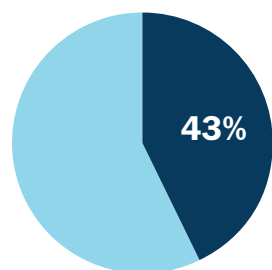


Women in the higher education workforce will never achieve pay equity without increased representation in leadership

Women are paid less than men in many positions at our nation's colleges and universities. Although the current focus on attaining "equal pay for equal work" in higher education is a positive development, ensuring women are paid equitably to men holding the same position is only one piece of the pay equity puzzle. Women in higher education are overrepresented in lower-paying positions and often denied opportunities to advance their careers. To achieve pay equity, an increase in the representation of women in higher-paying roles, especially leadership roles, is much needed.

Women are well represented within the higher education workforce overall, but they are concentrated within lower-paying roles: 32% of those who hold one of the ten highest-paid positions in higher education are female, whereas 57% of those who hold one of the ten lowest-paid positions in higher education are female.¹ Even within similar job functions, women tend to be overrepresented in lower-paying roles. For example, in higher ed IT positions, women represent 27% of IT professionals but only 19% of CIOs.² In addition, women comprise 43% of the higher-paid tenure-track faculty workforce and 58% of the lower-paid non-tenure-track teaching faculty workforce.³ The overrepresentation of women in lower-paying roles has substantial and lasting implications on their earnings compared to their male coworkers.



Women represent less than half of the higher-paid tenure-track faculty workforce

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Of the 10 highest-paid positions in higher ed 32% are female

Of the 10 lowest-paid positions 57% are female

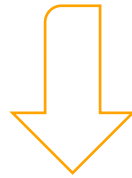
1 CUPA-HR. (2022). *Administrators, Professionals, and Staff in Higher Education Surveys* [Data set].

2 Ibid.

3 CUPA-HR. (2022). *Faculty in Higher Education Survey* [Data set].

Table 1. Gender representation among the tenure-track faculty workforce in 2021-22

Faculty Level	Percentage Women	Percentage Men
Assistant Professor	52%	48%
Associate Professor	46%	54%
Full Professor	35%	65%



The higher the rank, the greater the gap between women and men

Source: CUPA-HR. (2022). *Faculty in Higher Education Survey*.

Patterns in representation across the higher education workforce suggest that women are concentrated in lower-paid roles and are less likely to occupy higher-paying leadership roles in part due to systemic biases—in this case, lack of access to promotional and developmental opportunities.⁴ The pattern occurs throughout the higher ed workforce, but its clearest representation is within the tenure-track faculty workforce, as shown in Table 1.

Women make up more than half of assistant professors, the first rung of the tenure ladder. However, their representation drops at each successive rank, from assistant professor (52% women) to associate professor (46% women) to full professor (35% women). Female tenure-track faculty are thus less likely to enjoy the pay increases associated with promotion to associate and full professor than are their male tenure-track colleagues.

Missed opportunities for pay increases are not the only consequence when higher ed fails to promote women through faculty ranks. Promotion through the tenure ladder is a precursor to upper-level leadership positions—i.e., dean, provost, and president. When we fail to promote women through tenure-track faculty ranks, we also fail to improve and diversify the pipeline for top leadership roles in higher ed. This failure has important consequences for all women in the leadership pipeline in higher ed, as our research shows that women in administrative positions have better representation and pay in institutions with female presidents and provosts.⁵

Having more women in leadership positions does more than simply increase the face validity of an institution's diversity efforts. Women in strategic roles make the workplace better. They are more likely to inspire and motivate, promote professional development, build relationships, collaborate, innovate, solve problems, and champion change.⁶ The skills, experiences, and viewpoints women bring to the table are essential to

effectively address the crises that have arisen or have been exacerbated throughout higher education by the pandemic. In particular, female leaders are more likely to focus on and promote factors that are crucial to employee satisfaction and retention: employee well-being and diversity, equity and inclusion.⁷

Moving forward, it is essential to increase the representation of women in senior leadership, which means that representation in pipeline positions needs to increase, too. Some of the steps higher ed institutions can take to achieve this are:

Ensure women and men have equal access to opportunities to advance their careers. Institute formalized procedures to reduce bias during consideration of promotions, and keep employees accountable for ensuring women are aware of internal openings.

Implement paid parental leave (above and beyond normal sick or vacation time). For the 2021-22 academic year, just 43% of institutions provided biological mothers with paid parental leave.⁸ Paid parental leave can help prevent women from leaving their organization altogether for the birth of a child and also can attract employees who are planning for families in the future.

4 Andrea Silbert, president of Eos Foundation, has contributed a [commentary](#) to this TIAA Institute WVOEE series focused on the “power gap” of women serving as presidents at our nation's elite (R1 Carnegie Classification) universities.

5 Fuesting, M., Bichsel, J., & Schmidt, A. (2022). *Women in the Leadership Pipeline in Higher Education Have Better Representation and Pay in Institutions With Female Presidents and Provosts*. CUPA-HR.

6 Zenger, J., & Folkman, J. (2020). *Women Are Better Leaders During a Crisis*. *Harvard Business Review*.

7 McKinsey & Company. (2021). *Women in the Workplace 2021*.

8 CUPA-HR. (2022). *Benefits in Higher Education Survey* [Data set].

Institute flexible work options. Women are more likely to undertake primary child and elder care responsibilities than their male colleagues. Flexibility in schedules or the provision of remote or hybrid work opportunities can help reduce conflict between women’s personal and career roles.

Increasing the representation of women in leadership is not simply a “nice-to-have” ideal. The cost-benefit analysis is clear. Higher education institutions improve when women hold upper-level positions, and real costs are incurred when women are denied opportunities to advance to these leadership positions.



Some steps higher ed institutions can take:

- Ensure women and men have equal access to career opportunities
- Implement paid parental leave
- Institute flexible work options

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