



## Frequently-Asked Questions: Retention of Science and Engineering Faculty Who Are Women and/or Members of Racial/Ethnic Minorities

### **What is life like at Michigan for women and minority faculty?**

Women comprised 34% of all faculty at UM during AY2009, but the rates in particular fields vary widely, e.g., from 14% of College of Engineering faculty, 19% of College of Literature, Science, and the Arts (LSA) science faculty, and 34% of the Medical School faculty to 42% of the LSA humanities and social science faculty and 92% of the School of Nursing faculty. Moreover, 77% of the faculty at UM in 2007 are white; only 8% are from underrepresented minority groups, with 26% in the School of Social Work, 22% in the School of Education, and 14% in LSA social science departments, but only 4% in the College of Engineering, 7% in LSA science departments, and 5% in the Medical School.

Overall, women and minority faculty at the University of Michigan—like white men—report high levels of satisfaction with their teaching, research, and colleagues.

Nevertheless, the ADVANCE 2001 climate survey revealed that women faculty report experiencing high rates of gender discrimination and unwanted sexual attention at UM (41% and 20%, respectively, in the last 5 years). The same survey revealed that 27% of faculty of color reported that they had experienced racial/ethnic discrimination at UM in the past 5 years.

There are important differences in the home lives of women and men faculty. Male faculty at UM are much more likely than women faculty to have a partner who is not in the workforce; women are more likely to be burdened by more household responsibilities.

Women faculty and faculty of color rated their departments more negatively than counterpart male and white faculty in terms of many features of the climate.

### **What exactly is “the climate?”**

The workplace climate is the interpersonal environmental context for our work lives. It includes cues that

we are taken seriously (that is, included and consulted), valued, and appreciated, in contrast to cues that we are invisible or unheard, devalued, and not appreciated.

### **What makes a climate bad?**

Often it is enough for a workplace simply to have a numerically dominant group (by gender, race, or other characteristics) for that workplace to develop a “culture”—a set of daily practices and habits—that feel alien and exclusionary to people not in that group. Sheer demographics contribute to creating a climate that feels unwelcoming to people not like the dominant group.

Workplace climates feel unwelcoming when people’s actions (in universities, administrators, faculty, students, and/or staff) seem disrespectful or hostile, regardless of their intent.

### **How can climate be improved?**

Being aware of the problem and openly discussing it is an enormous first step. It is often difficult to talk about the climate openly, without fear of causing offense or pain. There are several resources for improvement including:

- CRLT Players performances of “The Faculty Meeting” sketch
- CRLT Players performances of the “Faculty Advising Faculty” sketch
- STRIDE presentations and discussions
- CEW’s Best Practices

### **Do women and minority faculty actually leave more than men do?**

From the national data over time, we think they do, but it’s very hard to tell for sure about the University of Michigan. With such small numbers of women and minorities, and large numbers of men and majority members on the faculty, it’s very difficult to assess differences in attrition rates. Moreover, the University does not record information about attrition in a uniform manner. We need to gather better data than we have. But given the small numbers of women and minorities,

it is important to keep those we hire. The evidence about the climate suggests that may not be so easy.

**Do women faculty demand counter-offers more than men because they are out on the market?**

No. In fact, evidence from many institutions suggests that women faculty are generally less likely to ask for counter-offers than men, and more likely simply to leave once they have made up their minds to go.

**Why do women and minority faculty leave?**

Generally, women and minority faculty eventually accept offers from other institutions for reasons that have to do with the climate at the first institution and their hopes for the climate at the second. Suspicions that they may be undervalued by the chair, colleagues, students, and/or staff are confirmed when people at other institutions treat them with respect and interest and offer them conditions of support for their research.

**Why do women and minorities leave instead of asking for a better situation at UM?**

If one of the important factors influencing women and minorities to leave is the climate, what exactly would they ask for?

It's also true that partners' careers and children's preferences play more of a role in women faculty's decision-making; for that reason, women faculty generally do not enter the job market for the purpose of improving their situation at their home institution. When they do enter the job market, they normally only pursue situations that address their household situations as well. In the end, when women are offered a job elsewhere, they are more likely to leave, while men are more likely to negotiate and stay.

**If it's critical to keep women and minorities from responding to potential offers (since they're likely to take them), what can be done to lessen the chances of them responding?**

We can ensure that the campus climate generally, and the departmental climate particularly, is so good that they will not believe they can reproduce it elsewhere.

At the campus level, this means ensuring that there are strong policies in place that support the career needs of faculty who carry substantial responsibilities for care giving and running households. These policies include flexibility in full and part-time work and the tenure review period; institutional vigilance about evaluation bias in salary, tenure, and promotion assessments; and support

for caregiving responsibilities (including modified duties, delays in the tenure review).

At the departmental level, this means ensuring that department chairs are selected and supported in the maintenance of an environment that is respectful and inclusive in the classroom and laboratory, the faculty meetings, corridors, and departmental decision-making. Clear and transparent policies are key supports for a respectful and inclusive climate.

How can more women and minorities be retained?

At the campus and college levels:

- Review and change policies.

At the departmental level:

- Improve the climate.
- Recruit more women and minorities.

At the individual level:

- Appoint women and minorities to leadership positions they deserve.
- Recognize women and minorities for their accomplishments.
- Provide better mentoring to women and minorities.

**What should happen if I hear that a woman or minority colleague is looking at jobs elsewhere?**

As with any faculty member, ask what would make him or her happier at UM. Talk to your chair or dean about what can be done to address his or her needs.

**What should I do if I learn that a woman or minority colleague has a great offer?**

Look at the whole package and evaluate the colleague's contributions at UM carefully. Figure out whether s/he has been undervalued at UM and how you can value him or her more adequately. Be flexible and willing to make exceptions for both women and men where rules are concerned.

For more information or additional copies of this resource, please contact the ADVANCE Program at 734 647-9359 or [advanceprogram@umich.edu](mailto:advanceprogram@umich.edu), or visit the ADVANCE Program's Web site at <http://sitemaker.umich.edu/advance>.