

Would I Do This All Over Again?

Mid-Career Voices in Political Science

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Preface

Mala Htun, Frances Rosenbluth, and Kathleen Thelen

According to the NSF survey of earned doctorates, women now make up about 40% of all new PhDs in political science, up from 15% in 1975 (Ginter 2004). And yet, the share of women achieving tenure has not kept pace with their entry into the profession. A large number of studies have sought to explain women's higher rates of attrition. As a result of this work we now know a great deal more about why the pipeline to academic careers is leakier for women and people of color than for white men: the climate in many departments is unwelcoming; the challenges of work-life balance tend to hit women harder on average; and women and especially women of color are typically assigned larger advising and service burdens, and receive less mentoring and sponsorship.

As much as we have learned from these macro-level studies, the large-scale aggregate data on which their findings are based is a great distance away from the lived experiences of individual women themselves. Laura van Assendelft, Page Fortna, Claudine Gay, and Kira Sanbonmatsu take a refreshingly different approach to understanding the challenges that women in political science face, and the choices they make. They conduct in-depth interviews with a select cohort of PhD students (men and women alike) who were in three graduate programs in political science in the 1990s and who are currently mid-career and use thematic analysis to identify the key factors shaping choices at critical junctures in women's careers. The authors portray the constraints informing how women and men experience the profession at all stages—from their initial decisions to pursue a PhD in political science, their experiences in graduate school, on the job market, in their first jobs (whether in or out of the academy), and through tenure and promotion for those who remained.

The analysis reveals the diversity of women's experiences, though some common issues stand out. Many women suffered from a lack of support and poor advising, which drove them out of graduate school. For most who stayed, the job search process, which offered few choices, foiled plans to remain in control, to weigh pros and cons, and make decisions. Once in academic jobs, both on and off the tenure track, inadequate and inconsistent advice, as well as the lack of transparency in formal and informal promotion criteria, put many women at a disadvantage. The expectations for promotion to full professor were particularly opaque. Ultimately, most had to figure things out for themselves. Departmental cultures varied dramatically, from a climate that one respondent referred to as a

“civil war” to another that was “pretty collegial.” Finally, many affirmed the “cultural taxation” imposed on women and people of color. Department chairs and university administrators ask them to serve on committees to add diversity, but participation, while helping the university, augments women's service obligations and potentially thwarts their advancement.

The “academic dream” was unattainable for most women in the study, but for different reasons at different stages. By carefully curating their narratives, the authors provide an intimate view of the obstacles and opportunities women face in political science, the constraints on the paths they choose, and the successes and setbacks they experience along the way. The result is a brilliant collective portrait of a diverse group of women whose stories remain relevant to the younger generation of women political scientists who continue to face many of these same challenges. Their personal stories bring vividly to life the life-changing decisions that, while individual and contingent, together form a dismayingly familiar picture. We wince with them as they recall careless mentoring, discouraging comments about their prospects as a “trailing spouse,” racist remarks on student evaluations, and insufficient institutional support for the demands of family and work.

Many departments have done much to establish more welcoming environments for young scholars. But some of the reflections on the feelings of futility or inadequacy from two decades ago continue to resonate today. Childcare leave remains unevenly offered and inconsistently evaluated in the promotion process. Advising and committee work still lies more heavily on women and especially women of color. The discipline has embraced the concept of diversity, but lagging is an appreciation for, let alone mechanisms to incorporate, the different academic perspectives and styles that a more diverse faculty bring with them.

Much is left to accomplish; the treasures of insight in this report will help us devise better solutions.

Report

Laura van Assendelft, Page Fortna, Claudine Gay, and Kira Sanbonmatsu

As higher education undergoes structural challenges and the extent of inclusivity within the academy continues to spark debate, we contribute to these conversations with original interviews drawn from the mid-career perspectives of political scientists. We conducted personal and confidential semi-structured interviews with individuals from three graduate programs who entered graduate school around the same time (i.e., the early 1990s) about their educational and career experiences—from the decision to pursue the PhD to the present—regardless of whether they completed the degree or work in the profession today. The mid-career stage provides a unique window into the discipline—and the academy generally—and the distance and career security that allow for candid assessments.

How do people experience the profession of political science? What explains differences in individual trajectories—both within and outside of the academy? What works in graduate training and in the profession? What could be better? What should young people know about seeking a political science PhD?

In this report, we share the perspectives of the individuals we interviewed and offer their personal accounts and observations. What brings men and women into the study of political science? What keeps them there? How has the discipline changed in the past two to three decades? How could it improve going forward?

How do institutional climate, efforts to diversify the academy, and policies such as family leave impact individual careers? Which policies and practices help graduate students on the job market and faculty on the tenure track? What are the tradeoffs in academic and nonacademic pursuits? What is the value of the PhD—inside and outside of the academy?

This project is one result of the American Political Science Association (APSA) Presidential Task Force on Women's Advancement in Political Science (2016–2018) launched by APSA President Kathleen Thelen and chaired by Frances Rosenbluth and Mala Htun. Our task force subgroup sought interviews with individuals from the same graduate-school cohort who are currently mid-career to shed light on the status of women in the profession and the dearth of women in its highest ranks (American Political Science Association 2011; Mitchell and Hesli 2013). We wanted to know how gender interacts with graduate education and the pursuit of academic

and nonacademic jobs and to understand how women—and men—experience political science. We also wanted to understand how race/ethnicity intersects with gender to shape experiences. We build on the important work of the Women's Caucus for Political Science and the APSA Committee on the Status of Women, as well as regional caucus and status committees and previous task forces.

Through our interviews, we uncovered important insights about the profession more generally, beyond its gendered aspects, which we discuss in this report. We believe that these first-person accounts are an important source of evidence and observations as we debate the current job market and the future of academic careers (Hochschild et al. 2017).

A supplemental analysis of a large sample of women and men in the profession, conducted by APSA staff of the same cohort we examined through interviews, revealed notable gender differences in career outcomes. This large-N APSA membership analysis (which is explained in more detail in the appendix) confirms the importance of asking difficult questions of the discipline about why women—although represented in strong numbers at the graduate level—do not ultimately populate the ranks of tenured faculty and beyond to the same degree. APSA's analysis revealed gender differences in the attainment of tenure and promotion to full professor for those earning PhDs between 1996 and 2000. Among our interview respondents, the highest attrition for women compared to men occurred during graduate school.

For more details on our interview methodology and the APSA membership-analysis methodology, we refer readers to the appendix.

MID-CAREER COHORT STUDY

We selected three graduate-school cohorts who started PhD programs in the early 1990s, representing a mix of public and private institutions and regions, and we obtained approval from our respective Institutional Review Boards to conduct our research. We were able to obtain names and contact information for almost everyone from the three programs, yielding a total of 44 respondents. We invited all of these respondents to participate in our study. Subjects were asked to take a short online survey and to provide their current curriculum vitae. Of the 44 respondents, 31 surveys were completed, yielding a

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71% response rate for the survey. The survey data provided a limited demographic profile of respondents. Our respondents include 18 males (58%) and 13 females (42%). Twenty-five (81%) respondents are white and six (19%) are people of color. The minority respondents included two women and four men. Most respondents are married, 24 (77%), and 23 (74%) have children. Of those who are married, 20 (83%) have a working spouse. Four respondents (13%) are currently caregiving for an adult who is ill, disabled, or aging. Twenty respondents (65%) completed a PhD in political science, including 78% of the men compared to 46% of the women.

The primary source of material for this analysis comes from our in-depth follow-up interviews. Of the 44 respondents initially contacted, 29 participated in these confidential interviews, for a response rate of 66%. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. All unidentified quotes are excerpts from the transcripts of these interviews, redacted to protect confidentiality.

The stories unfold chronologically from the initial decision to pursue a PhD in political science, to the experience in graduate school, on the job market, in the first position (academic or nonacademic), at early career, through transitions (if any) to a current position, to reflections on paths chosen and advice for future generations. Emphasized throughout are issues of work–life balance and the role of gender and race. The stories reveal how uncertainties and expectations shape choices as well as the factors that readjust expectations and define career success and satisfaction. The diversity of voices in the cohort interviews raises common themes and unique insight to where “leaks in the pipeline” may form. The value of a PhD in political science is validated and, at the same time, continued barriers to success in the discipline are highlighted.

THE DECISION TO PURSUE A PHD IN POLITICAL SCIENCE

There are opportunity costs in choosing graduate work and, ultimately, an individual’s career satisfaction is influenced by early expectations as they continue their studies. Although a PhD in political science is a versatile degree, almost all who entered the programs in our cohort study did so to pursue an academic career. The decision typically was made early, as junior and senior undergraduates—and even as early as high school. As one respondent described, “As far back as I can remember...I mean, I can’t put an age on it but certainly by

the time I got to high school, I think I knew that I would go on to college, go on to a PhD, I’d be a professor. It was all teaching, it was all teaching, that’s what I cared about. That was the biggest love.”

Only a few respondents pursued other fields first. One started law school but, after one semester, “wasn’t sure that’s what [they] wanted to do,” explaining that “when you’re that age, you are kind of like, lost.” Another completed law school and then briefly worked as a lawyer to pay off student loans before pursuing a PhD in political science to find more “intellectual exercise.” Working in Washington or in jobs after college that required research inspired others to return to graduate school in political science: “I started to realize that I liked research”; “I really enjoy reading and writing and research”; and “I was working in Washington in politics but I wanted to go into academia.”

Several themes emerged as motivation for this decision, including the role-model effect of professors at the undergraduate level. “I had two professors who I thought were really great, and they encouraged me to consider it as a career possibility, and that’s what I wanted to do.” Similarly, another recalled, “I really admired the professors that I had in college and I thought at the time that it seemed like a really cool lifestyle and a way to just spend my life doing something that I was really interested in.” That kind of passion for learning inspired a number of other respondents. “I liked the idea of studying something in great detail, and...doing that kind of indefinitely.” Another explained:

I didn’t, at first, have any sense of what it meant to become a professor. So, I just thought, well, you know, I just like school and I don’t know what else I really specifically want to do, except maybe, I don’t know, politics of some kind. And so I thought academia might be the right career. So, I just went and talked to one professor who seemed friendly and he was and just told me all about it. So it started to seem like a more realistic possibility at that point.

This idealism flourished, despite dissuasion for some. “I was warned by one of my undergraduate advisors when I was trying to decide where to go that the question was not what’s the best program, but what will be the least horrible and traumatic program because they’re all kind of like that. And looking back at it, I thought, you know, it wasn’t that traumatic after all. I had a pretty good experience.” Others perhaps simply wanted to postpone career decisions. “The idea of jumping onto the

job market was not so attractive. So perhaps school seemed like a better alternative at that time.” As another respondent remembered, the description of careers in political science were appealing: “[T]here were all these old...brochures about, you know, becoming a political scientist. And it said in there, it said people who pursue a career in political science can expect to enjoy a comfortable upper-middle-class existence.”

Undergraduate internships provided further insight. “The one thing that internship taught me was that I did not want to work as a bureaucrat; being told what to study and to produce reports was just not what I wanted to do. So that sort of reaffirmed the idea that I wanted to pursue a career as a scholar where I was setting my own agenda.”

All respondents exhibited the characteristics of lifelong learners. All were seeking intellectual challenge. Some were inspired by faculty role models, others by exploring other options first. Clarity on expectations within the program, realities concerning the job market, and even what type of academic (or nonacademic) option would be preferred were not yet solidified at this stage, regardless of gender or race.

GRADUATE-SCHOOL EXPECTATIONS

The respondents were quick to decide about graduate school as undergraduates: “I think it was my junior year of college”; “my senior year at college”; or “I was in college...I went straight through into the graduate program.” However, these decisions were made with rather vague expectations. “I didn’t know, you know, how the academic market works or what it takes to be a university professor”; “I didn’t have any [career expectations], I just wanted to study.” Another respondent recalled:

I thought that I would be a professor of some kind, but I just didn’t know what. Just looking back on it, I wasn’t probably nearly as well informed about it as I maybe should have been. I think that I was imagining maybe being a researcher, but I was still a little bit on the vague side of what it meant to be a sort of full-time R1 kind of researcher...I think I was just a little vague about all the sort of permutations of what you do with a PhD.

Career expectations fell into three categories: (1) unknown (i.e., focus on the PhD, make decisions about a career later); (2) some combination of teaching and research, but definitely an academic track; and (3) academic and/or nonacademic career options. Those in the first category had reasons for pursuing a PhD but no realistic expectations about what the program or job market would involve. “I really didn’t have any career

expectations. I was getting a PhD, going into grad school because my father had a PhD, and I figured I’d see where it would go.” Another confided, “I didn’t know when I was a senior in college how things worked.” Some simply could not recall: “I don’t remember that I had a strong vision for what I would do.” Similarly, another explained, “Not that I had a particularly clear idea of what a PhD in political science meant.”

Those in the second category wanted to be professors but had little understanding of the difference between small liberal arts colleges and research universities. Some would discover a preference for teaching compared to research in graduate school or in their first academic position. “I was definitely thinking about a college or a university career. I don’t think I had a very clear view of the difference between a liberal arts college and a research university when I was still an undergraduate.” There also was an expectation of more choice in the job market: “I wanted to be a professor. So, my expectation was I’ll go into the job market and there would just be oodles and oodles of jobs available.”

There are, however, unintended consequences of the choices made in accepting faculty positions. Through trial and error, respondents adjusted their priorities in balancing teaching, researching, and family. “I imagined myself doing the combination of research and teaching. I don’t think I had a good sense of the balance between the two and how that would vary as a function of where I might be employed.” Some students alluded to departmental expectations about what type of careers they would pursue:

I went where there was money and a person that I wanted to work with and that sort of thing. I thought that I would end up in a somewhat more research-heavy part of the career. Of course, I drank the Kool-Aid our first year in grad school and really had sort of internalized the idea that R1 was kind of the only legitimate way to go. Even though I had a liberal arts undergraduate education and I loved that and I very much was inspired by my undergraduate professors in my liberal arts college. But I, you know, early in the career I certainly didn’t think that I would end up teaching at a very teaching-oriented liberal arts school. I’m not sorry that I did, but that has been a shift of my expectations from, like, when I was a real new grad student to where I am now, for sure.

Those in the third category were open to nonacademic options. Some considered applied work, particularly in policy-related fields but, again, only in general terms. “I did not specifically think about how this would look in practice and whether there would be an academic job or nonacademic job.”

Others simply had not developed a strong preference as an entering graduate student: “You know, I don’t know if I had any dream job.... I was open to using a PhD in academics or nonacademics.”

Ultimately, the success or failure of these students in their PhD program hinged on how strong the connection was between finishing the dissertation and their career goals. Whereas most of those we interviewed entered graduate programs with an intellectual curiosity and strong desire to continue their education, few knew exactly where that path would lead them.

GRADUATE-SCHOOL RETENTION SUCCESSSES AND FAILURES

Graduate school delivered the promise of a challenging and intellectually rewarding experience for most respondents. Respondents described “excellent” classroom experiences that “exceeded expectations.” The interactions with peers added to the vibrant intellectual culture. “I think what I really liked about it was the intellectual engagement with my peers and my mentors. That’s what stands out for me. Just the idea that everybody that I happened to be involved with on a daily basis was really interested in learning and thinking at a deeper level. That part was super fun.” Echoing this sentiment, another respondent answered, “Certainly from an intellectual perspective, it was one of the most exciting experiences, I think, in my life.”

Where the graduate-school experience diverged for some fell into two categories: (1) a growing disillusionment with the direction of their field of study; and (2) a negative experience with individual faculty members or the general culture of the program. In the first category, one theme that emerged was a desire for political science to be more applied. The research questions, it seemed, grew increasingly narrow and farther removed as the respondent progressed through graduate school. “Fundamentally, I want to understand the world and figure out how to make it a better place. So, it was about the sort of narrowness of the field itself and political science and not something about the department.” Another complained that there was too much reading without enough time for reflection and that “it became too esoteric.... It just felt that it didn’t have the application on real life that I wanted it to.” Political science became less exciting to these respondents because a steady path toward program completion requires sustained passion. “I knew pretty early on that it wasn’t for me. Once basic coursework was over and it was like ‘now what do you want to study, what are your questions’ and either I wasn’t ready and/or those questions became too small for me and that was certainly by my second year of study.... I realized ‘I’m

just fundamentally not interested enough.’” Another who left with a masters to pursue a law degree described the PhD program as “a great deal of time and effort spent over issues that often seemed to be of minimal importance.”

For some, the search for the dissertation topic would be inconclusive and eventually lead to departure from the program:

I found it challenging, I felt it interesting. Eventually, I did lose passion for it.... After I passed my exams, then I started working with an advisor on a dissertation and I kind of popped from one topic to the next, and I just found that I really had no interest in it. So, I decided to leave.... I didn’t have a singular research interest going into the program that a lot of my peers had. Like, they already had an idea of what in the field of political science they wanted to do a dissertation on...I did not. I thought I would discover that in the process of going deeper and that simply never happened.

Sometimes the decision to leave the program was accelerated by other life changes. “I had just had my first son and I think they chalked it up to that...like sort of a reprioritization, ‘oh, this guy wants to go raise his kid, he doesn’t want to study,’” although the real motivator was “trying to decide on something that I didn’t find any interest in and pursuing it to whatever end.” How perceptions of students and faculty members change when they start a family is discussed in greater detail in a subsequent section.

Our interviews also revealed gender-based graduate-program obstacles that led to exiting the program in some cases. One woman who left her program explained, “I was really able to see that it wasn’t just me. This wasn’t, you know, I’m having a hard time; it’s women who are having a hard time.”

Describing the department as having an “unprofessional academic culture,” one respondent in part blamed herself. “I think I wasn’t ready; I was too young.... Coming from a working-class background, I was unprepared for the culture that I would encounter. I just discovered as I got a few years into it that I really didn’t like the lifestyle.” She added:

I just hated the capriciousness of it...like he could totally ignore me and...my work would suffer because he felt he could ignore me. Whereas if I were, you know, in a professional setting...there are boundaries...I’m supposed to support my team, enable my team, like that is not the culture in graduate school. When I went into the professional world and I saw...how much effort there was to...eliminate bias and prejudices in the

hiring and promotion process and evaluation process...where it felt like in graduate school, all anybody wanted to do was tear me down.

Another female respondent described not being prepared to navigate a department deeply divided over methodology. Assumptions were made based on her undergraduate work, but she felt that she lacked the confidence to say, “This is how I want to pursue my storytelling in this field.” In leaving the program, she described the feeling of having to “break up with the people that I had been assigned to even before I got there.... And, of course, it’s all deeply personal...this is someone’s work, this is someone’s life work...this is how they’re going through their life work, so it does feel personal when you say ‘that’s not for me.’”

Lacking a good mentor was also a recurrent problem. “I didn’t have much mentorship...they basically told me I didn’t fit in academia.... I didn’t know enough coming straight out of the undergrad...to discern that it was not a good fit. Now that I’m much farther along in a career, I understand what good mentoring and good support looks like and I don’t feel like I got it. I had no idea what I was getting into.”

For another female respondent, the issue emerged at the dissertation stage. “My experience in the program itself was colored by my experience with my dissertation advisor, which was not a good one. My dissertation advisor was not a mentor in any sense of the term, and we didn’t have structures in our program if students found themselves with an instructor who was not supportive.” Another had two mentors in conflict with one another. “I had two very strong-willed mentors and, ultimately, that was not a good way to go. I really needed to choose one or the other. But I really didn’t...know how to read the politics of the department and so, I sought protection from one and sought really input and guidance from the other.” She also worked as a research assistant and recalled taking the first two years to set boundaries regarding work expectations:

I was working for a professor and I saw other people were research assistants and they didn’t have nearly as much to do as I did. And every time I would complete a task for my professor, he would give me more. And every time the bar would move up. So, my bad experience in my first year or two, I would also say had to do with me not knowing how to set boundaries yet. He had no idea that he was overloading me. He had no idea that what I was doing was out of proportion to what other people were doing because

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I had never said anything, because I didn’t think I could say anything.

When she finally did say something, her experience improved and she felt supported through the remainder of her program. Another respondent, however, felt that she “never established a good rapport with the person [she] came to study with.” One woman criticized a general lack of

support for women in her graduate program:

What I noticed was that other women were equally as hard on themselves as I was and that there was a real gender difference in how people appeared in graduate school. I was very close with the other women in my program, and I was really clear on how hard of a time they were having and I did not perceive the men having as hard of a time.... The rate of women dropping out was so much higher and the women taking so much longer than the men was so clear to me.

This respondent, who did not complete the degree, observed that if graduate programs were more supportive of women and more interested in ideas, “there’d be a lot more women political science professors out there doing a fabulous job of teaching young people, and that’s really sad [that they aren’t there].” Later in the interview, she commented:

Political science is fascinating, politics is amazing. I love the idea of educating people to think critically about politics. It seems like it’s the most important thing we could be doing as a country. I’m sorry the political science discipline didn’t support more women to really flourish as graduate students and therefore as professors.

Another woman we interviewed related that she was one of three students to enter her program without funding. Her male advisor had told her that she “couldn’t hack it in academia” and, therefore, should not be funded. She appealed to the dean of the graduate school and received funding when her department had denied it.

Others who had a positive experience overall still noted areas for improvement, particularly in teacher training:

I had very good interactions with my advisors and they were quite accessible, so I didn’t really have any problems there. It was, you know, fairly straightforward. The funding was good so I

was able to progress fairly, without any delays in terms of getting from the classwork to the field, to working on the dissertation, to field work, to getting things done. You know, there was never a financial constraint in terms of having to go look for work or anything like that and delaying things on that end. So, yeah, I think the one thing that was maybe missing was training in how to teach.

Some respondents noted that teaching needed to be treated with greater respect. One woman explained that she was congratulated for winning a teaching award, and a professor in the department shook her hand and told her, “You’re a fantastic teacher. Now write the book you know.” She recalled, “That was confusing to me to feel like I was an excellent teacher and was getting that really recognized but that what was really valued higher than that was to produce an article, a book—and I think I wanted to do both and be valued for both.”

Finally, respondents recognized a need for better socialization into the profession for political science graduate students:

My PhD program was absolutely amazing in terms of teaching us to be good social scientists. I continually look back and look at my colleagues and the training that we got and I think we got some of the best training that still exists. What we did not get—what was really lacking in that program, in my opinion—was much guidance in terms of navigating, you know, the actual profession. So, it was kind of—and we did get stellar, I think, stellar training as social scientists. But the message was, you know, all you need to do is be a great social scientist and everything else will take care of itself. So, we didn’t get much—there were a few professors who provided that for their students, but the program itself really didn’t pay much attention at all to, um, socializing us to the profession.

In summary, many of the respondents in our study did not have clear expectations entering graduate school. Some found that a more advanced study of political science was not what they had imagined. They realized at some point in their studies that they were on the wrong path, for them. Others faced hostility or discrimination within their department. Without effective mentoring and support, these students left; for some, this meant reluctantly abandoning a cherished career goal. It is important to note that the highest rate of attrition came in the first two years of the graduate-school experience, with women and people of color more likely than men to leave their program. We see in our interviews that women were more likely to highlight a lack of encouragement and lower satisfaction than men in their graduate-school experience.

THE JOB MARKET

Respondents who continued through the final stages of their PhD program developed clearer expectations about the job market in political science. Most entered the job market ABD (all but dissertation) and spent six months to a year applying and interviewing before receiving an offer. There were readjustments along the way in terms of how many jobs they expected to be available, how much control they would have over the process, and what they were willing to accept as their first academic appointment. Most felt fortunate to find employment, and a few landed their ideal position. Others assumed they would stay for a couple of years at their first academic appointment and perhaps move on. The job-market experience greatly impacted expectations and ultimate career satisfaction. A number of respondents were married by this stage and some were starting families, which complicated the search process.

Most respondents prioritized academic positions, even if they were open to other options. “I sought all tenure-track, assistant-professor positions at all manner of schools. But I didn’t apply to a lot.... I applied to maybe, I don’t know...four maybe, and I received two interviews.” Another recalled, “I just looked for academic jobs because it was the first year I searched.” For most, the process was “not long at all.” As one respondent remembered, “I began the application process in the fall and...I had a job by, like, the end of March or something like that. So, it didn’t even take a year. It was a matter of months.” Another started the process “relatively early” but felt “super lucky” because their advisor provided so much support listening to their job talk numerous times and even providing written feedback. Additional mentors offered advice on how to dress and speak. “I wouldn’t have done it without them kind of being really harsh but also supportive.” Another respondent who was very satisfied with an offer from an R1 institution recalled:

I applied to maybe one or two branch-campus kind of places—that was sort of like a backup—but having interviewed at one of those places, I realized pretty quickly how different they were from the main sort of research universities.... It was all in that first year. I was on the market early; I applied for a whole bunch of places. I had two interviews and one of them was the one that I took.

Most respondents took the one offer they received; therefore, finding the right fit was somewhat serendipitous. One respondent noted applying to 15, maybe 20 universities in search of the right R1 placement, thereby creating anxiety about the decision making that might be needed:

Well, I only had one job offer and the job offer I had was one I was content with, so I guess I never thought about rejecting or pursuing an alternative because it was pretty much what I wanted to do. My search was characterized by some uncertainty in the sense that I was applying for a bunch of jobs and not sure if I was going to get them. But it didn't seem as daunting as it does now when I look at all my students applying for jobs. So, it was, you know, an uncertain, unpleasant time, especially when you have to go for a job talk and you don't know if you got the job or not.

Not everyone had as many positions to which they could apply, however. As one respondent explained, "I think it was frustrating in the sense that the subfield I was in...was becoming limited to positions that were funded by grants. It felt like the field was narrowing through things beyond my control.... You can apply to open positions but, again, with a field that was waning, it didn't feel terribly—what's the word—empowering." Another accepted the one tenure-track offer they had because "everyone saw it as a good choice" but "primarily it was the only offer I got." Likewise, another respondent explained:

Jobs were scarce and I just felt basically lucky.... So, I think the things that made me happy about the way it worked out included that it was in a good city and that it was a school with a strong reputation and a lot of strength in my area.... The decision itself was just, it felt like, you know, you're in the military and you go where they assign you.... I remember the feelings. I would say that it was extremely stressful and that I thought it all worked out okay in the end.

Trailing spouses compounded the stress of some of the job searches. A married female respondent was warned by her advisor, "You need to be prepared if you both want academic jobs that you are going to have to live in different places and you are going to have to have a commuter relationship." Her response was, "And I remember just being like, no. That's not okay; it's not acceptable, that's not what we are going for." So, she entered the market looking for opportunities for a trailing spouse and "the search kind of fell together pretty quickly. I was just on the market for one season." Ultimately, she accepted the one job offer that she received, knowing that it would have possibly two tenure-track lines. "I would have been really satisfied if, you know, the dream job that didn't exist landed in my lap but, you know, I was on the market for a really short amount of time." The plan was to stay for two or three years but, "after my first year, I got pregnant with my first child and, suddenly, you know, calculations changed completely." Another couple looking for the possibility of two positions

already had their first child:

[W]e had a small child so we didn't want to be...I didn't want to go into, you know, sort of a series of one-year positions or anything like that. I wanted things to be settled. I had, I think, like most new PhDs or soon-to-be PhDs, I had notions about the kind of institutions where I would like to be. But I also had a fairly clear-eyed view of the possibilities that were in my scope and so, the institution itself was recruiting bright students. It was a liberal arts institution. I liked both of those things. So, I suppose, yes—I mean, there were a couple of characteristics of the institution that I liked but I wouldn't have chosen that particular institution had it not been for my spouse.

For others, the job-search experience was more negative. Some searches took longer than expected. "I had some interviews my first year and I was still ABD and...didn't get any of those jobs, and so then I had this lectureship and went out on the market again and that's when I got my first tenure-track job." Another person we interviewed eventually was offered a tenure-track position but left academia after three semesters. For some, the disappointment came in wanting an R1 position but finding a teaching-college position. "I would say that I was not very satisfied in the sense that, you know, I really wasn't sure what I wanted at that time. And I was pretty sure that I wanted a job at an R1 institution in an urban environment, and that's not what I wound up with." Another respondent was frustrated that some institutions "just didn't even acknowledge an application." Worse still, there were several people on the market from the same department and "strange things happened":

I was called and informed that the search was not going to take place because the line had been pulled from the department when, in fact, that wasn't true. And so, the next day I found out that [a peer] was going for a job talk and it was a little bit disconcerting. I felt that it was dishonest and I didn't quite know why they felt the need to do that.... They just could have said "thanks for applying, but you're not coming for the job talk." I mean that's pretty easy, but I thought that's really odd.... I had some weird experiences. I don't know, at that point, I was beginning to feel how difficult it might be to get a job.

Mentoring through the job market was inconsistent or nonexistent for most. At the same time, departmental expectations were omnipresent. A clear hierarchy existed, ranging from R1 academic positions at the top to nonacademic careers

"And, for me, it's always been funny to look back on my career. It all seems so logical and so natural that I ended up where I am right now."

or teaching at liberal arts colleges at the bottom. "When I was graduating, I had some people suggest some potential nonacademic tracks because they knew I was sort of more in that area but, basically, all the career preparations, every single one was on academic jobs. There was never even a discussion of the possibility of non-academic." Another sought a "more applied version of research" on the job market, while "still sort of pretending I was going to write my dissertation." One respondent never even considered academic positions:

I honestly did not consider any faculty or academic positions when we were leaving graduate school. I just popped straight into consulting, strategy consulting. And that was all done without any interaction or, you know, seeking out any feedback from faculty—I think mostly because I figured that the reaction would be pretty negative, and I just didn't want anything.... I didn't have confidence that my dissertation, in general, and my job-talk paper, in particular, were going to be strong enough to get me a position at, you know, a department that was sort of out of a high-enough quality that it would kind of give me the quality of life and/or flexibility to be in the same place as my significant other was going to be. And that became...that was probably the biggest criterion...it's just not wanting to be separated from my significant other. I mean, I actually got pretty negative reactions when I finally did inform my faculty members. It's in a range from "Oh no, you really shouldn't do this because you're really cut out to be an academic" to "Why did I write that letter for you?"

Only one person we interviewed assumed that they wanted a teaching college and ended up working at an R1 institution. "I definitely thought I wanted a small liberal arts college but, as time went on, I became more open to a research institution and that, ultimately, is where I ended up for my first job. But I really just thought...you know, teach, get tenure, publish, have a decent career, and get tenure...that was pretty much it." Another respondent described the serendipity of the process: "And, for me, it's always been funny to look back on my career. It all seems so logical and so natural that I ended up where I am right now. Because you have no way of knowing where it's going to work out, but I was really quite fortunate in terms of everything that worked out the way it did."

Not having the dissertation finished before entering the

job market was unproblematic for most respondents. If anything, having a "deadline" helped. For one of our subjects, however, the unfinished dissertation, a child, and the need to find paid employment led to an alternate, administrative career within higher education. Most respondents had a short and successful experience on the job market. Some were still trying to figure out what they were looking for, whereas others could not find the perfect fit. The illusion of "oodles of jobs" and ranking the pros and cons of salary, location, and prestige of the institution never came into play. The first academic appointment was the only job offer they received. As one respondent reflected: "The biggest realization as the transition from graduate school to professor was that the world doesn't revolve around you and what you need to do has nothing to do with you, it has to do with other people's expectations...you get the illusion; at least I had the illusion in graduate school that so much was under my control." Although we identified a leaky pipeline in early graduate school, respondents who entered the job market secured academic positions.

EARLY ACADEMIC CAREERS

The first academic appointment marks the transition from student to professor. Expectations about academia are tested in the face of the realities of teaching, research, and service as the clock ticks toward tenure. Respondents landed a variety of initial academic positions, from fixed-term contracts at community colleges to tenure-track positions at small teaching colleges or large research universities. The load distribution and expectations for teaching, research, and service varied, as well as the size and diversity of departments. Moreover, respondents themselves varied in terms of satisfaction with their initial placement. The quality of students, climate of the department, workload, salary, location, and opportunities for spouses all played roles in how they perceived their fit within the institution.

Institutional Fit

From the beginning, the institutional fit was not right for some. One respondent took a position at a community college and disliked having to use a textbook chosen by the department to teach the same course repeatedly. "The experience wasn't super gratifying but it was a job." Another respondent described how the position simply did not feel right: "I think I got kind of spooked by the fact that this could be the next 35 years of my life being in that office." Normative evaluations also played a role:

If I can say anything that was a little bit disappointing...I remember some of my colleagues telling me things like, you know, "It doesn't matter about the teaching, so don't waste your time on the teaching. You just need to publish and it doesn't matter which journal you publish in; it can be any journal but you need to publish a certain number of pages." So, you know this can't be the right value system in which to function.... That didn't feel right at all. I mean, that's not sort of an ethical universe in which I wanted to be a part.... Publishing is fine, but... teaching four courses a semester.... Just starting out, I don't have the lectures to draw on or very much experience in teaching, so teaching takes a lot of time at that stage and I wanted to do it right because when you're facing these young people, you want to do right by them.

Another respondent preferred "a better fit intellectually" and did not like the direction in which the department seemed to be heading. Similarly, a respondent that ended up at a small liberal arts college described their research agenda as "probably better suited to an R1 institution." In another example, a respondent got the impression that they were not what the department was expecting, or "the sense that they were looking for somebody other than who they had hired." This respondent also had a spouse in a tenure-track position at another institution, so there was commuting involved and then a child to raise. After becoming the primary parent for a while, he switched from academia to an administrative position in professional development. A long-distance commute did not work for another couple, and the respondent left their first academic position as a result. Institutional fit influenced the decision of two other respondents to leave academia at the beginning of their first academic appointment.

Mentoring

Given the findings of past research about the importance of mentoring (Blau et al. 2010), we posed specific questions to our subjects on this topic. When starting their early careers, respondents reported intermittent mentoring, mostly informal. Most institutions did not formalize the process, and most respondents did know the value of what they might have been missing at the time. They did not ask—or always know who to ask—for the advice they might have needed. As one respondent described: "They, I think, were pleased if I seemed to be taking care of things myself. I mean, there was not a lot of interest in my area of scholarship or anything like that, not really." As another reported: "There were informal mentoring expectations within the department, but nothing really ever developed from that for me." Another respondent said that although the people were nice and the students were smart,

"there wasn't really anyone that I would look to as a mentor." This was a common theme, as another respondent's story illustrates: "I think I had a formal mentor who was appointed by the school with whom...I don't remember having a specific meeting.... But my general recall of that situation is that people were assigned mentors who did not do a lot of mentoring and we did much more peer mentoring."

Much of the mentoring that was described came through informal channels. "There was some informal mentoring but it was, I mean, it was just a matter of if you, if it occurred to you to ask somebody for advice, there were people around you could ask, but that was about it." Another respondent described going to the office every day whether or not they were teaching and, through hallway conversations, lunches, and meetings, they "quickly figured out what the institution wanted." Casual mentoring, as one respondent called it, simply meant "There were a number of people that I asked on a kind of periodic basis about particular things I had questions about." Describing this method as inadequate for those early years, this respondent also was on the job market immediately and not interested in staying at the institution.

Lacking formalized mentoring, many respondents found other faculty that they "just naturally got along with." Finding that support for some, especially women and people of color, meant reaching outside of the department. "I sought out female friends from other departments.... Emotionally, it was good support. I have never felt that I had like minds in my department." As another respondent recalled: "There were definitely several faculty members who were very supportive of kind of asking me what my long-term plan was."

Respondents primarily recalled advice about work-life balance or teaching. One respondent recounted: "I can remember quite clearly my mentor telling me you can't say yes to everything, which is really good to hear because as a tenure-track candidate, I think you do feel a pressure to say yes when a senior colleague asks you for something or the administration asks you for something. And so, I think that was quite helpful." Not all respondents followed the advice of their mentors:

I think I did not make good use of the mentoring.... I wish that I had thought more about listening to people's advice about how to balance things, how to promote your own work, how to limit the amount of time that teaching takes. But it's not that the information wasn't available to me, I just wasn't predisposed to ask for help on these things.

As another respondent described: "To be quite candid, I don't think I really took that advice, so one of my long-standing

challenges is that I have a difficult time saying no to people.” This respondent also pointed out that a good mentor is defined by action, not only words:

...he wrote a lot, both textbooks and academic articles, and so he was really a good inspiration in that respect. So, I think that’s an important quality of a mentor. I think it’s not only what they say but what they do because, in part, you model your behavior based on what they are saying to you in terms of, you know, what you should be doing. If they’re telling you to write but they don’t write, it doesn’t have the same impact.

This respondent also received tangible assistance as a beginning teacher:

I received copies of notes from their class notes in terms of how they go about preparing the material. When I transitioned from specialty courses to more of a traditional first-year course...I had one of my colleagues...give me all of her notes...in terms of...a framework in which to present this type of material and that’s completely different than a small seminar where you’re reading selected articles, every week you’ve got a different set of articles to read. It’s very different when you’re doing that with a group of 10–20 students as opposed to a first-year class of 80–100.... You really benefit from having someone sharing their notes and experiences with you. So that was definitely helpful for me.

Teaching was described as a “sink-or-swim kind of thing” that you “learn by doing.” As one respondent noted: “I don’t remember having a lot of conversation about teaching early on. I think it was just the sort of thing I learned over time by trial and error.” Those who were mentored were appreciative. “Especially when I started, there was lots of teaching support and they would come in and film your class and then break down the film—sort of training teachers and that was, if mortifying, a very helpful experience.” Another described co-teaching with a senior colleague:

I learned a lot from him just by doing it together. But, apart from that, when it came to teaching and especially to mentoring students, I feel like I was just imitating what had worked for me when I was a graduate student and I happened to have a couple of very good advisors and mentors, and so I just tried to apply the lessons that I had learned from them to my relationships with my own especially graduate students.... Undergraduate teaching remained a little bit of a mystery to

me...and it took me a while to figure out how to be, I think, as good an undergraduate teacher as I was a graduate teacher.

Another respondent was advised regarding informal norms of grading. Her story highlights a “land mine” she was able to avoid:

One of my mentors was very honest.... That first year, I had sense enough to talk with him about grades because I had a couple of people that had Fs...and he told me straight up, “do not give Fs, do not do it...you have pre-tenure...don’t do it. Give a D-...do not give an F.” And I didn’t and that was some good advice because it’s one of those unspoken rules. I so appreciate him to this day for that because a lot of people would not have given a voice to that sort of unspoken rule; however, I have seen it work over and over again. I’ve seen people almost denied tenure because of a few Fs that they gave.

When it came to research, however, the same respondent said they received “no advice, no guidance, nothing. I was really stumbling through that by myself.” Yet, this would be a critical component of the tenure-and-promotion process.

Mentors played an important role in respondents’ early careers, providing advice about teaching, research, work–life balance, and informal rules and norms of departmental or institutional behavior. Women were more likely than men to report seeking the advice of mentors, and their most supportive advocates were often informal or outside of political science.

Tenure and Promotion

Most respondents reported that the criteria for tenure were clear. “I never was really worried about it because I felt that the institution was pretty up front with me in terms of what expectations were.” As another respondent described:

I can remember having a couple of conversations with chairs and more senior colleagues about that as I was proceeding through my junior appointment and particularly at the midterm review point, and I think I did get pretty good advice about that, although I wish that people had advised me to be more conservative with how many dissertation committees I joined.

Another respondent had a similar experience:

I never felt that I didn’t know what to expect and, again, because of the mentoring they provided in

One respondent described confidence in knowing that the “institution views hiring someone as an investment and, you know, wants people to get tenure.”

terms of “Okay, here you should be writing. You should have at least a couple of articles out before your first and second review.” I didn’t feel that I had any serious problems with that process. Again, because it was transparent but also because my mentors really told me here’s what you should expect.

One respondent described confidence in knowing that the “institution views hiring someone as an investment and, you know, wants people to get tenure.” Perceptions of fairness corresponded with transparency and rubrics. “I thought the department was always fair to people so I don’t think that politics really mattered whether you got tenure, let’s say. I felt there were pretty clear objective criteria, you know, and so if you met those criteria, it would become—it was sort of pretty clear to the department that you had done that.” Another described how senior faculty were “candid and open about how things worked” and gave “as much information as they were able to.”

In contrast, one respondent reported: “...we got embarrassingly little information.... I had like a 10-minute conversation with my chair at the time about what needed to go into my tenure file, but I don’t think I ever even got, like, a written list of things. I just took notes in that conversation.” Another was told as she prepared for a mid-term review: “Look, it’s not a big deal.... Just tell us where you are in your research, teaching, and service.” However, when the first statement she wrote was inadequate:

So rather than tell me it was inadequate when I turned it in, they...said “This is horrible, she can’t write, we don’t know how we want to renew her” and all of that. It was a little bit traumatic for me.... I had enough contacts across the university that I got tons of input on how different people put together their portfolio and I did really well on my own but, by that time, I understood that I needed to reach out beyond the department in order to do well.

Most respondents, however, had a clear understanding of the bar they needed to meet for tenure and the salience of each criterion evaluated. Quoting one respondent: “We had no illusions about what the standard actually was.” The order of priorities, of course, varied by institution, as highlighted in the following narratives. Research universities prioritized research, as this example illustrates:

One would be scholarly outputs...the publication in high-quality peer-review journals. Two, it would be network building both within the department, so being friends with the right people...and then, outside the department, being recognized by more senior scholars in your field as an emerging scholar. And then below that teaching. I’m going to say that’s considerably below the emphasis placed on research productivity. And then, as a tertiary concern, service—but that was

merely a checking off of obligations; the service expectations and burdens were quite low for a nontenured faculty person.

Similarly, another respondent explained how research productivity prevailed over teaching and service:

I would say research is overwhelmingly the most important thing. Like, research is the one factor on which you can basically get tenure or be denied tenure pretty much no matter what else is happening in the rest of those areas.... So it’s not that the other things don’t matter at the margins if the research is borderline or something like that, but really...there is almost never a conversation about anything other than research and publications.

Regardless of the official policy toward tenure and promotion, it was clearly understood by respondents at this type of institution that research productivity would be the most critical metric in the granting of tenure:

The institution wanted research. That’s what they wanted and I was—it was made absolutely clear to me that all they cared about really was research and that was my job because they had a lot of failed tenure cases. There were people leaving and so I think they just wanted someone who could do research and that was what I wanted to do anyway. I didn’t want to be a bad teacher, but I certainly wanted to get my work out and they wanted me to get my work out. And I think that was communicated pretty clearly.

In contrast, respondents at small teaching colleges focused on teaching:

I think teaching, high-quality teaching, as evidenced both by student evaluations and by faculty observation, that's the most important thing at the institution. I think a solid research production is also quite important though slightly less important in the sense that you could tradeoff a little more research than you could tradeoff teaching. And, being a good citizen, community member, participatory, all that, that also matters but to a kind of smaller degree.

At these institutions, teaching effectiveness is described as the "litmus test" for tenure decisions:

If you are not doing a good job in the classroom, you are not going to proceed, and I would say that's probably the number-one reason that people get denied.... Second to that would be research; there's a whole lot of scaring of younger faculty about what they need.

Navigating the path toward tenure required, in some cases, a reprioritization of balance to meet institutional expectations. Explanation of the unwritten rules and survival tips proved essential to some respondents. This final comment from a female respondent about the criteria for promotion reiterates the importance of mentoring at this early career stage, providing insight that may explain the gender gap in manuscript submissions (Teele and Thelen 2017):

[I]t was a research institution, so you would expect it to be weighted pretty heavily. I think quantity meant more than quality in some ways, and I did not have quantity but I think I had quality, and they were okay with that. Of course, the killer teacher evaluations did not hurt me...that really helped. And the fact that I had several grad students...so I sort of mitigated the quantity part. But I think that for me and for a lot of people...I was not young chronologically, but I was young in the profession...it is scary to send out articles for publication. So now because I informally mentor a lot of people, I really push them. I really push people to send out the article. I say "I know it's scary, but you know what...once you get that critique and it's going to hurt, you'll be immune to that, but you just kind of like jump in the deep end." And I wish somebody had said that to me because when I look back at some of the early papers I produced for conferences, they were eminently publishable.... I just didn't know it.

The majority of respondents who started their careers in academia successfully navigated tenure and promotion, even

if the initial fit at the first institution was not ideal. Two left academia early in their career; some found a better fit at another institution years later. No respondent in our study left academia after being denied tenure. They reentered the job market and found success at a different institution.

CURRENT ACADEMIC CAREERS

At mid-career and beyond, the majority of respondents who continued in academia are not thinking about leaving their current positions. That does not mean there are not challenges within their department and, in some cases, serious red flags that need to be addressed. Here, the conversation shifts away from surviving the early-career stage to broader reflections on collegiality, workload, recruitment issues, inclusivity, and overall job satisfaction.

Departmental Collegiality

The collegiality of a department is influenced by its size and diversity in terms of age, tenure, race, gender, and subfield. Departments change over time, as this respondent describes:

Our department has gone through several phases.... When I arrived, it was still, I would say, relatively small with a cohort of members that had been at the institution for 30 years and were kind of solid leaders. They got along well. It was very collegial. Decisions were made fairly smoothly and easily. We've grown since then and that cohort has mostly retired. And so, the cohort that followed up, I would say, was not as strong a group of leaders or as cohesive as a cohort. That's led to some tensions and frictions in the department, which means, you know, our meetings are functional but we don't do much beyond functionality and meetings.

Another described their department as "trying to climb out of a culture hole" that did not use to exist. Financial constraints, turnover of faculty, and unwritten rules all played a role. "As resources got scarcer, the knives came out. I think we grew and there have been literal growing pains in that it's no longer really possible to do things by a committee of the whole. There have been more things being done by subcommittee. The department has been organized more around subfields." This reorientation of the department became problematic as faculty retired and "failed efforts at recruitment and rebuilding" resulted in people "blaming each other." "Members of subfields started blaming each other for their own failure or inability to recruit or for taking up too many resources or this and that and the other thing.... A lot of it, I think, was just people being pissed off and frustrated and taking it out on

each other, and that's really left some marks on the culture of the department." As new hires have been made, "the younger people are understandably quite cautious and are taking their cues from the people who are going to be voting on their tenure and so it hasn't been a panacea." The unwritten rules are not clear and "nobody really knows whose following which body of norms." The respondent reflected, "I don't feel constrained by it, but I feel disoriented about it." Another department feeling the winds of change was described in this way:

The school as a whole has been in a bit of a transition over the last several years in that a lot of our senior faculty have been retiring. I think right now the school is changing in terms of the dynamic. The faculty were a very close-knit group... because they had all come to the school at close to the same time and so there was a great level of collegiality and camaraderie because they went through tenure together and that develops relationships and positive experiences.... We have an increasing number of new faculty here that are still getting their legs and still developing their voice and developing the relationships. I think, overall, I would say that, yes, there is a sense of community here, but I think it's changing, and I'm hoping it's going to get closer as people begin to work more together and exchange ideas and collaborate on projects more so.

One department was described as divided into "three or four different groups" that had reached "the point of kind of ridiculous where people don't even talk to each other in the halls kind of thing." These divisions added stress to life in the department. One respondent described "a very, very tough place as a professor...very impenetrable...a very divided department." Another respondent described being "in the middle of this conflict...it was a source of constant stress for me...civil war."

Some respondents consider themselves adept at avoiding potential conflict. "I learned a long time ago to be a diplomat and that has served me well. I think I'm typically quiet. I'm very collaborative and found that those qualities suited me very well when you're trying to deal with individual faculty with different positions and politics." Another department was described as "a pretty collegial place" but large enough that faculty members did not know one another well:

And so, it's not that we are in any way, I think, unhappy, it's that we are large and so we can be strangers a little bit unless we go out of our way to find each other and we have differences of opinions. I think there is an atmosphere of mutual respect in the department. People recognize that

everybody is doing interesting work in different areas. It's just that I don't—we don't always hang out with each other.

Similarly, another respondent described their department as a "collection of individuals...not a collective really." Another has never felt comfortable in their department, explaining, "I don't feel a sense of connection within my department. But I do with people outside my department...and people outside my university, you know, colleagues at other schools." In contrast, another respondent reported, "I had good junior colleagues who are still some of my best friends and intellectual collaborators." Another replied, "Oh, I'm very happy with the collegiality of where I am. That's one of the big plusses."

Others noted that experiences within departments may be influenced by gender:

I will also say that the culture in my department was pretty chill, at least for the first six years or so.... It was a reasonably collegial environment. It's not so much anymore, but I'm more protected, so it doesn't matter as much. There wasn't much of a feeling of exclusiveness. People just kind of gravitated toward the people they had either intellectual or temperamental sympathy with and it worked out fine. I was cognizant of the fact that I didn't have to work hard to be respected either by my colleagues or my students... lessons in the privilege of being a [tall] white guy, and so we were all aware of the fact that this worked really differently for different people.

Another male respondent had a similar perspective:

It was inclusive if you were a man and so, in that respect, you know, speaking from a position of privilege, sure, I felt part of a group. It was not... it was a very small department and I would say that my colleagues were not attentive to issues of difference, period, certainly not gender, and we had racial diversity. Yes, I felt supported but I was, you know, part of the privileged in-group.

Female and minority respondents also saw gender- and race-based exclusions in their department. As one respondent explained, she initially felt unwelcome because "this institution is not diverse and it is very conservative." Another respondent described how even the floor layout of a department can affect inclusivity:

I do feel respected in a certain way, but those networks are not inclusive and, just to give an example of this, we are all on one floor in a building

The heavier the teaching load and/or the larger the class sizes, the more constraints there are on time for research.

and there's a kind of central office space for the division secretary. So, there are offices on one side of that and offices on the other. I am the only person on this side of the divide.

She described how the department would not hold meetings because issues simply got discussed “water-cooler” style. As she explained, “I think that they are very oblivious to that, just the physical separation of me from everyone else.” Another said, “I never felt like anybody was sort of out to get me, but there definitely were people who, I think, were indifferent to my existence at best.”

Our interview evidence in this area dovetails with recent studies related to gender, race, and climate, as well as the challenges that these categories pose for inclusion, success, and job satisfaction in academia (Gutierrez y Muhs et al. 2012; Monroe et al. 2008).

Salary

Salary did not emerge in our interviews as a primary influence on job satisfaction; however, it was a reason for some respondents to change institutions. For some, the job market proved to be a vehicle for increasing pay, either by using an offer as leverage at the first institution or accepting a position with a higher salary at the second institution. One respondent candidly commented, “I never expected to make a lot of money doing this.” Even those at smaller institutions with heavy teaching loads and “lower-than-average” salaries reported job satisfaction. Some acknowledged tradeoffs between salary and work–life balance. As one respondent explained:

We are paid less; I think we are below the average for most institutions. But there is, I think, more recognition or maybe the tradeoff is that there is more sort of flexibility in terms of, you know, work–life balance. So, when I came here, of course, again I was a single parent. I had to pick up my kids from school. And, you know, I was able to do that...and I don't think there was any kind of negative evaluation of my performance.

Another respondent agreed, “I'm very satisfied,” saying the salaries are lower than average and the teaching load higher, “but an enormous part of that is that we are satisfied as a family.” Another respondent satisfied with their salary described how happy they are to be at an institution where they are “100 percent aligned with the mission of the institution.”

Research

The common theme regarding research is that there is never enough time. “I wish I had more time for research.... Life's unfair, you know.” The heavier the teaching load and/or the larger the class sizes, the more constraints there are on time for research.

There is competition over scheduling that might facilitate research and resentment toward faculty who appear to use parental leave to supplement research. One respondent explained that so much time is spent with students that it is “very hard to carve out real chunks of time” for research. Learning how to do research in “increments,” they find, is “very difficult.” Another respondent describes infusing research into their teaching:

There's never enough time, you know—you figure out ways to wedge it in. You try to find ways to maybe teach a special-topic seminar that also helps you do your lit review for a new project or something. You try to get creative about ways to layer research into your teaching—but, no, there is never really enough time. But, you know, again, this is a teaching college.

Respondents also report that some institutions simply do not have the “infrastructure to support individual faculty on large projects.” Increasing institutional expectations for service and admissions-visit days also have encroached on time for research. As one respondent explains:

When I am teaching...especially when I have that three load, I don't have time to...I don't want to make the students suffer because, you know, I'm working on a book...that's not really fair. So, I can't give them short shrift. So, I'm grading and grading and grading and grading and I'm just crazed...especially this past year because we had 22 tenure-promotion cases.... It was just a lot. And then we have no professionalized advising...I find it to be horribly time consuming. I want them to professionalize it...not that I would not mentor students just as I'm doing. I would not stop that, but when advising week starts and you're scheduling everybody and you're searching for classes...it is a lot of work...and then I was on panels when we have our weekends and the tours and stuff and visiting students coming in to talk to you.... I think that administrators don't understand how much things have kind of changed.... We really don't have the time to do all of that, especially those of us that represent

minority groups and they want us sitting on these panels...

Are women more likely to get asked—and to say yes—for heavier commitments in teaching, advising, and service? One respondent noted that some senior faculty simply refuse to teach the large introductory courses, for example, whereas “there are the rest of us who just pick up the slack and move on.” As this respondent elaborated:

Less formally, I would say there are some people who are more prone to volunteer for, you know, the little jobs that need to get done...manning a table at the academic forum or being the senior-thesis advisor or something like that. I would say that’s partly determined by personality; I would say it’s mostly determined by personality though there is probably some correlation with gender there that I’ve been attentive to. It’s not one to one though. There are some women who are refusing intro courses and staffing the tables, but there are, I would say, three or four women in our department, maybe three, that regularly volunteer when others really should be doing more.

Another respondent noted that although their teaching load allows them an appropriate amount of time to do research, “There’s a problem with service, which I think is not as ubiquitous in the sense that, typically, women do a lot more than men.”

Service

Many respondents perceive that departmental and institutional service loads have generally increased over time for all faculty and, individually, post-tenure. They also report that the burden of these increased expectations is more likely to be carried by women—a perception that finds support in recent analysis (Mitchell and Hesli 2013). As one respondent reflected:

I guess the thing I think that’s most important and it’s getting more attention...is really this issue of service.... We need to provide women with resources and knowledge and experience and mentors to help them learn how to protect their time and their interests and, you know, see that as appropriate. But I do think women do most of the service. And those who don’t, publish, and

“I think it’s that women don’t get taught to say no. And they don’t get taught to look for their own interests at least as much as they do anyone else’s...”

get rewarded. And that’s a big problem.

This respondent continued, describing how some faculty craft an image as “slackers” and then never get asked to do anything. Those who “take up the slack” are disproportionately women. “[S]ome of the problem lies with women, you know, having role models and mentorship and help with, you know, what is appropriate in terms of protecting your time.... I think something that leadership needs

to emphasize more is gender balance and who’s doing what.” Women and minorities often are asked to serve on committees to add diversity. As a minority respondent explained, “You’re tapped a lot. I say no a lot. But the few things I say yes to...really do tax me. So, I think the mindset of administration is we are all in these classes with this 12:1 ratio and they don’t take into account that my department in particular is overwhelmed with students.” Another respondent has noticed that major committees have increasingly more women and, in some cases, only women:

One thing that’s really interesting to me in recent years is really watching how much those major committees are increasingly women. So, I just served on one of the major university’s elected committees and we were all women. And on one hand, you want to cheer that and say that’s great, but the other part of me is going, “Huh, we are the ones who show up, do our work, do our homework, um, where are the guys on this, you know?”

One respondent acknowledges that it is difficult to “calibrate and appropriately incentivize” service commitments, particularly in a small department. In her observation:

I think it’s that women don’t get taught to say no. And they don’t get taught to look for their own interests at least as much as they do anyone else’s.... Of course, people who are trying to get things done, they just need somebody to do it, you know, so when the women never say no, that’s how it works.... Learn how to say no, you know. Learn how to say no and stop apologizing. That’s something I’ve had to learn. And I think it comes—men just, you know, absorb that from the culture a lot more easily than woman do.

Teaching

Teaching loads and class sizes vary by institution, and respondents differed in their satisfaction with the teaching component of their position. A common theme was how fulfilling teaching can be:

I honestly say to people all the time I can't believe I get paid to do this. Because it's such a rewarding, yeah, it's a very rewarding experience.... Many of the students that are coming to us are first generation either in the United States or first generation in higher education and so we really value the importance of the teaching experience for them.

The rewards of teaching first-generation college students were a common theme emphasized as particularly fulfilling, in that “we are really changing the equation.” Respondents also described the intellectual satisfaction of the teaching process itself:

I really value the teaching experience. I think for me personally, I learn a great deal when I teach and I realize how much I don't know, so I appreciate the intellectual challenge of teaching. The need to know the material and be able to convey it to someone is really important.... There is a sense of satisfaction knowing that you really are having an impact, hopefully a positive impact, but you're having an impact on them.

Reports of the most satisfying teaching experiences came from smaller classroom environments. One respondent acknowledged the difference small class sizes can make:

[O]ne thing that I find—and I wouldn't have known this until I experienced it—but our classes are generally, you know, less than 50 people. And sometimes as small as 20, and I find that very rewarding...and I found that to be a great thing about this job. So, when I'm in class, I mean, I know everyone's name—we, you know, I have a conversation with them. I'm not just up there lecturing, which has been a part of the job I really liked.

By facilitating success in teaching, institutions are described as providing substantial resources in this area of faculty development. “There's a lot of support for teaching curriculum, development grants, and things like that if you are developing new courses.” Faculty autonomy in designing, scheduling, and teaching classes also contributed to job satisfaction.

For the most part, respondents report being respected by both graduate and undergraduate students. One respondent explained how student perceptions of her have changed as she has aged. She assumes that “maybe I'm a little more mom to them, because I'm probably older than their own mothers. So, I detect a little bit of that and sometimes I have to be a little bit more sort of on top of my game to really establish myself with the class early on.” Another explained that the undergraduates respected them but the graduates did not until they reached mid-career. She felt that “early on, grad students were taking their cues from faculty.”

Another issue raised by a minority respondent is the perception of bias in the classroom that can translate into negative teaching evaluations, consistent with existing research (Martin 2016; Mitchell and Martin 2018):

That lack of acknowledgment that not only who we are but what we teach is very hard...because there's an assumption of inherent bias that I have that someone white who talks about it doesn't have. So, I spend a lot of time with students saying, “There are biases...everybody has them.... The only honest thing I can do with you as a teacher is to say these are things that shaped me as a person, this is what motivates me to study this subject, and so now you have the information through which you can filter my assignments and the reading that you have, but feel free to bring up other things to counter what you have been reading.... I'm open to that but I'm going to tell you that I'm a human being so...I will pick readings that are conservative but I'll never pick readings that I feel don't have any intellectual value.”

This respondent notes that departments do not always put racial bias on evaluations into context. As she explained:

[T]he extent to which I have been subjected to sometimes even cruel student evaluations, which take their toll emotionally and there have been no...ways of mitigating it from an institutional level and hence making me feel a lot better about what happened...and they had a way of reading the evaluations that sometimes revealed a bias and they would write about it.

She also added that departments could do a better job of not putting race and gender in silos or assuming that a new hire would cover the topics “and they don't have to talk about it anymore.” She noted that even in the introductory course in American politics, her colleagues were skipping the chapter on civil rights, referring students to her classes instead.

Promotion to Full Professor

Unlike the clarity of the criteria and the transparency of the tenure process described by respondents in the early stages of their career, promotion to full professor was much less structured. Individual, departmental, and institutional expectations all play a role in the timing of the application. Some respondents delayed or decided not to pursue the higher rank:

I'm in the kind of typical position of someone who's been an associate professor for a long time.... My starting salary wasn't as high as some of my peers in other subfields. I am not dispositionally inclined to spend a lot of my time going out and getting outside offers for the sake of having leverage and getting raises.... I like it out and I think I manage to keep my work going, so it's not catastrophically bad, but I feel like it is. You know, it's the kind of thing that because it doesn't have to happen at a specific time everything fits the schedule chips away at the thing that is most flexible, and the thing that's most flexible is also the thing that's supposedly the most important and that you care the most about or you know equally as much as teaching.

This respondent in part blames the shift that naturally occurs with a change in rank from assistant to associate level and changes at the institutional level that have increased workload, particularly in advising and writing letters for students. "A lot of us are complaining about this and that we don't have time for anything else and we don't have time for an intellectual life in our own department." In addition, universities have reorganized with more administrative tasks shifted to faculty at the same time there are fewer economic resources. In that climate, there are fewer resources to support faculty research and development. "It seems like a big part of the budget for administration has been shifting away from stuff that's actually faculty facing in a direct way and toward middle management...." The consequences are only now gaining visibility, but "you can't just solve the problem by creating a new forum and then asking everyone to add a new biweekly event to their calendars if everyone already feels like they have no time."

Other respondents criticize the lack of clarity about the review process for promotion to full professor at their institutions or noted that the standards seem to be changing:

What I'll say is that no one really seems to know what the standard for promotion to full is, and

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the uncertainty about that has been increased apparently by the austerity situation so that some things that people used to believe about promotion to full appear no longer to be true—or maybe they are true but only for some people if they have support from the right faction in the department who is connected to the administration in the right way. So, I'm pretty dissatisfied with the fluidity of that process, the vagueness.

Not having clear guidelines was compounded by a lack of mentoring for others. "There was a lack of clarity, in terms of promotion to full...so there wasn't a lot of emphasis on career development after getting tenure." In another example, a respondent did have mentoring but from a colleague who came to the department after her and was promoted to full professor before her. "[F]or promotion to full, I had a different chair, and he wanted very much to mentor me. I just really didn't want—well, his mentoring was very patronizing and he came into the department after me, but got full before me."

Administrative Experience

Expectations and opportunities for leadership positions increased following tenure and promotion to associate professor and again with promotion to full professor. Although respondents felt more confident in saying no, requests to serve on committees increased. Opportunities to chair major committees also increased. Many served as department chair and a few filled administrative positions on an interim basis or made a permanent shift. When discussing these opportunities, respondents fell into two camps: (1) those who find they have a predisposition for administration, and (2) those who would prefer to avoid administration.

In the first category, one respondent articulated why the transition to administration was a satisfying career shift:

I seem to have an aptitude for it and some of the qualities that are useful for being an administrator just by happenstance I have. I have a very long fuse. I don't get angry very easily. I have a thick skin so if people say unkind things about me or my ideas, I would say it's easier for me to weather those things than I've observed with some of my colleagues. And, I enjoy facilitating the work of my colleagues.

Still, there are challenges to the position:

[T]he only reason I would not be very satisfied is the position of Chief Academic Officer, in my opinion, is the hardest job in higher education, especially at institutions that are resource strapped.... Faculty colleagues are understandably under stress themselves and they will make assumptions, causal assumptions about what the institution is doing and then normative claims about what the institution should do, and they are sometimes difficult to square up.

On a day-to-day basis, what provides job satisfaction is working closely with faculty members to solve problems they face:

I very much like helping to support colleagues who find themselves in difficult positions, personally and professionally. I've learned this over time. A lot of times when a complaint or an issue arises in the Dean's office, what oftentimes emerges is that a colleague is under stress for some secondary or unrelated reason. Being in the position actually helped them resolve that issue and, at the same time, resolving the issue whether it's with another faculty member or student or a parent or something like that, it's very satisfying work. What I do not like, faculty feel like they have squatter's rights on the Dean's psyche.... A lot of the Dean's time is spent explaining what actually you don't think or what you didn't do. That's not very satisfying work.

Others would prefer to avoid leadership positions: "I'd rather not be chair. I've seen what it's done to my colleagues' lives." Admittedly, serving in an administrative position allows a faculty member "to see everything that goes on behind the scenes," which "makes you appreciate the opportunities that you have so much more. But also, it gave me a chance to give back to the institution, and so many of the things that you're talking about now in terms of mentoring and such, I'd like to think that I have provided those opportunities to some of my colleagues." Serving in an administrative position was valuable but clearly not a calling for some. "But, you know, the great thing about it is I'm now back up on the faculty floors and I'm looking at all my books on my bookcase, and my smile is even bigger now than it was when I entered that office."

In the following section, issues surrounding gender, race, and intersectionality are highlighted. Department chairs and administrators at the institutional level play an important role in defining campus climate. Inclusivity and diversity are impacted by who holds leadership positions on campus and how they use their power and policies to shape the experiences of faculty.

Recruitment of Women and Minorities

The goals of removing bias and increasing diversity among faculty are not easily met. "We hardly have any female faculty at all. And I really don't know what the reason for that is." Another common theme was "we couldn't find any." Comments from our interviews about how gender, race, and intersectionality play out in the recruitment process revealed ongoing challenges for the discipline (Gutierrez y Muhs et al. 2012; Monroe et al. 2008).

One respondent noted that job advertisements in her department are not written broadly enough to attract a diverse pool of candidates, which is arguably a missed opportunity:

Then there were other things like, you know, a sense that the standards that are applied in the discussion of female job candidates are different. Not formally different, but that if one were to listen to the way we talk about women candidates in faculty meetings versus the way we talk about male candidates, there's still a kind of...the same sorts of things that would be invoked to cast doubt on a woman are invoked for the sake of coming up with excuses for them in the case of men.

Change has come slowly and, despite formal policies asserting equal opportunity, informal barriers remain:

[W]hen I arrived, there were relatively few female faculty in our department and now it's got to be approaching 50–50.... Some are more or less against it; they just want the best person to win. If the best person is a woman in minority, they have no problems with that, but they wouldn't want to make an effort specifically to hire somebody who they view as a diversity candidate. Others, I think, are more attuned to the idea of looking specifically hard at diversity issues when engaged in the hiring process and making sure that the department is conscious of those issues.

Another respondent similarly described the situation:

I would say that in the last 10 years, it's been much better. Like the degree of attention that's been paid and the sort of general degree to which people in the department agree that (a) other things equal, one should have gender equality in a department; and (b) other things should be able to be equal because there's lots of smart women in the profession.... But we couldn't find any, which was something that I used to hear a

lot and I hear less now—although I still do hear it in certain subfields.

Other respondents think that their institutions and/or the geographic location simply are not attractive to minority candidates:

[W]e have a lot of difficulty recruiting and retaining minority faculty.... It's not necessarily a super-attractive place to come to.... But we have not been willing to put any additional resources to hire in a pretty competitive pool.... I would say our department is foursquare behind the idea of hiring diversity, but we are also a really small department and we are about to get smaller because [of] the budgetary situations.

Moreover, departments and/or institutions that do offer additional incentives for diversity hiring find there can be backlash. One respondent described additional resources provided by the institution, offline for the department's budget:

And, at the same time, the existence of those resources has also bred resentment and negative reactions from a numerical minority of members of the department and that has, I mean, it's probably a cost worth incurring because we've done some really great recruitment that way, but it's also contributed to this sense of conflict over available resources...

Another respondent described how the department did not necessarily mirror institutional objectives:

I would say the administration may have been more interested in the hiring of minority faculty than the department, on average, which is not to say the department was not interested. It's more like, again, some people in our department are conscious of not wanting to give a tip to minorities—a boost, a “thumb on the scale” to minorities just because they are minorities. So, as the department, when we hire, we tend to have to be...we have to kind of downplay that aspect of a candidate.

This respondent explained how this affects the climate for minority faculty members: “[I]t's probably a slightly less equal setting for minorities in general because there's a little more consciousness of an unwillingness to bend over backwards in some people's view for minorities than for women.” Of course, “Nobody believes that they are biased or bias can be introduced,” as one respondent explained, “so, no...there are no particular efforts to recruit minority candidates.”

As one minority respondent described, retention also is an issue even when recruitment is successful:

[W]hen I came, it wasn't just me, they also hired some other minority faculty during that early time period that I was an assistant professor. So, we actually had a pretty large group.... We still have a group—it's not as large as it was because people get recruited away or leave for one reason or another. But I felt that the university and the department were taking this all seriously, you know, on both fronts when I got there, minority faculty hiring and gender hiring.

And as this respondent points out, regardless of institutional climate, people are uniquely affected by the experiences they bring with them:

We're working very hard to enhance the diversity of the faculty, and so if one looks at our hiring over the last five years, we've really, really worked hard to ensure that our faculty are reflective of our students and the broader community.... So, I'd like to think in that respect, we have a faculty that reflects that and that I'd like to think that my colleagues feel that they are treated equally and have the same opportunities as everyone else on the faculty. And I think that's true in terms of whether it is tenure opportunities, in terms of whether it's course selection, service work—I think we've done a pretty good job across the board. But, again...I think even within minority faculty, individual experiences really are influenced by the individual and what their prior experiences were.... I know that different individuals have different experiences based upon who they are and where they come from and how they view the world.

Inclusivity and Diversity

When respondents were asked about the climate for women and minorities, answers varied from positive perspectives, to observations of differential treatment, to personal experience with gender, racial, or intersectional discrimination. As one respondent qualified his comments, “One part of me acknowledges that I'm not the right person to ask because I'm not female. I'd like to think that my colleagues all feel that and are actually treated equally and feel that they have the same opportunities that their other colleagues do.” Another was aware of the results of a climate study on his campus, noting that:

I think the proportion of women who reported

“There have been things about it that have been pretty dispiriting and I would attribute a lot of that to being the only female in the department.”

that they did not feel that they or their work was taken seriously, that they didn't feel at home in the department was much higher than the proportion of men who reported that. The proportion of women who reported witnessing either harassment or sort of inappropriate behavior that didn't necessarily rise to the level of harassment was higher than the proportion of men. I've certainly witnessed it and I think with men, it's just a question of whether or not you're paying attention.

Some feel that the different experiences of women compared to men have more to do with life choices about family than departmental or institutional climate. As one respondent explained:

[I]t is my perception that the climate is just as good for female faculty in this institution.... That doesn't mean that I don't perceive that my female colleagues perceive some stresses that are characteristic of female colleagues also outside this institution relative to the male colleagues.... But I don't think it's coming from within this institution. I think it is part of the problems of work-life balance that are asymmetrically experienced by males and females.

In contrast, a female respondent reported: “There have been things about it that have been pretty dispiriting and I would attribute a lot of that to being the only female in the department.” A male respondent also has noticed differential treatment, explaining that his female colleague “who was a significantly more accomplished scholar...did not receive the recognition that she deserved.”

At the institutional level, there may be official recognition of bias but, informally, there is a subtle lack of awareness that lingers. One person told us: “I think at one level, yes, at kind of an official-on-paper level, yes. I think in more subterranean ways, no. And I think if you talk to my female colleagues across campus, they would say the same thing, that there are lingering sorts of subterranean issues that make it a somewhat less favorable climate—especially if you have kids.”

These experiences come in various forms, including the feeling of respect or lack thereof. One respondent described a generational gap within their department that contributed to an awkward dynamic:

[J]ust the kind of age distribution of the department was a little bit strange. There were all these senior male colleagues who were kind of seen as the intellectual leaders of the department. So, they were all male, and then the female faculty tended to be much younger and not really seen in that kind of leadership role. Although over the...years that I was there, you know, it did start to improve somewhat, so obviously

the women got tenure and had more flexibility and competence to take on that role. But, in general, I would say tough for female faculty but it seemed to be getting a little bit better. And then there just weren't any faculty of color at all, so that was just a nonissue.

Another explained how the intersectionality of gender, race, and class affected her feelings of respect within the department. In this excerpt, she is comparing herself to a male, minority colleague: “Like...if he's talking about civil rights...he's going to say ‘blacks’...he's never going to slip up and say ‘we’ like I will do. So, he has a way of distancing himself from a strong black identity. So, he's doing great. The climate is fine for minorities of a certain class strata and who are less challenging by virtue of the strength of their racial-group identity.”

She went on to say that racist comments were made by students on her teaching evaluations. “I had students here just make up lies out of whole cloth about me and put them in evaluations.” Her perception is that the institution is “really taken with students' words for everything” and so “if you don't do well in a class...that was your fault and that there is not something else at play.” She explained how this is used against her in formal reviews. “And I feel like because of this willful ignorance, it results in a discriminatory result for me.... I believe that it is just something that people don't want to face. So, yes, I have felt that way at some end-of-the-year annual reviews when I'm writing my report up and when I talk to the chair afterwards about stuff...yes, I felt unfairly treated.” Her attitude is that “it is tough, but it's going to be tough anywhere I go, so there's kind of no escape. I don't know anybody that doesn't have this problem.”

Perceptions of respect are shaped informally by colleagues. One woman we interviewed said her colleagues refused to engage her in intellectual conversation:

And, to this day, my male colleagues do not talk to me about politics.... I tried to take a couple

articles over to my...colleagues and said “This is really interesting because this is very much squarely in this kind of long-standing literature”... and they man-splained me down so hard. “Oh, this is, no, this is a totally different situation.” And, you know, one of them just said, “Yes, I really disagree with this”...and whenever I would try to bring up gender, “no, no, no, no” and... the kind of little “There, there sweetie. You’ll see”.... None of them ever said to me, “Yeah, you know, we were wrong. And let’s talk about this literature....”

She described a feeling of invisibility that arises when, time after time, “you are standing in a group conversation and what you say is ignored or dismissed but then repeated five minutes later by another colleague and everyone goes ‘oh, okay, good idea.’” She referred to these experiences as “unconscious” bias.

One woman of color we interviewed felt that whereas “some people may have had a little respect” for her, overall, she did not feel respected. “And I just had to play it straight, to be honest and authentic.... It was the only path, the only way that I could go at the time. I don’t regret it. I’m much wiser now and I can really advise. I’m an excellent mentor for junior faculty. But for me...I just had to bump my head a few times and kind of learn the hard way.”

Gender and race also came to the surface in our interviews with respect to inequities in workload. Assumptions were made, for example, about commitment to research, as one female respondent recounted her experience: “I realized that three of my colleagues were, every semester, stacking up all their classes on Tuesday, Thursday.... So, I went to my then-chair and said I’m noticing that other people get this and I’ve never had this, ever. And his response to me was ‘I think they want to get research done. That’s why they have asked for it.’”

In terms of service, one respondent described the extra burden placed on women and minorities, but particularly minority women, to diversify committee representation. As one respondent described:

Now when it comes to gender and race, there is the usual double-triple burden thing, administrative burden. Like, so, if you’re trying to populate a committee and you want gender equity for your committee and it’s also a committee that has some remit that has to do with a search in race and ethnic politics or in legacies of empire and you’ve got, like, two black women in the department, like, they’re going to do a ton of additional administrative work.

The same expectation seeps into advising and teaching. One respondent felt what she described as “unconscious discrimination” in subtle forms, including the pressure “to be constantly available, much more nurturing, and put far more hours into teaching and service.” Other respondents complained about having to provide the bulk of the large service courses with higher enrollments:

I was shocked to find that some males had only taught to their strengths and had been teaching the same three courses for 10 years.... There are some men in the department that don’t do any of it...not the intro, not the senior seminar, not the FYS and not methodology. That needs to end, but I just notice that nothing is said. But I’ve seen this...even when women come up for tenure or mid-career reviews...somebody always brings up...well, how many different courses have they taught? I’m like...I know you just didn’t ask that question...you’ve been teaching the same three courses for 20 years. So that’s the thing...and it seems to go unnoticed when the men do it. So, I wish departments could do better about that.

Course enrollments and advising also vary by subfield; however, as this respondent noted, gender and race play a greater role in explaining inequities:

There are certainly faculty members who by virtue of their research area or their demographic characteristics do a ton more of advising for students with particular research interests or students of color or whatever and who carry, I think, a disproportionate burden in that way. And, to some extent, this is the result of the, you know, one of those unwritten norms that was once spoken in a department meeting was the “Well, we already have one feminist here, why do we need another one?” And so, all of the people who want to do feminist theory have to work with the one person.... So, yeah, so there are definitely inequities, but I would say they’re not so much by traditional subfield...as by, again, by race and gender.

Expectations are disproportionate in terms of their teaching and advising; however, women and minorities reported being marginalized in other ways. One respondent described how she has “basically been invisible.” She explains that she is never asked to give talks, and that everything she has tried has been “marginalized and dejected.” The cumulative impact of these inequities and/or unconscious examples of bias takes a toll. As one respondent reflected:

I was very isolated in the department so I would

say that was very hard on me.... The conditions under which I worked were not the best.... It was a very large department...probably for most of them, I did not really know the names of their wives even or their children on site because I just was never around them enough to remember it. So, it was a very lonely existence. It was lonely socially, it was lonely intellectually, there was, like, nobody to talk to, nobody interested in talking to me.... So it was kind of hard...but I did learn a lot...I took advantage of what I could take advantage of.

She summed up her experience with intersectionality as producing “intellectual isolation,” “invisibility,” and “having to...outperform everybody else in order to just be treated the same, and that’s a big burden.”

NONACADEMIC CAREER PATHS

A number of respondents implied that nonacademic career paths were not prioritized in graduate school. Some reported not wanting to tell their advisors or not feeling supported when it was clear that they would not pursue an academic career path. The winnowing process for most occurred before the dissertation and job-market phase. This leaky pipeline affected women and people of color more than white men. Respondents chose to leave graduate school early or to finish but to not go on the job market for an academic position. Only one later returned to academia. Those who left their program had few, if any, regrets about having pursued a graduate degree in political science. They described their transition as natural steps, creating better fit with their individual preferences.

I don’t think my PhD took me where I thought I would go. But I think it’s rare that people end up in exactly where they thought they were going to.... If you are sort of constantly learning over time about not only what you like but what you are good at, and how that aligns with the opportunities out there, you are probably going to end up somewhere different from where you have envisioned.

One respondent described graduate school as intellectually challenging with enjoyable interactions among a wide range of faculty and fellow students. When this person realized they enjoyed teaching more than research, they felt like an anomaly with little support from faculty within the department. Yet, working with students to provide faster, more tangible results to problems appealed more than the slow timetable and isolation often associated with research. A nonacademic mentor provided the support needed to make a successful transition:

“...an absolutely incredible professional role model, personal role model...so I was really lucky in that respect.”

Law was an easy transition for some. One respondent appreciated “being able to have a more profound impact on something that I would find personally satisfying.” Another lawyer reported, “I’m very satisfied. I like the content area I work in. I like the nature of my work; it’s very supportive, focused on solving problems, not as much as, say, litigation. I like the entrepreneurial aspect of having a smaller practice where I can choose and quickly implement decisions and choices that I want to make about how to run my business.” The methodological training that graduate school provided proved valuable:

Certainly the method portion of grad school was helpful. Program evaluation is a combination of using social science methods but also the idea of valuing and looking at what different perspectives on a situation or on a program are.... I still am very engaged with the normative aspects of civics. I mean, intellectually, I love thinking about that stuff. But it was really that program evaluation allowed me to think and be engaged in the world without all the messiness that comes with a nonprofit sector.

Respondents also credit graduate school with developing their more general problem-solving skills. “I feel like graduate school taught me how to think in a way that undergraduate never did. I’d say all kinds of doors opened up because of it.... All of my work afterwards has been in politics either at the federal, state, or nonprofit level and in social justice.” Building a new program or company from the ground up, wearing several different hats, and simply finding intellectual challenge were common motivating factors. “I was interested in finding somewhere where I can be intellectually challenged, use the skills that I have, but I also then see the results and impact.”

The applied nature of nonacademic jobs in government, consulting, and nonprofits provided more tangible satisfaction for these respondents than their perceptions of academic life:

There are some people who are happier with just, okay, I’m advancing knowledge and that’s great and whether or not it has any influence on anything in the world today, that doesn’t as matter as much. And some people are fine with that. And some people feel frustrated.... The think-tank world, you know, you can go and brief a general or some policy maker and if you can convince them, then you can have a direct impact on how some aspect, you know, usually not a large

Finding the right career that is intellectually challenging, fulfilling, and consistent with one's values sometimes requires a change in plans.

aspect, but so some aspect of policies being carried out. So that's fulfilling.

Salaries also play a role in the satisfaction expressed in nonacademic careers. One respondent became a software engineer, explaining that "engineers are a lot like graduate students, in that they are really geeky, they are really smart. So, if you like being around really smart people, software is a great place to be. And—only the software developers were a lot happier because they were much better paid." Another respondent said that she enjoys the opportunity to help people and that "there is literally something new to learn every day if you want to. So, if you're a nerd, the financial industry is a great place for nerds."

Recurrent themes about the appeal of nonacademic careers included always learning new things, working with teams of smart colleagues, and making a difference:

I feel like I can make a difference...and there's a kind of, I don't know, some sort of dopamine thing that goes on when you're able to really change somebody's life in a positive way and that becomes addictive. I feel like I've ended up through a very circuitous route—I've ended up with the right combination of education experience to be doing exactly what I'm doing right now.

One respondent transitioned from teaching to an administrative position in student life, temporarily at first, but ultimately made the career change permanent:

I have fantasized that the role of the faculty member sometimes seems more attractive because of the summer and things like that. I do know enough to know that the race for tenure is not, you know...easy street, you know, in terms of stress. So that part I don't envy. But I do think it is. Oftentimes, when I look in terms of work-life balance, I feel like faculty—at least at this institution—have a lot of power and are able to secure spots to teach when they feel like it and not be here when they don't, and that is just not something that an administrator can do. On the other hand, I do find it is super gratifying to have the bigger picture of the institution and what it takes to run an institution and have that.... I am continually amazed at how really smart, educated

people who are faculty members can be so clueless about certain things that just seem really patently obvious to me about what is important for the institution and why their individual perspective from their department is such a limited one. You have to be comfortable with uncertainty and with knowing that your work is not something that you have total control over.... Being a faculty member, you have a lot more autonomy and a lot more ability to kind of control your workflow, whereas you don't in administration.

Although these former political science graduate students are no longer attending political science conferences, they agreed that they use what they learned in political science in their day-to-day work. As one respondent articulated, there are many ways to pursue political science:

How can I have a job where I can, you know, pay my bills, pay my loans, but still have academic stimulation...real time, real life, real world. To me, political science is still a cool profession because, you know, you're measuring human behavior and this is stuff [that] really impacts people's lives. But you don't have to go into academia to continue to be a student of political science, if that makes sense. I use a lot of the skills that I developed, just in a totally different way.

Finally, one respondent initially pursued a nonacademic career and later returned to academia, explaining:

Consulting work required just a crazy amount of travel, and...intellectually, it was not, it was not a good fit.... What I found was that a lot of times, people weren't really interested in finding the right answer to the problem that they were facing; they just wanted an answer. But I wanted to get back into the world where, you know, you take your time and you methodically try to come up with the right answer.

It is all about passion. Finding the right career that is intellectually challenging, fulfilling, and consistent with one's values sometimes requires a change in plans (Jasperson 2006).

WORK-LIFE BALANCE ISSUES

Regardless of career path, balancing work and life changes can be challenging, adding stress and impacting expectations and satisfaction. Managing relationships, dual careers, children, divorce, aging parents, sick relatives, and deaths all emerged in our interviews as factors that affect career navigation. The issues affected all of our respondents, regardless of gender, race, age, or career path. The effects can take a toll on productivity, career mobility, and perceptions of value and respect in the workplace. As one respondent reflected:

If you have three or four areas in life you are responsible for, you will do a horrible job in any three of them. And the trick is to keep moving. You are not going to fulfill your own high expectations in most of what you do. The trick is just moving these things around, not always the same ones. But stress is not a friend, but stress is going to be there no matter what. You are doing something that's ambitious and worth it. So, I don't anticipate a world without stress but, yes, I've had stress....

The stress is not always predictable, as one respondent commented, "Some semesters are better than others." Finding ways to cope can be an individualized process, but these stories open the conversation about these issues and highlight ways in which informal and formal support could be improved at the institutional and policy levels. This set of issues is also particularly relevant to women in the academy because they typically shoulder greater responsibilities for family and caregiving than their male colleagues (APSA 2005; Cramer, Alexander-Floyd, and Means 2019; Monroe et al. 2008).

Trailing Spouses

Trailing spouses were discussed as a factor that influenced the job-market stage, but the issue continuously shapes career trajectories. What happens when one spouse finds an ideal job but the other does not? As one respondent notes, "The fact is that increasing numbers of faculty are double faculty. We have no policy in place and it's really hurting us." Finding a geographic location that satisfies two sets of career goals is tricky—and even more so when the couple starts a family. Expectations of going on the market again in a few years are replaced by one spouse's successful progress and/or new goals for how and where to raise children. As one respondent tells his story:

So when I got married, it was, I think, a slightly larger, stronger expectation that I would look elsewhere.... Then when we had a child, I actually got an offer...which seemed perfect pre-child but, with a child, my spouse no longer wanted to move given cost-of-living issues, job-market issues for her.... So, I would say the pressure to leave went up with

marriage and went down with a child.

Whereas some pressures of child rearing ease over time, job-mobility constraints can increase. As one respondent explained, "I have kids in school and the idea of moving at this point when one of them is going into tenth grade and the other is going into seventh grade, that's a tough time to have your kids moved. So that has affected my choices about going on the job market or not." Also, the reality of needing tuition exchange has kept some respondents in place as their children near college age.

Children

The impact of having children, both positive and negative, proved to be the most widely discussed work-life issue. Many respondents report that marriage and family corresponded with the first academic job. "I got married after my first year on the job.... And then, two years later, I had my first child and then, two years after that, I had my second." The logistics of this stage are complicated and can be expensive. "Balancing the early stages of a career and family is challenging. Finding affordable daycare, a backup plan, negotiating work travel with a spouse...." Institutional policies, or the lack thereof, compound these issues. "We did not, when I had my kids, we did not have a leave policy. So, if you wanted, you could take six weeks of disability, which, you know, depending on when you have your kids, is really not very feasible...in terms of getting someone to cover your classes." The formal policy stated no leave, but without the informal network of female colleagues having children around the same time, this respondent never would have known to negotiate informally. "So, you could go in and negotiate for a one-course reduction and in return for that one-course reduction, you would do some sort of a project...but I wouldn't have even known that I could do that if it hadn't been for a colleague of mine in history."

She also was given advice on how to mitigate the expectations of her teaching load. "I often was teaching six different classes a year...something that I—you know, again, I got from my female colleagues who had young kids. And they are, like, you have to get a few things in the can and you've got to insist that you teach it on a rotation so that you are not, you know, reinventing the wheel every time...." Female colleagues also helped one another out when their child care fell through. However, there are challenges to starting a family that are unanticipated. As this respondent explained, "Nursing and having an infant at home with a class that meets every day for three hours was more difficult than I anticipated." Even when things go smoothly, time and flexibility are limited. As another respondent described, "Either I am doing work or I'm looking after the kids. It's starting to change a little bit but there wasn't a lot of room for me to do stuff that was unrelated to either of those things."

Although one father described his department as supportive, he had to assume more child care than he expected because his wife received no formal leave:

I felt very supported by the administration, by my colleagues. The stresses came more from the fact that the administration did not offer generous leave to my spouse or really any leave. So, that really affected our quality of life. So, her not being able to take leave meant I had to take more time with my infant, which was fine by me and was very supported by my colleagues, but it introduced the level of stress into the equation that I wish had not been there.

Similarly, another respondent recalled, “The main thing for me was that I didn’t get the time off to work on my research that I would have had if I hadn’t had two children.... You got two semesters to use when you wanted to. And I used them for when my children were born.”

Other institutions offered leave but with limitations. One respondent found out that either parent could take a semester of leave, which he took advantage of for the first child. He added, “I didn’t even know we could until my chair brought it up.” He could not, however, do the same for the second child because there were limits on how often you could take leave. Even when families work out their own balance, the stress is always there. As one father reported, “I would say that for me and most parents that I know, family responsibilities are always stressful...that can be good stress and bad stress because that is what is most important in life and it needs attention.” In his case, his wife worked outside the home and he was able to work at his home office and care for his son during the day. He described how “the balance worked out pretty well.” He could work while his son napped and again in the evening when his wife came home. As he explained, “It wasn’t like...I can’t do both, I’m forced to choose...I didn’t feel that was the case at all.” However, it did require juggling the family work schedules: “You know, my wife works and so there are always pressures on both of us to figure out, you know, who’s taking care of the kids after school, who’s doing what on the weekend. In the summer, because she works in a more or less full-time position, I wind up doing a lot of child care.”

Even with balance, respondents agree that productivity is compromised. There is less time for reading, research, and reflection. As one respondent explained, “especially given the demands—even when you’re coparenting—of having young children, it certainly takes away from your research productivity.” Another respondent concurred: “Before we had our son, I felt like I had plenty of time. I was able to go conferences. I was able to interact with colleagues and talk about new research ideas and, you know, other people’s papers. I was reading a lot

of papers, you know, working papers, journals. I was kind of staying on top of what was happening in my discipline.” Another parent concurred:

I had the child and...I mean, this ended up taking up all my time for the first four or five years.... Yeah, so it had a big impact in—I mean, I enjoy it and I did it because I have this, you know, love and I feel this obligation to, you know, to raise my son, but I mean I had no idea that it’s going to—I was going to have to stop my research and just do this full time. Even with help, I had help but, even so, it is 24 hours.

Not only is career satisfaction influenced by reduced time for “the life of the mind” but the pressures of maintaining individual and/or institutional expectations regarding scholarly activities needed for tenure and promotion also increase. “It’s been a source of strain and...yeah, I would say this had a negative impact on my professional activities of the past year or more.... I’d say over the past five years, it’s been a fairly frequent burden or diversion or demand on my time that subtracts from the amount of time I have available to do other things.”

One respondent lamented the lack of mentoring on this topic. As she told her story:

...there wasn’t anything formal in place to mentor junior people.... My specific situation was that I had recently gotten married, and I had two children while I was on the tenure track.... I did at least formally get time off the clock, but I got no time off in terms of teaching.... I had to burn what was research leave that was given to junior people to have some time off after I had each of my children.

What she wished she would have done at the time was speak up to demand more support, explaining that “everyone gets a research leave, but those of us who have babies, it’s not a research leave.” Even stopping the tenure clock was not standard at the time. Every concession had to be negotiated and, although it might be granted, “it wasn’t standard policy.”

Time simply becomes more limited when children enter the equation. The realities of juggling two work schedules with child care, school schedules, and unexpected interruptions are demanding:

I definitely experienced disruptions at work during the day. Some of those were either just routinized disruptions because we had a kid that was only in school for a half day and we just didn’t have very much time during the day to get

work done. But also if our child was sick, or if my mother-in-law had a doctor's appointment, that would cause disruptions in the day.

The pressure increases for single parents. As one respondent explained, "So, the other thing that happened to me when I moved from my first job here is, I went through a divorce and, you know, it's just a fact that nine times out of 10, when those things happen, you know, the mother then becomes the full-time parent or largely...and those things affect your career trajectory."

Some respondents "curtailed professional travel" and became "really good at handling things by phone." As one respondent remarked, chuckling, "I'm probably like a lot of moms; I have done conference calls from my closet." These constraints on productivity were expected by new parents and they continue for as long as the children are living primarily at home:

I would say that just comes with the terrain, and I knew that going in and I did it anyway. So, yeah, they've slowed down my scholarly productivity but not in a way that I didn't anticipate it or understand.... The kids being older now, it's much easier than it has been when they were younger. But it's still a source of stress when I'm managing summer research students and trying to write conference papers and need to travel for work. Just trying to figure out who's taking care of the kids and how to get all that stuff fit in is stressful.

For one respondent, having children slowed the path to promotion from associate to full professor. As she explained, "Unlike tenure, you know, the full professor, you know, there's more flexibility and you are not forced to come up at a certain time, so you can make that decision to time it, either based on when you think you have enough stuff or, you know, life-balance etc." She initially deferred because, as she explained, "I taught 26 or 27 different courses, separate course preps; I was very much a teaching workhorse...part of it was I was just too exhausted to go up when my kids were still the school age and younger. It was one more thing I couldn't do, you know, so I waited." As another respondent explained, even when children get older, "The needs of kids don't pause." Another pointed out, "My kids are fine at the moment, but there are times when they are not." Looking back, one respondent described, "It almost killed us. We had two kids while we were both trying to secure tenure and although we had some child care, we never

"We had two kids while we were both trying to secure tenure and although we had some child care, we never really had enough. It was very, very difficult."

really had enough. It was very, very difficult." Another noted that their son is now in college, which "has freed up a significant amount of time." As child-care responsibilities start fading away, "there is more time that opens up to do academic work or service work."

In the meantime, respondents coped with the challenges of parenting through individualized solutions, taking advantage of family-friendly policies, or pushing for changes. Respondents noted different parenting values and how no single solution will meet the needs of all families. One respondent, for example, opted to hire a nanny. Although that provided relief in child care, it added a different stress to the household:

For us, it really was more idiosyncratic. Like, we had a nanny for a couple of years, and then we sort of got sick of having to manage a nanny, and we got rid of her. Before we got rid of the nanny, things were actually pretty good. We could both work full time and it felt like both of us were making good progress in our careers. But once we got rid of the nanny...and, again, that was a decision that we made. There was just a much greater responsibility for child rearing and that's when things really started to get difficult.

Other new parents had the support of family members nearby who could assist with child care. "When the kids needed to be supervised...we had either my parents or my wife's parents or there are always ways." One father described the early years of juggling when his son was born but how his wife's ability to stay at home for more than a year "was amazing." He also had support from her family, which, as he described, "made it manageable because otherwise I don't know how we would've done it."

Many respondents argued that institutions could do better in providing access to child care. When their kids were younger, this issue was their highest priority and a major source of stress. Ironically, one respondent pointed out:

[T]hey did run workshops...you know, work-life balance, which I've never had any time for. I'm, like, not going to go to a workshop on work-life balance when I'm juggling like a mad woman my work-life balance. So, you know, things like that for me were never particularly helpful because the timing of it just—I didn't have the time to do it. But they did offer things like that, it just wasn't

something that I could do.

Another similarly noted health and wellness initiatives at her university but not child care:

...they subsidize things like massages and Weight Watcher memberships at work, and free Zumba and yoga classes and things like that...management encouraging people.... Staff and faculty to take care of themselves is really important because there was definitely a culture here that it is a point of pride that your car is the last one in the parking lot and that you are here on Saturdays and Sundays and that kind of thing and they're trying to combat that.... I fail to understand what's so hard about getting a daycare center. So, I think that makes it super hard for young parents—male and female, by the way...not just the women. But think of the convenience of being able to drop your child off but have your child in proximity and you might go over and have lunch. I mean, it just makes for an easier life and a better work–life balance if people could do that.

Her actions in response to this need helped to change the culture within her department:

I had our lounge totally renovated to accommodate six kids when their moms couldn't take them to daycare or something. I got these ottomans that are storage and I put blankets in there, DVDs; I got a flat screen put in there and a DVD player. I had crayons, coloring books, all kinds of stuff.... Sometimes that turned out to be a lifesaver for people. That was my little way of taking the nick out of the institution's blindness toward this need.

One respondent pointed out the financial obstacles for institutions making these investments, and that “it becomes even more difficult to adequately address those in the current economic and social climate” but that small changes can make a difference. A complaint to a department chair about meetings scheduled for 9 a.m. in the morning got changed, for example. “I didn't drop my child at school until 8:55, so there was no way I could be here for a 9 o'clock meeting. And so now all of the meetings that require senior-faculty attendance start at 9:30.” Another made the case: “I have kids, I'm not going to come to any meetings after five. I basically can't commit to anything before nine-thirty because we have to bring them to daycare. No one has ever, to my face, said anything about it, and I don't get the sense that behind my back.” Another respondent made a pitch for “flexible schedules for tenure and promotion” and the possibility of “two-thirds time with

benefits” as beneficial to institutions, faculty members, and their children. Whereas this arrangement might not appeal to everyone, it offers a solution to some:

I think, honestly, the thing that if I could have just waved the magic wand in my previous position and changed something, I would have tried to do, like, a half-time position or something because that would have opened up time for me, you know, both to, you know, feel like I wasn't juggling quite so much. It would have set up expectations with my colleagues that I just wasn't going to be around as much, and it would have opened up a little bit of time for me to just kind of think a little bit more intellectually than I had been able to. But that was something that when I kind of just nudged a little bit on it, I got a negative reaction, so I just never pushed it very hard.

Respondents agreed that “more could be done to accommodate the fact that there are lots of faculty members with little kids.” For single parents, it can be even more challenging. One respondent noted, for example: “...if you're a single parent, it becomes a lot more expensive to attend a conference.” Again, one cannot predict life changes at the job-market stage but, external to institutions, geographic locations can make the difference in balancing work and life. One respondent felt that her satisfaction had more to do with the “culture of the city,” the availability of affordable child care outside of her institution, and a manageable commute. Ultimately, to maintain job satisfaction, expectations sometimes need to be adjusted:

I think most people who have children have to make some choices about their professional work where they are satisfied in rather than achieving at some level that they had envisioned for themselves. I think how faculty members rationalize that tradeoff, I think, is an individual process but it's also, I think, it strongly determines whether a faculty member can find some satisfaction in their work.

Whether the climate of a department informally supports those changes is another story. Mostly, respondents who are fathers felt supported in their role. As one recounted:

But I remember having the pager with me and I was at the retreat and I was in one of the meetings when the pager went off and I think I probably used an inappropriate word as I ran out of the room, but it was a false alarm. But, you know, I never felt ostracized. I never felt criticized in any way. And, again, it might've been because I was very new in comparison to all the other faculty

here, but I really felt supported throughout that whole process.

Similarly, another father applauded his department's support. When his wife was out of town and he had to be at a school event but there was no child care, a colleague who was a mentor offered to keep the child in their office with them. As he reflected:

It wasn't so much what the school said as much as what the school did, and I never felt that the school was pressuring me in a way that limited my ability to have a family and to have a life outside of the institution.... I never felt that the school looked down on me or told me, you know, you shouldn't bring your child to school, and that was really important, and so I think that was perhaps more important than saying one thing and doing something else, but I never felt that I couldn't have a family and I couldn't mix them together when the moment required it. So that was really important for me.

Others painted a different story, describing a backlash against how people use family-friendly policies:

...I definitely had a reputation among my colleagues that I was a pretty involved parent and that I really could not be depended upon to stick around late for a meeting or show up early for a meeting. And that also my kind of productivity wasn't going to be as high because of my familial obligations. And I wouldn't say I necessarily missed out on the specific career opportunity, but I think there might have been better professional success within my institution if I didn't have to make those sacrifices. And so, when I would still, you know, kind of flake out and not do something that I was supposed to do and use my child as the reason, I think people reacted negatively to that.

Is parental leave being used to provide child care or to create more time for research? Should leave be contingent on how much child care is provided? Should parents on leave not be doing any research at all? These comments revealed hostility toward perceived abuse of generous leave policies. One father, for example, chose not to take paternity leave for each of his children for this reason:

There were some people who took parental leave who were fathers and put their children in child care and used it for extra research, and I was kind of incensed by that...therefore, I felt very

strongly that I would not take parental leave if I was not actually providing child care 20 hours a week.

There is an ongoing perception that "men and women would use the accommodations that were made for family responsibilities in different ways." As one respondent confirmed: "Men would be more likely to take advantage of their family leave to get articles published while their wives took care of the kids and that women would be more likely to take care of the kids while they were on family and medical leave." This respondent added that "maybe there needs to be a norm that you're not working on articles while you're on family leave."

One respondent recounted this type of comment in faculty meetings regarding women on maternity leave: "I wish I was off all that time so I could get some research done." She fumed, "And that's inappropriate. They are not off on vacation...they are off having a child." In another example she provided:

[O]ne of my colleagues...she was junior...had one child and then was actually told by an administrator, "...don't do this again before coming up for tenure, okay. Don't come back looking for another maternity leave." Well, she did and she got pregnant again and she wouldn't ask for leave. So, she was hoping the baby would come over the holidays but the baby didn't. The baby came, like, right before finals week the first semester. She was out maybe five days and she came back and she looked like death warmed over.... I was so worried about her and I was hopping mad...I was furious. I fussed at everybody that I could because I thought that was ridiculous to allow that...but everybody was like...you're so dramatic...you're blowing this out of proportion...and I thought, "Are you out of your mind?" It was just ridiculous. Can you imagine a place where that's okay? Now that has changed since that time because I think some people were taken back a bit by my reaction, but I had a very bad reaction to that.

Another unintended consequence of family-friendly policies is that the intent of a policy may or may not be implemented. One respondent noted that although she stopped the tenure clock during leave, the "extra time" was used against her at tenure and promotion, resulting in a negative tenure decision. Also, gender differences persist in how family issues are discussed, or not, in the workplace. Parenthood is still approached and treated differently by women and men. Women are careful not to draw attention to themselves as parents. "How I talk about or frame what I'm doing as a parent when in the workplace, I think I do edit myself, censor myself. ...if

"In fact, I think for women in that department...well, what can I say...no other women in that department had children but one."

dad is taking someone to the doctor, he's like that's happening and everyone thinks that's fantastic." Another respondent echoed these attitudes, recounting: "I had a colleague actually tell me, you know, not to talk about spending time with my kids because that might be seen as not having sufficient dedication to the job." Another respondent added:

I think institutions don't say it, but I think they still think of it as something extra or something special for women that they shouldn't have to do and there are many benefits that go beyond the convenience or work-life balance for faculty.... A lot of your health problems are the insurance plans are really narrow and maybe they ought to include more alternative medicine and alternative strategies for dealing with your health.

As this example illustrates, a chilly climate toward work-life balance affects graduate students as well:

I would say that this institution was a place that was just not interested in work-life balance. In fact, I think for women in that department...well, what can I say...no other women in that department had children but one. When grad students got pregnant, it was a very obvious chilly breeze coming from senior faculty.... This was very much frowned upon and you really ran the risk of professors completely losing interest in you because you got pregnant.

Health Issues and Aging Parents

Another source of stress in work-life balance is perhaps less visible because of the temporary and/or intermittent nature of the issue. Caring for aging parents, relatives with health problems, and deaths in the family also affect mobility, productivity, and job satisfaction. Both parents of one respondent had health issues, as they explained: "My dad has stage four cancer and my mom has early-stage Alzheimer's...so I've had to travel...." Another had a sibling in crisis: "Last year, my oldest sister, I brought her here with me for a little bit over a month because she was recuperating from a devastating illness.... I don't think there are provisions for a sister." Family deaths also took a toll, as one respondent described: "The care of my dad has definitely affected me; he passed away this January but the previous four years had been, you know...I went and saw him every month and so I did have to adjust things."

Some respondents have both young children and aging parents to manage. As one described: "We both had to take time off of work to care for children, and [his] dad got sick a couple of years ago. He had to take time off to...be with him." Another respondent explained:

I would say the reality is that the biggest issue for me would be work flexibility so that I could kind of handle my familial obligations. Our son is still relatively young and my spouse is quite busy and getting busier, so it's important that I be able to provide, you know, kind of home support to our son. And then in addition, my mother-in-law who lives nearby—we've become sort of her primary caregiver, so to speak, because she has dementia and so that's another important kind of responsibility.

Another respondent is married with no children but, as an only child, had to handle his father's diagnosis of cancer:

So, first the sort of suddenness of his diagnosis, which started with a debilitating small stroke that left him with a language deficit and I sort of dropped everything and went out and took care of him...and then he had surgery and I was taking care of him after that. So, there was sort of all of that for a chunk of time.... I didn't cancel classes the first time because I was on leave...which was a blessing. And then...he died and that's when I had to cancel classes...and just go deal. I was able to be with him actually when he passed and, yeah, it was good...but it just kind of slowed me down in a way that was depressing, that the lost momentum, and then, you know, there were carry-on effects. So, you cancel your classes, but then you have to make them up and so then I had, you know, the following academic year, I made up the classes that I had had to cancel, which meant that I was teaching 150% load.... It felt like I lost a year and a half of research time out of something that lasted for three months, you know.... My chair at the time knew what was going on and the message I got was "do what you need to do and we'll work it out later"...and so that was great.

Although thankful for the department chair's support, the informality of the accommodation had an impact. As the respondent continued:

There was an enormous amount of flexibility and I didn't think that it was unreasonable for them to ask me to teach the courses that I had to cancel at some point and they were flexible about when I did that so, no, I had no complaints about it. I think the problem is that that flexibility felt totally contingent on the fact that I had a generous and flexible chair at the time because I think he was just making it up. I don't think there was an established procedure for this.

It takes time and emotional energy to manage the health care and/or death of family members. As another respondent described:

...my father passed away about a year and a half ago. So, I've been kind of, like, dealing with the after effects of that and helping my mom deal with various things. And that's obviously caused some personal stress.... So that, that took the last 12 months or last 18...there was a point...last fall and winter where I really kind of dialed back as much as I could at work so that I could have time to do these other things that I was dealing with.

Most of the family health crises that affected respondents were temporary and, in most cases, institutions or departments provided informal accommodations. Respondents also faced these issues later in their career, post-tenure, reducing some of the pressures to maintain a prescribed level of research productivity through the crisis.

In terms of life–balance issues, children were the most common theme discussed. Respondents made clear that although institutions have room to change formally and informally, they would not have changed their own decision to raise a family. As one respondent noted, “I mean, having a child does change people, right? It certainly refocused what I needed to do in life.” As another respondent reflected: “So, if I had had fewer children, I would almost certainly have had greater research productivity and a much less rich life.” Another asserted:

I wouldn't have it the other way where I had lots and lots of publications and bounced out of here if it meant that I didn't have my kids. So, you know, of course, having kids changes it, but that doesn't mean in a way that I regret or think it bad. You know, I take these two great human beings over a longer list of publications any day, no question.

A positive effect of the greater visibility surrounding family-friendly policies is a change in perception of the parenting roles of both working parents, as one respondent noted: “I

think maternity leave...has changed the role that I think the men that I work with who have had kids perceive what they are supposed to be doing and how other people perceive what they should be doing.”

REFLECTIONS AND ADVICE

In this final section, the questions are reflective. Would you do it all over again? Would you advise someone like you to follow the same career path? How, if at all, do you think the profession has changed during your career path? The answers to these questions provide further insight to the factors that divorce a political scientist from an academic career path. The comments also provide useful suggestions for what could make the career path in both academia and non-academia more satisfying and/or more successful. In many ways, the advice reflects what respondents regret not knowing when they entered graduate programs. Perspectives on how the discipline has changed over time also reflect broader changes within higher education that are not within institutional—much less departmental—control.

Most of the reflections are positive but qualified. The most negative raise red flags that need vigilant attention as we move forward in providing best practices for removing barriers to success in political science. Some would definitely choose not to follow the same path again. “If the terrain of higher education was the same as it was when I began in the '90s and that is, less resource-strapped, absolutely. I love the work. I love the environment. I'm not sure knowing what I know now I would do it again.”

In terms of advice to prospective graduate students, a common theme focused on preparedness for the path ahead. It is not enough to know what your passion is; students should have both realistic and flexible expectations. “I would probably think that they should do a little more research than maybe I did. Not that I did no research, but I feel like people really need to know what they are getting themselves into.” Another warned about making sure “there's personal satisfaction in the type of work that they would be doing because there are so many things that one can do with an academic career.” Moreover, there are opportunity costs:

It's a huge investment and, when you think about it, you need to weigh the chances of getting a good tenure-track job against, you know, the five years of, you know, training and earnings potential and alternative five or six years or seven whatever it is, in an alternative career. And, of course, if money is your interest, you should not even think about it at all.... But, I mean, for me it is, it's a great job and I think I've been—all things

considered, I've been very lucky. I think I ended up—despite being denied tenure and that being a very difficult process—I ended up with a pretty amazing job in the end.

As another respondent explained, there will always be unpredictable factors that change values or force reprioritization of goals:

I would encourage them to be contingent at all opportunities because every single branch in the decision process has costs and benefits. And I wouldn't be—I wouldn't be fixated on an end point. I would be fixated on the next point.... I would be aware of the choices and the cost one is making...because, at some point, you aren't the person you were seven years ago. And, as in my experience as a primary parent for a while, things change. And that doesn't mean that what you wanted before was wrong at the time, and it doesn't mean that what you want now is what you would have wanted as an early self.... Just be prepared that not everything will go as you anticipate in the sense of even what develops won't be what you envisioned. But that doesn't make it any worse.

Describing political science as a “high-risk profession,” another respondent felt that more could be done to increase awareness among students about “how difficult it is to succeed and about...what lies ahead of them.” Watching students fail when they might perform so well in other careers is difficult. One respondent warned that “political science is not a good fit for the person who really values being engaged at work.” As another respondent observed, “Some of the happiest people I know went to government right away.... Keep your eyes open, learn as much as you can early...even do a professional internship if you can along the way just to make sure you are in the right place.”

Another explained that students need to have more certainty that they really want to pursue an academic career:

You should only do it if you really want an academic career, and I've pushed them to think about that.... So, I wouldn't do it again. I mean, it all turned out fine and, you know, but I didn't have anybody really guiding me when I was younger or asking me the kinds of questions that I now ask the young people when they say, “Oh, I'm thinking about going to graduate school.”

Another agreed, saying, “we just don't tell them enough... we don't prepare them for what lies ahead...it is not a safe

career. I think we need to disclose what is going on...what we do 24 hours a day; I mean, I don't think students know this.”

Getting research experience prior to graduate school was another piece of advice offered: “I would have gotten specifically some research experience first.... You really need that research experience to, first of all, know this is what you're cut out for and also just to kind of have a sense of what the expectations are of, in my case, quantitative social science in terms of mathematical skills, statistical expertise, and working with large datasets.” Concerns about the status of the job market in higher education were also a common theme: “I think the climate for academia is grim and getting grimmer. So, I'm very reticent about recommending people to go and become academics.” “Well, the job market is tough, so I don't think that I would...things have gotten even more difficult for candidates to get tenure-track positions.” Another respondent only encourages students with the most potential to succeed:

I mean, I strongly dissuade people from, or I try to dissuade people from, going to graduate school unless they are absolutely fantastic and seem like they're going to make it out the other end with some chance of success. And I talk to them very realistically about what the profession is like and yet I don't tell them, I don't decline to write for such students, and I don't tell them they absolutely mustn't. I just try to let them know what it's really like.

Respondents also were reluctant to encourage students to enter a career field that they perceive as declining:

I just feel with the state of higher ed right now, institutions are going to be closing; you know, there's just, there's huge bottlenecks so there's just not that many openings. And as long as they go into it really clear-eyed about what the field is, what, you know, an academic career is...but I don't, like, try to get our students to go to grad school the way I used to in my first probably five to 10 years.

One respondent described a common perception of the job market today:

Yes, I would do it all over again. I have hesitation about advising my students to pursue PhDs mostly out of job-market concerns. The job market is tough and, no matter how good you are, you might not get a good job. So, I'm not sure I would advise undergraduate students to pursue a PhD. But if you're already doing the PhD, I would say being a professor of political science is

Who defines political science as a discipline and what makes it relevant to some but not others?

a pretty good gig if you can get a good job.

As another respondent explained, “Of course, every human thinks they are going to be the exception.” However, at least knowing the numbers of jobs available and understanding who gets jobs and what those placements look like would be useful. This respondent added:

I feel like my career would have been different if I had never gone to a conference, let’s say. I don’t know if anybody every told me that directly, but it always seemed like you need to go to conferences, you need to meet people, you need to get your work out. And people have been really helpful and nice to me at conferences over the years and encouraging. It’s kind of hard to imagine my career without the whole kind of conference-associational dynamic.

The difficulties of work–life balance also were discussed. As one respondent explained, “I guess just the sort of sense that I wouldn’t have expected the balance to be as difficult as it has been.... I didn’t expect to be the kind of parent that I’ve ended up being, which is a parent that really wants to be involved a lot.... I think I probably would not have gone to pursue the PhD.” One respondent, as a minority, warned: “Somebody of my same temperament and my level of racial-group identity and younger, like at the normal age that people come out and get into this? I’d have to say no because...not that I don’t think they could do well, but I think it would come at some emotional cost for them that I don’t know if they’d be willing to pay.”

Perceptions on how the profession has changed reveal issues that affect job satisfaction, both positively and negatively. Individuals enter the field of political science with an image of what they want to contribute, how they want to join the conversation, and how they like to tell their stories. Who defines political science as a discipline and what makes it relevant to some but not others? As one respondent reflected:

I think what I found in the profession that I don’t like is methods driving out substance. And having that sophistication and statistical analysis really occupying more and more journal space to the point where one’s ability to publish substantive papers that are written with a lesser degree of methodological sophistication.... That’s one thing that I have struggled with. And then, simultaneously, the death, slow death, of some university presses means that...more narrative forms

of argument are struggling to find outlets there as well. And so it’s kind of substantive work that really seems to be getting squeezed from journal-article perspective as well as from university presses, and that makes me very pessimistic about the future utility of the field.

Several respondents noted that the profession has become more quantitative than qualitative and that methodological sophistication is now institutionalized. At the same time, there is recognition of the proliferation of outlets for reaching a broader audience as a political scientist:

On the other hand, I will say in the last five or 10 years there’s also been, you know, a nice swing toward a discussion about policy relevance and writing for broader audiences. The blog and places like that have really put a spotlight on what political scientists can share with the world as opposed to just getting more and more narrow in talking to a smaller audience about very specific things. So, that’s been a kind of counterweight to what I see has generally been the trend toward professionalization.

Describing this development as “cool,” one respondent applauded “the diversity of ways that political scientists try to make their work relevant to contemporary politics in an immediate way reaching beyond academic journals.”

Respondents acknowledge that the perceived professionalization of political science has both costs and benefits for today’s graduate students. On the one hand, respondents perceive “a more well-worn path in terms of training for students who are interested in this more quantitative, mathematical track.” On the other hand:

Even as a grad student, you are expected to publish one or two or more peer-review pieces or you have to do your post doc or figure out something else to do until you published those things to be viable on the job market. So, many more people a lot earlier are going to conferences and working on publishable papers, and the professionalization of political science, has been, I think, quite intense since we were in graduate school.

Another comment about the profession noted the “increasing use of non-tenure-track or tenure-flow faculty that puts a lot of additional pressure on the discipline in the way it’s

taught.” Whereas there is more acceptance within political science of diverse subfields, there is still room for improvement. As one respondent explained:

I would say that I think the profession has definitely been way more open to studies of women and minorities and stuff like that...but I think we are still dominated by institutions and quantitative studies and mainstream studies.... I still think there’s a little bit of a stigma to people who are outside of that mainstream research area...and I guess for me at this point...had I known about, say, American Studies or even if I’d known more about sociology, I might have chosen one of those other disciplines where it might be easier to be interdisciplinary—although I see political science kind of in their pocket certainly...where people who are interdisciplinary have a space.

Respondents acknowledge that today’s graduate students appear to have additional pressures and challenges, “jumping through various professional hoops” that were not there as much when they started out. Even so, the academic life still looks pretty rosy for some:

I always tell my graduate students that you don’t know how lucky you are. Right now, you’re seized by the existential uncertainty of being able to get a job, but these are the best days of your intellectual life. As you explore these ideas, you have, you know, great amount of time to do it and you have the smartest people that you’re likely to be with who are interested in similar things, so take advantage of it.

One of the encouraging results of this study is the ultimate satisfaction that respondents have, with few exceptions, about where their career path has led them, regardless of how “twisty” it was. As one respondent reflected, “It all worked out in the end. You know how this goes...it all works out for all of us...we all figure it out. I tell my kids that [for] young people, success looks like a straight-line trajectory, but it’s actually this tangled mess of a trajectory that gets you to the same place. So...that’s where I’ve been....on the tangled mess.”

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to add narrative to the immense accumulation of data regarding career paths in political science. In doing so, a broad picture was painted about expectations and how they affect career trajectories; the barriers and opportunities to success at each stage of the academic career; and the roles that gender, race, and intersectionality play.

Our interviews drew attention to an early leak in the pipeline that occurred in graduate school. Women and people of color were more likely to leave their PhD program in political science, reporting less support and satisfaction with their experience than white men. Most graduate students entered their program with vaguely defined expectations beyond pursuing an academic career. As respondents progressed, opportunity costs and shifting priorities related to marriage, dual-career families, and the arrival of children influenced their career trajectories.

Job satisfaction is defined uniquely and the rewards of academia are plentiful. The “Academic Dream,” however, did not materialize for most respondents. Instead, they ended up happy simply to find their first academic placement. Institutional fit then played a significant role in respondents’ satisfaction and success. Institutions varied in terms of departmental collegiality; workload expectations; and the balance of research, teaching, and service. Women, and especially women of color, were more likely than men to discuss feeling invisible, isolated, or discriminated against within their department. Women were more likely than men to report that having children affected their professional status. The chilly climate was described as informal, subtle, and even unconscious yet damaging to morale and job satisfaction. The absence of family-friendly policies required faculty to negotiate exceptions or contingent support. In other cases, the use (or perceived abuse) of family-friendly policies stigmatized faculty. Formal mentoring was widely nonexistent or ineffective. Women and people of color found their greatest support through informal networks, often outside of political science. When mentoring existed, expectations were clearer for criteria to earn tenure than promotion to full professor.

The 29 voices in this report add diversity, depth, and deeply personal insight to our conversations as we, as a discipline, move toward embracing best practices.

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Appendix

Mid-Career Cohort Study

We conducted our Mid-Career Cohort Study in 2017 and 2018. With a small sample of respondents (i.e., about 29 completed interviews), we do not claim to offer a nationally representative account of the mid-career perspective. However, we selected three graduate programs that reflect a mix of regions and public and private institutions. Because we were able to obtain information for almost all students who entered the three programs and to complete interviews with most of them, we feel confident that we have a rich and diverse set of perspectives. By using a qualitative approach, we hope to provide narratives that can supplement quantitative analyses of career trajectories and to further advance discussions of best practices for removing barriers to success in political science academic careers. We also go beyond many past approaches by including individuals who did not complete the degree and/or who currently work outside of the academy.

Of the 31 respondents who completed the online component of our research, 18 (58%) indicated a current primary career in academia, including 11 tenured faculty members, five administrators (two in student-life administrative positions), and two non-tenure-track researchers. Of the men who completed their PhD, 86% are currently in academic positions, compared to 83% of the women.

The survey data from our mid-career cohort respondents yielded details of our subjects' graduate-school experiences. Table 1 reports participation teaching, research, and scholarship activities during graduate school.

APSA MEMBERSHIP DATA

We used a large-N dataset created by APSA drawn from a large sample of current and former APSA members to supplement our interview evidence. APSA identified 1,307 women and 2,605 men who had earned a PhD from 1996 to 2000 and had conducted a financial transaction with APSA. APSA staff selected a stratified, random sample of these individuals that included an equal number of women and men for online research. The goal of the web-scrape was to determine how many of these PhDs are still in academia today and to research their career trajectories. Of the 1,276 individuals that APSA selected for web-based research, APSA staff found biographical information online for 574 women and 583 men, revealing no statistically significant gender difference in whether

Table 1
Graduate School Experience of Cohort Respondents

While in the PhD program, did you do any of the following?	Response
Serve as a teaching assistant or teaching fellow	24 (77.4%)
Design and teach your own course(s)	10 (32.2%)
Serve as a research assistant	22 (71.0%)
Coauthor research with another student	6 (19.4%)
Coauthor research with a faculty member	4 (12.9%)
Attend professional conferences	24 (77.4%)
Present research at professional conferences	17 (54.8%)
Organize workshops or conferences	8 (25.8%)
Submit research for publication	14 (45.2%)
Publish research	11 (35.5%)

N = 31
Source: Mid-Career Cohort Study Survey

information about the individual was available online.

Results of this APSA analysis of 1996–2000 PhDs indicate that there is a gender difference (58% of women compared to 62% of men, $p<0.10$) in acquisition of a tenure-line position. There also is a gender difference in whether individuals are still employed in academia (82% of women compared to 86% of men, $p=0.05$) and the rate of tenure (50% of women compared to 56% of men, $p<0.01$). Of the women and men in tenure lines (331 women and 359 men), women were more likely to be in administrative positions; however, the N was very small.

Among the women and men who ever held a tenure-track position (N=689), women were less likely to be tenured (86% of women compared to 91% of men, $p<0.05$). Whereas 207 of the original 583 men researched are currently full professors, the same is true of only 158 of the 574 women who were studied.

Thus, these APSA membership data reveal gender differences in tenure rates and the presence of women in full-professor positions for a large sample of individuals who earned degrees around the same time as those we interviewed for the Mid-Career Cohort Study. This analysis suggests the importance of continued attention to how individuals experience the profession and to whether individuals are leaving the academy because they are attracted to other opportunities or because they face gender-based obstacles within the profession.

