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Narrowing the Gender Gap:

Women Academics in Canadian Universities

The number of female university teachers in Canada has grown sharply over the past twenty years, but women still remain under-represented within certain disciplines and at the most senior academic ranks.

Overall, between 1984 and 2004, the total number of full-time¹ university teachers in Canada increased by about 9,000. Of this number, more than 6,000, or 67 per cent, were women, bringing the percentage of women to just under one-third of all university faculty.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the number of full-time women faculty members has increased steadily since 1984. In contrast, the number of male professors actually declined between 1984 and 1994. As a result, the proportion of women university teachers increased from 16.2 per cent in 1984 to 23.4 per cent in 1994.

Since then, the number of male academics increased by about 3,200, while the number of women rose by 4,300. By 2004, nearly a third of all full-time university teachers were women (see Table 1).

The imbalance in the overall representation of female university teachers appears to be decreasing, but some noticeable disparities remain. While women made gains in all disciplines between 1984 and 2004, including the non-traditional fields of engineering and applied sciences (from 1.3 per cent to 11.5 per cent) and mathematics and physical sciences (from 4.5 per cent to 14.6 per cent), they are still seriously under-represented in these fields.

The majority of female faculty remain concentrated in a limited number of disciplines. In 2004, the social sciences accounted for the high-

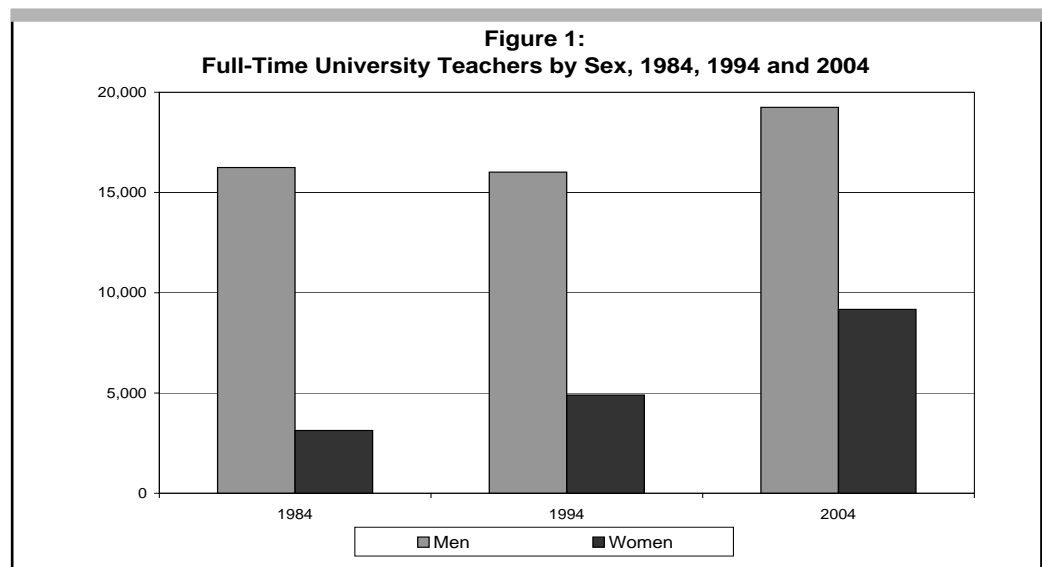


TABLE 1 Women as a share of Full-Time Canadian University Teachers by Major Discipline, All Ranks Combined (%)

	1984	1994	2004
All subjects combined	16.2	23.4	32.3
Education	25.0	34.7	49.0
Fine and Applied Arts	21.3	29.4	40.2
Humanities	19.4	29.0	40.3
Social Sciences	14.6	23.8	33.6
Agriculture and Biological Sciences	14.5	20.9	27.6
Engineering and Applied Sciences	1.3	5.3	11.5
Health Professions and Occupations	66.9	66.2	61.6
Mathematics and Physical Sciences	4.5	8.4	14.6

est proportion of both women and men.

About a third of all women and 30 per cent of men taught in the social sciences (Table 2). However, women were more heavily clustered in the humanities, health, and education. Together, these latter three fields accounted for 44.5 per cent of all female faculty in 2004, compared to just 24.2 per cent for men. In contrast, just over 10 per cent of all women taught in engineering and applied sciences or mathematics and physical sciences, compared with nearly a third of all men. Nevertheless, women's distribution across non-traditional disciplines did improve somewhat between 1984 and 2004.

The Representation of Women by Academic Rank

Women continue to be under-represented at the upper academic ranks, but their relative standing has improved noticeably over the past 20 years. In 1984, just 5.4 per cent of full professors were women, but this proportion had risen to 19.3 per cent by 2004. Similarly, amongst the rank of associate professor, women more than doubled their representation over the same period.

Women's gains at the entry level position of assistant professor appear to have stalled

TABLE 2 Distribution of Full-Time University Teachers by sex and major discipline (%)

	All Men		All Women	
	1984	2004	1984	2004
Education	9.4	6.1	16.3	12.3
Fine Arts	4.4	4.3	6.2	6.0
Humanities	18.7	14.8	23.4	21.0
Social Sciences	29.4	30.3	26.2	32.1
Agriculture and Biological Sciences	7.6	8.3	6.7	6.7
Engineering and Applied Sciences	9.8	13.5	0.7	3.7
Health Professions and Occupations	1.5	3.3	15.5	11.2
Mathematics and Physical Sciences	18.8	18.9	4.6	6.8
Specialization not reported	0.4	0.5	0.4	0.3

TABLE 3 Women as a share of full-time faculty by rank (%)

	1984	1994	2004
Full professor	5.4	9.8	19.3
Associate Professor	15.3	24.7	35.2
Assistant Professor	29.8	41.9	40.9

since 1994 - the share of women in this rank actually declined by 1 percentage point over this period.

Women's under-representation at the rank of full professor may be partly explained by the fact that women have entered the academic labour force in large numbers only recently. Given the time it takes to reach more senior academic levels, women's representation at the associate and full professor ranks should continue to improve in the years ahead.

Across all the major disciplines, women have improved their representation at the most senior academic rank. Significant improvements were made in the social sciences where women increased their presence as full professors more than five fold from just 4.7 per cent in 1984 to over 21 per cent in 2004. Women also made strong gains in the non-traditional fields of engineering and applied sciences and mathematics and physical sciences, although women are still seriously

TABLE 4 Women as a share of full-time faculty by rank and major discipline (%)

	1984	1994	2004
Full Professor			
Education	11.8	18.9	35.0
Fine Arts	10.3	13.4	26.8
Humanities	8.8	13.0	24.1
Social Sciences	4.7	11.1	21.3
Agriculture and Biological Sciences	6.7	9.9	17.9
Engineering and Applied Sciences	0.7	1.5	6.5
Health Professions	26.3	46.2	42.8
Mathematics and Physical Sciences	1.2	2.7	8.3
Associate Professor			
Education	23.7	34.4	51.4
Fine Arts	16.3	28.6	41.6
Humanities	19.0	28.5	42.9
Social Sciences	12.8	23.4	35.8
Agriculture and Biological Sciences	16.9	23.8	30.7
Engineering and Applied Sciences	1.1	5.7	11.8
Health Professions	59.7	69.8	63.0
Mathematics and Physical Sciences	4.3	9.6	15.3
Assistant Professor			
Education	40.4	52.4	57.0
Fine Arts	32.1	50.6	48.3
Humanities	33.6	51.9	50.0
Social Sciences	25.2	41.9	42.7
Agriculture and Biological Sciences	25.8	38.7	36.9
Engineering and Applied Sciences	3.8	14.6	17.1
Health Professions	79.8	72.7	68.6
Mathematics and Physical Sciences	11.0	19.6	20.4

TABLE 5 Female Faculty by Region and Rank (%)

	1984	1994	2004
Atlantic Provinces			
Full Professor	4.9	10.6	19.0
Associate Professor	15.5	24.9	34.5
Assistant Professor	32.6	39.7	45.3
All ranks combined	19.7	24.1	33.9
Quebec			
Full Professor	8.7	9.3	18.6
Associate Professor	17.5	25.3	33.5
Assistant Professor	31.5	43.1	38.9
All ranks combined	18.8	25.4	32.4
Ontario			
Full Professor	4.7	10.5	19.9
Associate Professor	13.6	23.8	35.6
Assistant Professor	26.9	43.1	39.7
All ranks combined	14.8	23.6	33.4
Manitoba/Saskatchewan			
Full Professor	3.8	5.3	15.1
Associate Professor	15.0	23.6	34.8
Assistant Professor	27.3	33.1	38.4
All ranks combined	14.7	18.2	29.8
Alberta/British Columbia			
Full Professor	6.2	9.1	18.1
Associate Professor	15.7	25.4	37.4
Assistant Professor	32.8	42.2	41.2
All ranks combined	15.8	22.2	31.5

under-represented at the senior rank in these disciplines - fewer than 7 and 8 per cent respectively. At the assistant level rank in these disciplines and others, women's gains appear to have slowed significantly in the period between 1994 and 2004.

Regional and Institutional Comparisons

The share of women amongst university faculty is quite similar across the country. As illustrated in Table 5, women's overall presence in the academic workforce ranged from about 30 per cent in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, to just fewer than 34 per cent in the Atlantic provinces. That compares to a

range of between 15 and 20 per cent in 1984.

At the rank of full professor, women have made the strongest gains over the past two decades in the Atlantic provinces and Ontario.

As a proportion of associate professors, women have doubled their representation in most regions. Again, women's progress at the assistant level has stalled in most regions over the past ten years, indicating that fewer women are entering the academic profession than in the decade between 1984 and 1994.

With the exception of the universities in the Atlantic provinces and in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, the share of women at the rank of assistant professor actually declined between 1994 and 2004.

Women are less evenly represented across

TABLE 6 Female Faculty by Institution Type and Rank (% of total)

	1984	1994	2004
Primarily Undergraduate Institutions			
Full Professor	3.1	13.9	21.5
Associate Professor	10.2	19.3	32.3
Assistant Professor	24.4	32.4	41.6
All ranks combined	15.3	22.1	34.3
Comprehensive Institutions			
Full Professor	5.0	8.5	20.1
Associate Professor	15.5	25.3	36.2
Assistant Professor	29.7	44.7	38.6
All ranks combined	16.2	23.7	32.4
Medical-Doctoral Institutions			
Full Professor	5.4	8.8	17.2
Associate Professor	15.8	25.0	35.2
Assistant Professor	31.6	41.4	40.4
All ranks combined	16.6	22.3	31.6

ranks when different institutional types are compared. As shown in Table 6, in 2004 women tended to be less present at the large medical-doctoral universities, and more in comprehensive institutions. Additionally, women were less likely to be full professors at medical-doctoral institutions (17.5 per cent) than at undergraduate (21.5 per cent) and comprehensive institutions (20.1 per cent)².

Conclusion

Women have dramatically increased their presence among full-time university faculty in the past 20 years. By 2004, women made up nearly a third of all faculty, up from

just 16 per cent in 1984. However, while women have made gains across all disciplines and ranks, they remain significantly under-represented in non-traditional disciplines such as engineering and applied sciences, and amongst the most senior academic ranks. As well, there are proportionately fewer women than men at the large medical-doctoral universities in Canada.

With a large number of retirements of university teachers anticipated in the coming years, women may expect to continue to make gains. However, this will only happen if governments, institutions, and academic staff associations press for greater equity in the academy. ■

¹The data presented in this report are for full-time university teachers without senior administrative duties only.

²Primarily Undergraduate universities refer to institutions that are largely focused on undergraduate education, with relatively few graduate programs. Universities in the Comprehensive category have a significant amount of research activity and offer a wide range of programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Medical-Doctoral universities refer to research-intensive universities that offer a broad range of PhD programs and research, as well as medical schools.

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