment. At University B, ADVANCE administrators mail brochures that summarize work-life balance policies (e.g., parental leave, tenure clock extensions, lactation support) to all women who interview for faculty positions within STEM fields. At University C, deans and department chairs distribute similar brochures to candidates during interviews.</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Coordinate Meetings Between Prospective Employees and Diversity Officers</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>All candidates for faculty positions at University C’s college of engineering meet with an associate dean for diversity and outreach, who leads conversations on work-life resources. This allows candidates to explore available benefits outside of interviews, during which they may be hesitant to request support. University A’s school of medicine and University D’s college of arts, sciences, and engineering maintain similar associate dean positions.</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Centralize Resources on Web Portals</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>Institutions may provide access to all work-life policies and resources from one central online portal to enhance awareness. Central portals also promote administrative transparency and consistency across units. Contacts advise that current and prospective employees are most likely to find portals when human resources websites link to them.</td>
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V. Implementation and Assessment

**Implementing Equity Initiatives**

*Centralize Responsibility for Gender Equity Initiatives Under One Office*

Gender equity initiatives often face challenges associated with decentralization. In some cases, human resources staff track salary equity, while institutional research staff track employee demographics and school administrators track tenure outcomes. This structure complicates the implementation of comprehensive initiatives, which require coordination across components.

One office that oversees all components of equity initiatives – including employee diversity, salary equity, work-life balance, and professional development – can coordinate their implementation to maximize their combined effect. A central equity office can also provide current and prospective employees with information on the full range of policies and benefits, and perform holistic assessments of their impact. University A’s recent task force on gender equity recommended that a vice president oversee this central office; support from senior administrators symbolizes institution-wide commitment and facilitates implementation.

**Core Responsibilities of Central Equity Offices**

- Coordinate institution-wide gender equity initiatives
- Consolidate expertise on best practices to promote equity
- Provide central resource for all work-life benefits
- Collect data to assess equity initiatives

**Promote Unit-Level Accountability through Central Oversight**

Because individual units retain significant autonomy for hiring and management, the implementation of gender equity initiatives often lacks consistency across an institution; search committee trainings may vary among schools, and access to tenure clock extensions may vary across departments. Central oversight for the implementation of equity initiatives promotes consistency and accountability across diverse units.

**Strategies to Promote Consistent Implementation Across Units**

- **Establish Central Oversight for Diversity Officers**
  
  Each school at University D includes two faculty diversity officers, who train search committee members, oversee programming, and support individual faculty. All officers report to a central faculty development office, which coordinates the program and provides access to senior administrators. The office’s director regularly liaises with the University’s president and provost, and he presents annually to its board of trustees.

- **Include All Schools in Diversity Councils**
  
  University D’s diversity and inclusion committee includes faculty, staff, and students from various units who meet once per month to coordinate equity initiatives across the institution. Some representatives also serve on diversity committees within their schools; their presence ensures that school-specific initiatives align with institution-wide aims.

- **Engage Units in Strategic Planning and Assessment**
  
  At University C, all colleges and departments must draft annual strategic plans that include diversity goals, steps to attain these goals, and metrics to assess progress. A University-wide diversity committee reviews all plans to ensure that proposed goals align with institutional aims, and that proposed metrics promote accountability.
Assessing Equity Initiatives

Track Representation of Women Across Ranks to Measure Gender Equity

At contact institutions, administrators track the following metrics in frequent (sometimes annual) status reports to assess the impact of gender equity initiatives:

- **Employee demographics**: Annual status reports at University C track the percentage of total employees who are women from 1999 onward to measure progress in equity over time. The University’s women’s center also provides interactive spreadsheets that present detailed demographic data by department.

- **Representation of women in leadership**: Status reports often present staff demographics by rank (e.g., vice presidents, directors, managers) to track how frequently women hold leadership positions. For faculty, administrators may similarly track the number of women academic administrators (e.g., chairs, deans, provosts) over time.

- **Recruitment rates by gender**: To assess progress toward equal representation, status reports commonly track the number of new hires who are women. Administrators particularly emphasize this metric within units that lack equal gender representation, including STEM departments.

Survey Employees Within Units to Identify Campus Climate Concerns

All contact institutions supplement quantitative metrics with qualitative feedback from climate surveys. Effective surveys allow administrators to identify and target areas of concern. At University A, for example, human resources administrators analyze the results of institution-wide climate surveys to identify units with particularly low scores. Administrators then conduct detailed studies of managerial practices within these units.

Whether institutions administer custom surveys or common third-party assessments (e.g., The Chronicle of Higher Education’s Great Colleges to Work For survey, the Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education survey), essential questions include:

- Do employees feel that their work is valued?
- Do employees get appropriate feedback from supervisors?
- Do employees intend to leave within the near future (e.g., next five years)? If so, why?

Contacts place particular emphasis on an employee’s intent to leave. Because women, in particular, often cite family circumstances as reasons for departure, administrators may combine responses from climate surveys with feedback from exit interviews to assess the limitations of existing work-life balance policies.

Climate surveys and exit interviews reveal the impact of work-life balance policies on employee retention.