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The Tenure Gap:

Women's university appointments, 1985-2005

Introduction

Academic tenure is an essential protection of academic freedom. It is vital to creating the conditions that allow excellent teaching and scholarly research to flourish. It ensures academic staff can only be discharged for "just cause" and only through just procedures before a body of academic peers.

The existence of gender disparities in the awarding of tenure therefore raises serious concerns about the status of female faculty in Canadian universities. Women historically have been far less likely than their male counterparts to be appointed to a tenure or tenure track position. While there have been significant gains for women in recent years, fewer than 3 out of 10 tenured positions were held by women in 2005, and women accounted for 4 out of 10 tenure track positions.

National Trends in University Appointments

Between 1985 and 2005, the number of full-time university teachers in Canada rose 13.3%.¹ The number of full-time female faculty grew sharply by 129.8% reaching 8,784 in 2005, while the number of full-time male faculty actually declined by 9.8% to 17,424.

While the total number of full-time faculty rose over this period, the number of tenured full-time positions actually declined by 6.5%. The number of female tenured faculty more than doubled, but this was accompanied by a 22.7% decline in the number of men holding tenured appointments. As a result of these gains and losses, women increased their share of all tenured positions from just 12.9% in 1985 to 28.0% in 2005.

TABLE 1 Full-time University Teachers in Canada by Gender and Type of Appointment, 1985, 1995 and 2005²

		1985		1995		2005	
		Number	% of total	Number	% of total	Number	% of total
Tenured	Men	14,487	87.1	14,181	81.6	11,196	72.0
	Women	2,139	12.9	3,192	18.4	4,347	28.0
Tenure Track	Men	2,541	76.4	2,187	58.6	4,260	60.0
	Women	783	23.6	1,542	41.4	2,841	40.0
Non-Tenure Track	Men	2,289	71.8	1,983	66.0	1,968	55.2
	Women	900	28.2	1,020	34.0	1,596	44.8
All Appointments	Men	19,317	83.5	18,351	76.1	17,424	66.5
	Women	3,822	16.5	17,424	23.9	8,784	33.5

Source: Statistics Canada, Centre for Education Statistics, University and College Academic Staff Survey



The tenure track stream — normally initial appointments leading to tenure — witnessed the largest growth in employment. In 2005 there were 3,777 more full-time university teachers appointed to the tenure track stream than in 1985, an increase of 113.6%. The share of female university teachers in the tenure track stream rose sharply from 23.6% in 1985 to just over 41% in 1995, but has stalled since then. The share of men holding tenure track appointments fell from 76.4% to 60% in 2005.

Over the same period, the number of non-tenure track appointments grew by 11.8%. Female faculty accounted for the majority of the increase in this category. While the number of male non-tenure track faculty decreased by 14.0%, non-tenure track female faculty increased by 77.3%. In total, women made up 44.8% of non-tenured faculty in 2005.

Provincial Trends

The proportion of female university teachers who had attained full tenure status by 2005 ranged from a low of 25.0% in Manitoba to a high of 31.4% in Prince Edward Island. The provinces with the highest share of women with tenure track

appointments were Prince Edward Island (50.0%) and Nova Scotia (45.3%). By contrast, Saskatchewan (36.6%) and British Columbia (36.7%) had the lowest share.

By 2005, women made up 50% or more of non-tenure track appointments in five of the nine provinces under study. In Newfoundland and Labrador women accounted for two-thirds of all appointments in this category.

Trends by Institutional Type

Women's progress toward achieving greater equity in appointment status over the past two decades has varied by the type of institution in which they are employed. As illustrated in Table 3, female faculty have made the strongest gains in universities that are primarily undergraduate institutions. Conversely, women have posted slower gains in comprehensive institutions and medical-doctoral institutions. In 2005, nearly a third of full-time female university teachers in undergraduate universities had achieved tenure status as opposed to 26.8% of full-time female teachers in the medical-doctoral category.

Across all institutional types, women have made the strongest advances in the tenure

TABLE 2 Women as a share of full-time university teachers by appointment and province, 1985, 1995 and 2005 (%)

	Tenured			Tenure Track			Non-Tenure Track			Total		
	1985	1995	2005	1985	1995	2005	1985	1995	2005	1985	1995	2005
NL	16.8	20.5	27.2	30.0	38.6	42.1	33.3	46.2	66.7	19.4	24.6	32.0
PE	8.0	13.8	31.4	33.3	44.4	50.0	25.0	50.0	50.0	12.5	29.1	39.0
NS	16.2	21.8	29.4	26.7	43.4	45.3	39.0	35.6	53.8	21.4	27.3	37.1
NB	15.5	20.0	29.1	24.3	36.4	42.1	44.0	41.4	51.4	20.9	25.1	35.6
ON	12.4	17.9	28.7	23.3	44.5	39.7	25.2	32.2	43.2	15.7	24.1	33.8
MB	11.1	16.9	25.0	29.3	34.9	39.5	27.5	34.4	37.6	15.6	22.3	31.2
SK	12.2	14.9	27.2	19.4	37.5	36.6	29.8	37.5	44.3	15.3	20.6	32.4
AB	11.8	19.8	26.4	26.2	32.6	42.2	29.2	32.7	42.5	15.6	21.8	32.1
BC	13.6	17.9	27.5	20.4	40.4	36.7	39.4	42.9	50.0	16.6	24.3	32.6

Source: Statistics Canada, Centre for Education Statistics, University and College Academic Staff Survey

TABLE 3 Women as share of full-time university teachers by appointment status and type of institution,² 1985, 1995 and 2005 (%)

	Tenured			Tenure Track			Non-Tenure Track			Total		
	1985	1995	2005	1985	1995	2005	1985	1995	2005	1985	1995	2005
Medical- Doctoral	11.8	17.7	26.8	26.3	39.2	38.5	27.6	32.3	44.2	16.0	22.5	31.8
Comprehensive	12.7	18.2	28.5	19.2	45.9	38.8	34.1	45.8	49.4	15.2	24.2	33.8
Undergraduate	17.3	22.0	32.1	25.2	41.7	45.1	33.6	43.6	48.6	20.5	28.0	38.3

Source: Statistics Canada, Centre for Education Statistics, University and College Academic Staff Survey

track appointment category. In 2005 full-time female university teachers comprised 45.1% of tenure track appointments in the undergraduate category and 38.5% in the medical-doctoral category, up significantly from 25.2% and 26.3% respectively in 1985. In the comprehensive category, women accounted for 38.8% of tenure track appointments in 2005, more than double that in 1985.

The larger share of women holding tenured positions at undergraduate institutions is difficult to explain based upon the available data alone. It may be partly, but not entirely, due to the larger number of female faculty who teach in general arts and science fields that make up the majority of offerings that these institutions. In 2005, for instance, women made up 41% of all faculty in fine and applied arts, 41% of the total in humanities, and 34% in the social sciences. By contrast, women are seriously under-represented in engineering and applied sciences (11.8%), mathematics and physical sciences (15.5%), and agricultural and

biological sciences (28.4%). Comprehensive and medical-doctoral institutions tend to have larger applied science programs. Nevertheless, not all of this gap can be explained by this, indicating that women face other hurdles in achieving tenure status at medical-doctoral institutions.

Conclusion

Over the past 20 years, female university teachers have realized real gains in their appointment status across Canada. This has led to important improvements in employment security and academic freedom protections for more female faculty. Despite these advances, however, much more needs to be done to achieve equity. By 2005, women still made up just 28% of all tenured university teachers, but nearly 45% of non-tenure track positions. Governments, university administrations, and academic staff associations all have a role to play in redressing these inequities.■

Endnotes

1. The data presented in this report are for full-time university teachers without senior administrative duties. Data from Quebec universities are not included due to the unavailability of recent data. The last year for which CREPUQ provided a detailed break-down of faculty by type of appointment was in 2001-2002. We do not know how the picture would change were we able to include part-time faculty. Anecdotally, we know there has been a dramatic increase in the number of part-time university teachers over the past several decades but no reliable data exist in Canada to specify the exact numbers. The data from the United States, which include part-time faculty, indicate that 48% are part-time and that more than two-thirds of academics at degree-granting institutions are off the tenure track.

2. The Undergraduate category refers to universities that are largely focused on undergraduate education, with relatively few graduate programs. Comprehensive universities have a significant amount of research activity and a wide range of graduate and undergraduate programs, including professional degrees. Medical-Doctoral institutions have a broad range of PhD programs and research, as well as medical schools.

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