

## Chapter 2

# Women in American Higher Education: A Descriptive Profile

Carol Frances

### Women Faculty Gains

Women have made extremely impressive gains moving in huge numbers into the faculty ranks of American colleges and universities. The number of women working as faculty almost trebled in the short span of just 24 years from 1987 to 2011. The U.S. Department of Education reported that there were 264,000 women employed as faculty in American degree-granting institutions in 1987. By 2011 the number had increased by an astounding 471,000 – that is, almost trebling the number of women faculty in American higher education.

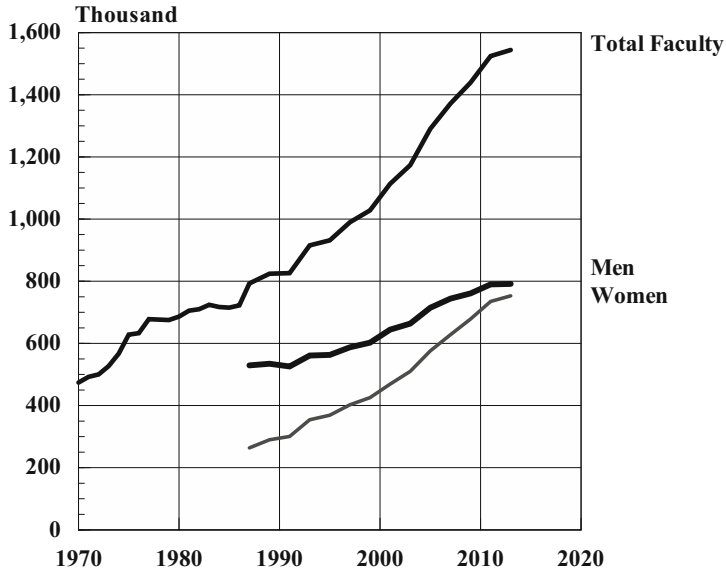
From 1987 to 2011 the total number of faculty employed in American colleges and universities almost doubled, increasing from about 790,000 to almost 1.5 million. The share of women of the total number of American faculty, including both women and men, increased from one-third of the total of just under 800,000 in 1987 to almost of half of the 1.5 million total in 2011. Trends in employment of faculty women and men over this period are shown on Chart 2.1.

We might well believe that we could celebrate without reserve this triumphant increase in the number of American women faculty. But hold on. These advances in employment of women as faculty members have not been accompanied with commensurate gains in their salaries as compared with the salaries of faculty men. Indeed, the gap between the salaries of women and men professors has widened since the 1970s. Measured in constant 2012–2013 U.S. dollars, the gap on average between the salaries of women and men professors in the mid-1970s was \$10,822. The gap in constant dollars had increased by 2012–2013 to \$16,915. Women professors' salaries as a percent of men professors' actually slipped from 88.7 % to 85.1 %. This erosion in their relative salaries occurred over the 37 years because the salaries

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**Chart 2.1** Trends in the number of instructional faculty in American colleges and universities by gender 1979–1987 (Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics*: 2014, Table 315.10)

of the men professors were higher than the salaries of the women in the beginning and their salaries grew over the years at a slightly faster rate than the salaries of the women professors.

The gap in salaries between women and men faculty grows as faculty ascend in rank, from instructor to assistant professor, then to associate professor, and finally to full professor. This chapter will document the trends in women’s participation in American higher education, with emphasis on women faculty – and then put these trends into a broader context, including in particular comparisons of the women’s experiences in academia with those of men.

## Higher Education as an Industry

To put this discussion into a broader economic context, we can compare higher education with other “industries.” Close to 4.0 million people were employed by American higher education institutions in 2015. This is considerably more than the 2.4 million employed in the auto industry.

From 1991 to 2011, the last year for which we have consistent data by gender, higher education added 1.3 million more employees, in effect doubling total employment in just 20 years. Of the 1.3 million increase in total employment over these 20 years, 60% were women and only 40% were men.

Thus, by 2011, the most recent years for which we have employment data by gender, more than half of the total number of all employees in American colleges and universities were women. Trends in total higher education employment are documented in Chart 2.2. In 2011, 2.1 million women were employed in higher education as compared with 1.8 million men. Yes, 300,000 more women were employed in American higher education than men and presumably the difference has widened in the years since then.

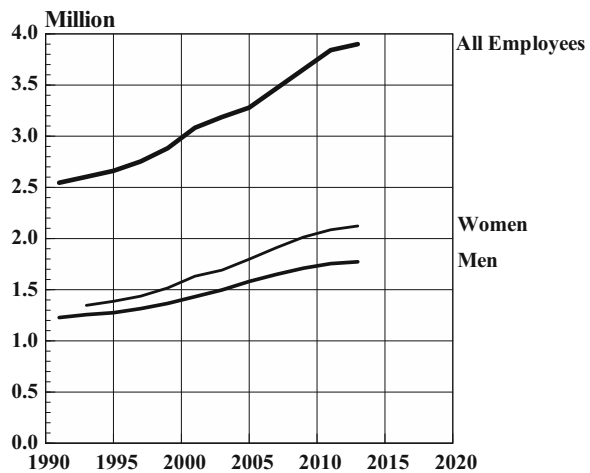
### Comparative Trends in Higher Education Employment, by Type of Job and by Gender

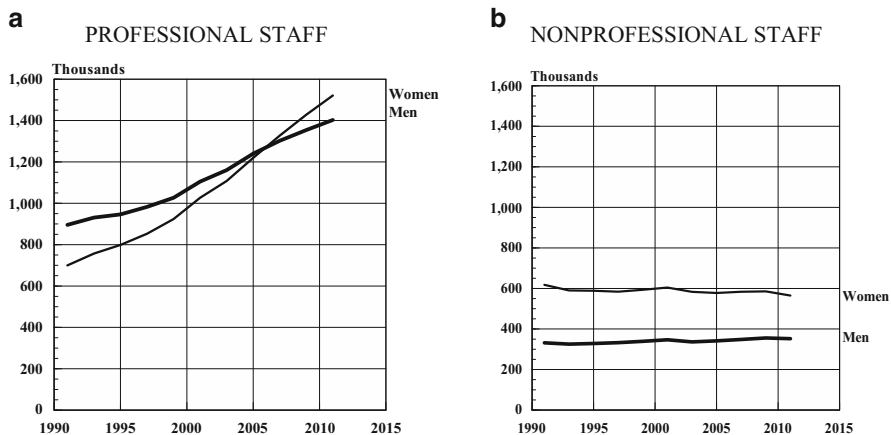
While the primary focus of this chapter is on women faculty, we should understand that faculty is only one of five major categories used to describe people employed in colleges and universities. First, the jobs are divided into two groups, professional and nonprofessional.

There are major differences in the percentage of these jobs held by women. As shown in Chart 2.3, a smaller percentage of women hold professional jobs and a larger percentage hold nonprofessional jobs than do men employed in American colleges and universities.

Next, the professional group of employees is divided into four subcategories: (A) Executive, administrative, and managerial, (B) Faculty, (C) Other professionals, and (D) Graduate assistants. Trends in the employment of women and men in the four professional academic job categories are shown on Chart 2.4. The difference in the distribution of professional jobs by type and by gender is large in the faculty domain. Only 35%, or just over one-third, of the women employed in higher education work

**Chart 2.2** Trends in the total number of employees in degree-granting American colleges and universities by gender, 1991–2013 (Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics*: 2013, Table 314.20)





**Chart 2.3** Trends in the number of staff employed in American colleges and universities by gender from 1991–2011 is shown on Chart 2.3. (Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics: 2013*, Table 314.20)

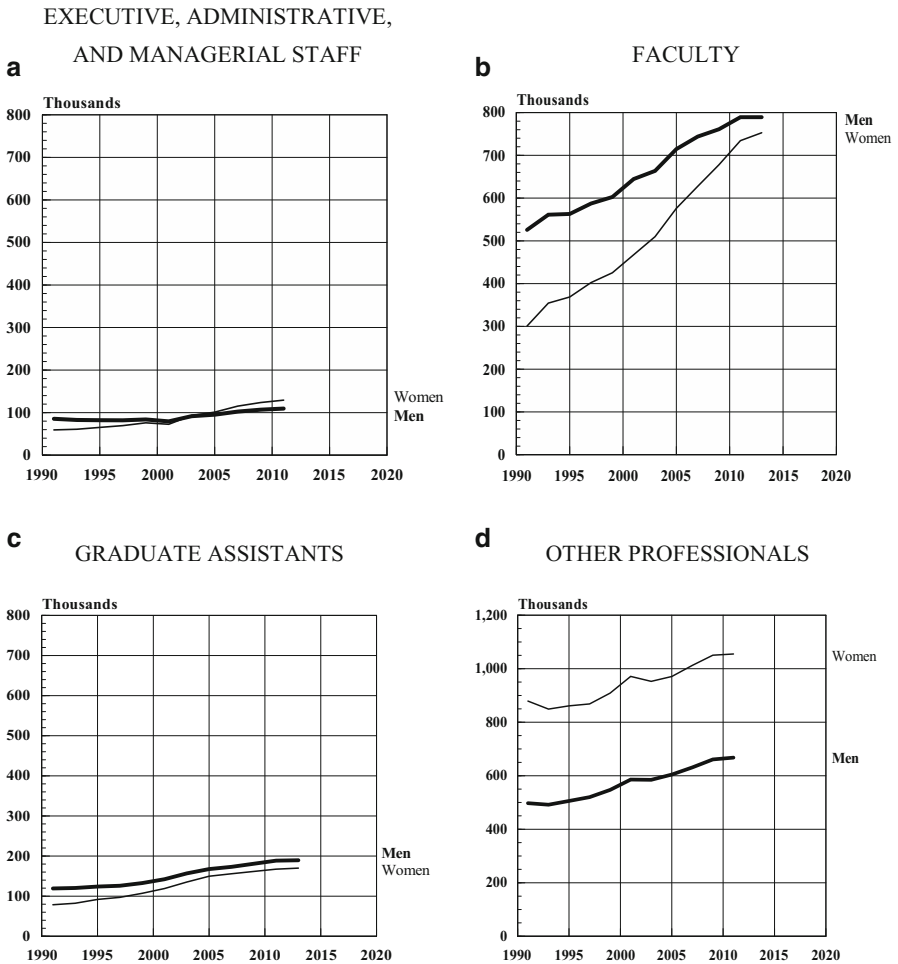
as faculty members as compared with 45 % of the men. The difference by gender is also large among “other professionals”, with many more women than men employed in this group.

### Comparative Trends in the Employment of Faculty Women and Men

There have been phenomenal increases in the number of faculty employed in American higher education institutions over the 20 years from 1991 to 2011. Total faculty employment soared from 826,000 in 1991 to 1.5 million in 2011. This is a huge increase of 697,000, or 84 %, in the total number of faculty employed.

According to the numbers published by the U.S., Department of Education in the 2013 *Digest of Education Statistics*, over these 20 years, 68 % of the increase in the number of faculty employed was accounted for by women. The number of women faculty increased by an astounding 144 %, almost three times the rate of increase in the number of men faculty which increased by only 50 %, though starting from a larger base. This means that the number of women faculty employed by American higher education institutions much more than doubled in just the 20 years from 1991 to 2011. Over these 20 years the number of women faculty employed increased by 434,000, from 300,000 in 1991 to 734,000 in 2011.

Thus, by 2011 the share of the full-time faculty who are women still differs enormously by rank, as shown in Chart 2.5. Only 29 % of the full-time professors are women, while 71 % are men. Women account for larger percentages of the faculty only at the lower ranks.

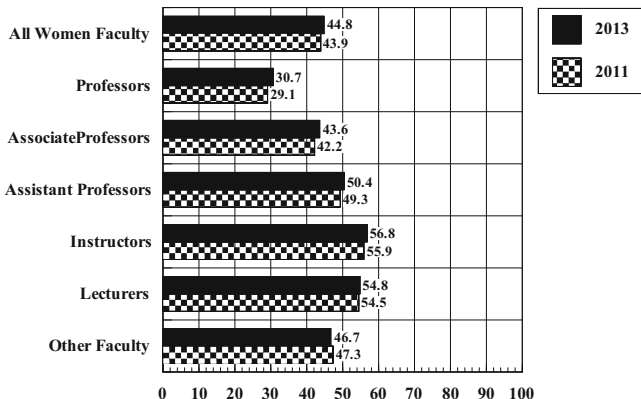


**Chart 2.4** Trends in the number of employees in American colleges and universities by type of job by gender 1991–2013 (Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics: 2013 and 2014*, Table 314.20)

### Trends in Faculty Employment by Full-Time and Part-Time Status and by Gender

The most recent data available about the patterns of full-time and part-time faculty employment by gender is for 2003. We do know that part-time faculty has increased to become close to half of all faculty employment, but we do not know the gender distribution of the current faculty full-time and part-time employment.

We can calculate the percentage distribution of women and men faculty between full-time and part-time employment for 2003. At that time, of the women faculty



**Chart 2.5** Percent of full-time faculty in American higher education who are women by faculty rank 2011 and 2013 (Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics: 2014*, Table 315.20)

employed by American colleges and universities, about half were employed full-time and half part-time. The division for men faculty was 60 % full-time and 40 % part-time.

From 1992 to 2003 the largest component of growth by employment status was the employment of part-time women faculty. This sector of employment increased by over 50 % compared with an increase of 32 % of part-time men faculty.

Though we do not have data on the salaries of part-time faculty by gender we can say that the salaries of a very large share of all of the part-time faculty are extremely modest. Almost two-thirds of the part-time faculty earned a base salary at their home institutions of \$10,000 or less in 2003 while 90 % of the part-time faculty earned \$25,000 or less in that year. In addition, many of the part-time faculty do not earn benefits equivalent to the benefits earned by full-time faculty, and some may not earn any benefits. The compensation of the part-time faculty, including salaries and benefits is so disproportionately low as compared with the compensation of full-time faculty that there is increasingly strident activism calling for higher compensation and better working conditions. Since a higher proportion of women than men faculty is part-time, these less fortunate conditions impact a greater share of the women than men faculty.

A good part of the explanation for the meager salaries of the part-time faculty is that almost 90 % hold a rank of instructor, lecturer, other rank, or no rank. Only 10 % hold a rank of assistant professor, associate professor, or professor.

It may also be explained in part by the fact that institutions pay women less than they pay men so they save money employing women. The U.S. Department of Education reports that on average, faculty women employed full-time earn 21.5 % less than faculty men across all accredited institutions. Women were paid \$69,000 in 2012–2013 as compared with men who were paid \$84,000, a stunning difference of \$15,000 a year.

This salary gap is generated by a combination of four separate phenomena. First, there is the differing distributions of women and men faculty by type of institution. A higher percentage of the women are employed at the less prestigious, lower paying institutions. Second, a larger percentage of the women are employed in the lower paid ranks of associate and assistant professor ranks while a larger percentage of men faculty are employed in the higher paid rank of professor. Third, at each of the three faculty ranks, women are paid less than men. And fourth, on average the women are probably younger than the men because a larger share of them have been hired more recently and have accumulated less seniority.

What is dismaying to the women in American higher education is that not only are women paid less at all three major faculty ranks but the salary gap has widened between women and men professors over the last two decades and it has not narrowed between the salaries of women and men associate and assistant professors. This salary situation persists in spite of the efforts of the feminists to teach women more effective skills when it comes time to negotiate their salaries.

Women have made impressive gains in the number employed as faculty in American colleges and universities. In a fairly short 20-year period from 1990 to 2010 women accounted for 60% of the increase in the total number of faculty and only 40% were men. Over this period women rose from about a third of the total number of faculty to almost half.

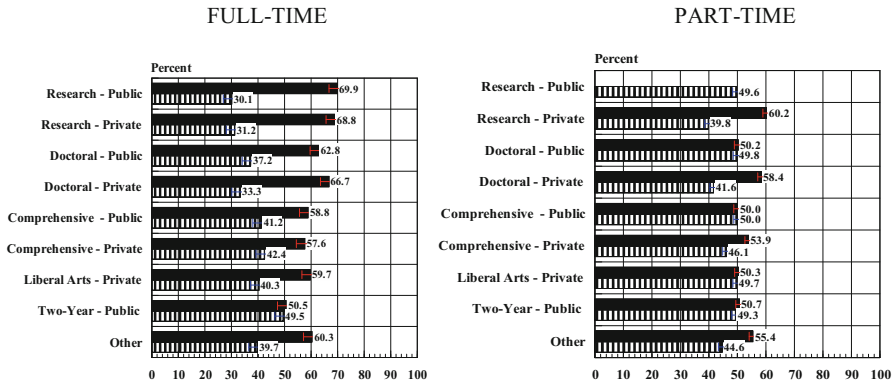
## **Distribution of Women and Men Faculty and Instructional Staff, by Type and Control of Institution**

Usually analysts working with higher education institutions distinguish between public and private control, and five different types: (1) Research, (2) Doctoral, (3) Comprehensive – all 4-year institutions, (4) Liberal arts colleges which are almost all private 4-year colleges, and (5) 2-year colleges, the majority of which are public.

The patterns of employment of women and men faculty and instructional staff are very different between full-time and part-time status. At virtually all of the institutions, at both public and private institutions, and at all five types of institutions, far fewer women are employed full-time than men. Generally, fewer than 40% of the full-time faculty and instructional staff are women and more than 60% are men. Of those employed part-time just under 50% are women and just over 50% are men (Chart 2.6).

## **Women Faculty in the For-Profit Sector**

A private for-profit college or university is private property from which the owner seeks to earn income. Inadequate response by the public sector institutions to the growing demand for college education has created space for the growth of the



**Chart 2.6** Percent distribution of faculty and instructional staff in postsecondary institutions by type and control, by gender, fall 2003 (Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics: 2014*, Table 315.50. Legend: Solid Black Bars=Men, Striped Bars=Women)

for-profit sector. The for-profit sector has expanded rapidly in the United States over the course of the most recent decades. Much of the growth in the private sector has been in the for-profit component, not the traditional non-profit sector. Actually, the private non-profit institutions are more similar to the public institutions than they are to the private for-profit institutions. The private for-profit institutions are sufficiently different from the private non-profit institutions that higher education should be characterized as having three sectors, not just the traditional two of public and private.

Women faculty have been a significant part of the growth of the for-profit sector. In 2013 there were close to 127,000 faculty employed in the for-profit colleges and universities. Of these, about 55%, or 70,000 were women faculty. Actually, women faculty predominate in all of the four components of the for-profit sector, comprising 51.4% of the 4-year for-profit full-time faculty and 54.4% of the 4-year for-profit part-time faculty. Women account for an even slightly higher percentage of the 2-year for-profit faculty: 58.6% of the full-time faculty in the 2-year for-profit sector and 60.9% of the 2-year part-time faculty.

Women faculty in the for-profit sector may be working for lower salaries and fewer benefits, without the protection of tenure.

## Faculty Salaries by Gender

While the increases in the numbers of women employed as faculty are very impressive, these employment gains are not accompanied by significant narrowing of the historic gap between the salaries of women and men faculty.

The gap in faculty salaries of all faculty by gender has not narrowed. Indeed, the salary gap has widened between women and men who are full professors. In con-



stant 2012–2013 dollars, the gap between the salaries of women and men full professors has widened from just over \$10,000 in 1986 to over \$16,000 in 2012, as documented in Chart 2.7. Over a career these annual gaps in salary could amount to hundreds of thousands of dollars and significantly disadvantage women in the accumulation of essential social security benefits based on annual salary, as well as retirement benefits generally.

The lower salaries on average for the women faculty are accounted for in part by a different distribution of women and men faculty employed by types of institution, by faculty rank, by discipline, and by activity. A higher percentage of women are employed in less prestigious and lower paying institutions; a higher percentage of women are employed in lower faculty ranks; and a higher percentage of women are employed in lower paying disciplines. Finally, faculty employed by higher education institutions are considered to have one of three primary activities: instruction, research, and service. The patterns of primary activity differ by gender. Close to half of the faculty whose primary activity is instruction are women, and close to half of the faculty whose primary activity is service are women. There is a difference, however, among faculty whose primary activity is research. Close to 60 % of the faculty whose primary activity is research are men while only about 40 % are women, as shown on Chart 2.8. Faculty engaged in research generally earn more than faculty in instruction. As a consequence, the lower percentage of women in research could help to explain the lower salaries of women.

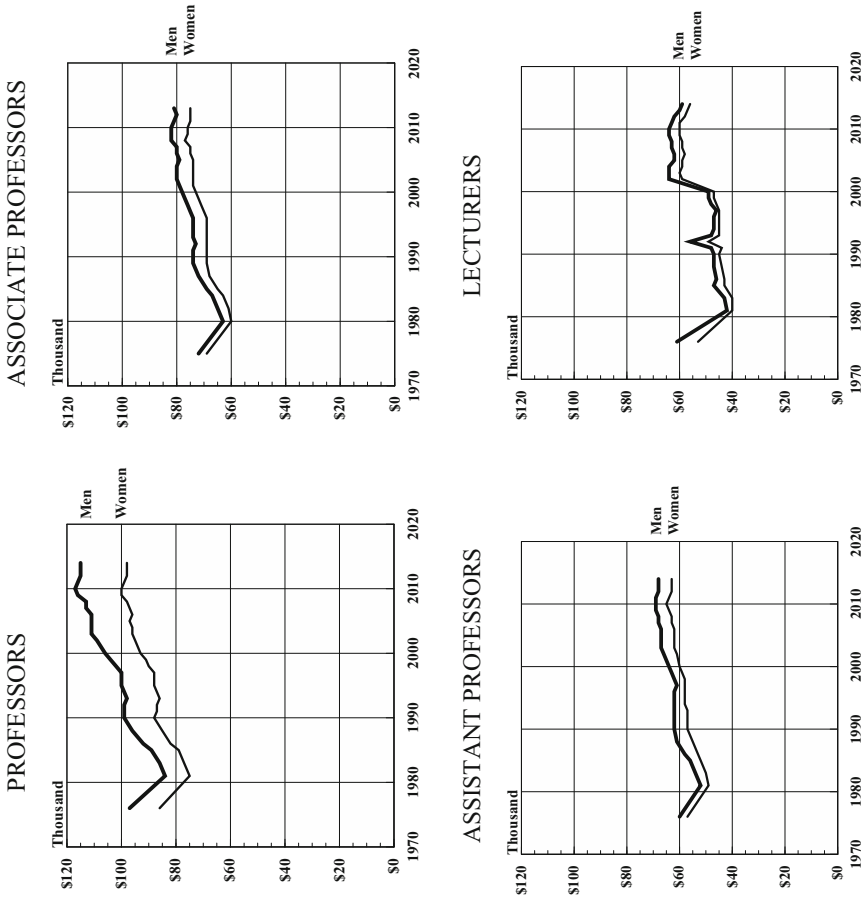
## **Women Faculty with Tenure**

We begin with two questions: first, what is tenure? And second, does tenure impact faculty women the same as faculty men, or differently?

Historically, American higher education was characterized by the tenure system at most of the 4-year colleges and especially at the prestigious universities. The core principles combine academic freedom and tenure in the belief that freedom of teachers to teach and of students to learn requires protection from dismissal except for cause, such as moral turpitude. Since the promulgation of the original Statement of Principles of Academic Freedom and Tenure by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) in 1915 it has evolved over decades in negotiation with the institutions with refinements incorporated in 1940. Institutions pressed to include financial exigency as a just cause for termination of faculty and the AAUP countered seeking to avoid manufactured crises insisting that the exigency be demonstrably real.

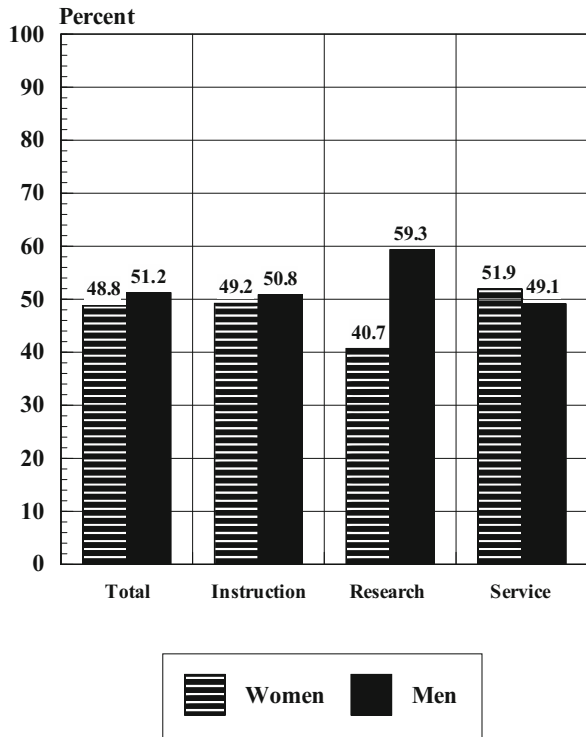
The public institutions have tended to maintain their tenure systems, while the private institutions have managed a substantial move away from tenure. Often tenure at the private institutions is replaced with term contracts. Tenure is virtually nonexistent in the for-profit institutions.

As the management of institutions focused increasingly on balancing budgets in the face of diminishing outside resources, the granting of tenure came to be seen as



**Chart 2.7** Gaps in faculty salaries between women and men by rank in constant 2013–2014 dollars: 1974–1975 to 2013–2014 (Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics*: 2014, Table 316.10)

**Chart 2.8** Faculty activity percent by gender 2003  
 (Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics: 2013*, Table 314.40)

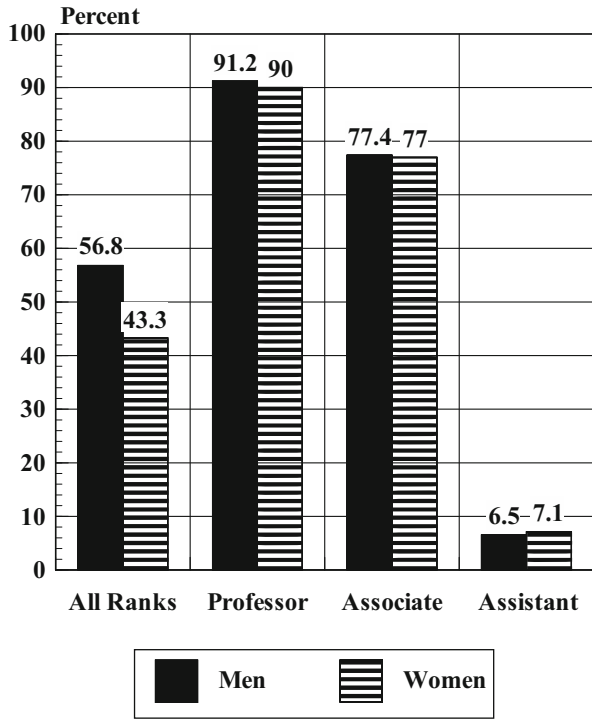


creating very large fixed costs limiting the ability of the institutions to respond to necessary change. Consequently, pressures mounted on many campuses to terminate tenure. What happened instead, however, was that rather than take on the faculty in a direct confrontation, the tenure system was simply eroded by offering employment to new faculty only on a non-tenure track basis. Further, many of the new hires were only in part-time positions.

Thus, many men were hired in the past while institutions were still embracing tenure. Women are now seeking employment as faculty in an era when opportunities for tenure-track positions are no longer being offered, or at least are offered much less often. Typically, as documented by one self-reflective study by the Harvard Faculty of Arts and Sciences (Harvard 2005), women are offered only a small fraction of the tenure-track positions that are offered to men.

While women generally have about the same percent with tenure as men within each faculty rank, a smaller percentage are employed in the faculty ranks with the highest percent with tenure. Chart 2.9 shows that 91.2% of the men employed as professors as well as 90% of the women employed as professors. The gap in the percent of women in all ranks with tenure is explained by the fact that many fewer women than men are employed as professors.

**Chart 2.9** Percent of faculty with tenure at institutions with a tenure system by rank, by gender (Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics: 2014, Table 316.80)



### Women in the Higher Education Pipeline

Actually, for women the higher education pipeline begins in the elementary grades, encouraging girls to excel in school and take the classes, including math classes that are prerequisites for college, that will prepare them to apply. We will begin here with the next step, which is to enroll in college. Subsequent steps are to complete an undergraduate curriculum, and then enter graduate school. Women who are preparing to teach at the college level then go on for a master’s degree and ultimately a doctorate. Once entering a career in academia, women could aspire to become department chairs, deans, provosts or vice presidents for academic affairs. At the pinnacle of a career in academia women could become college presidents and possibly members of the governing boards of trustees. This section of the chapter compares the participation of women with that of men at each major milestone along the pipeline.

## Enrollment of Women Students in Colleges and Universities

While the focus of this chapter is primarily on faculty, it is important to take at least a brief glance at women students enrolled in colleges and universities. They account for more than half of the entrants into the pipeline that ultimately produces women eligible to become faculty members.

Chart 2.10 documents the trends in college enrollment of women and men from 1950 to 2012. Up until about 1980 men enrolled in college had always significantly outnumbered women. Beginning about 1980, however, women students began to outnumber men. Amazingly, there was very little increase in the college enrollment of men for a period of almost 25 years from the mid-1970s until the late 1990s. During this entire period, while the enrollment of men was almost flat, the number of women increased almost continually. Since 2000 the number of men enrolled in colleges has begun to increase again, but the gap previously created by the women continues to widen. By 2012 there were close to 2.8 million more women than men enrolled in American colleges and universities.

The trend in enrollment from 1950 until 2012 in American colleges and universities by gender is shown on Chart 2.10.

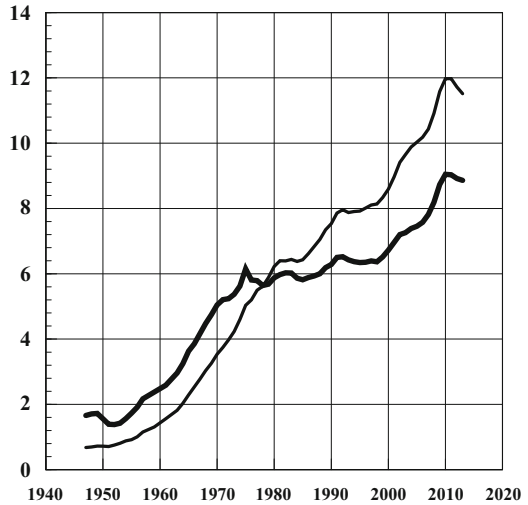
## Women in the STEM Pipeline

In recent years in the United States there has been a particular focus on the STEM fields: science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. President Obama has declared that excellence in the STEM fields is essential to our national well-being and success in global economic competition. An immediate question is what is the role of women in these fields. We know that few of the faculty in these fields are women, but is the number of women in the pipeline increasing? One possible indicator is the number of BA degrees awarded to women in the STEM fields. It would be reasonable to take data on the number of degrees awarded to women in the physical sciences, information technology, engineering, and mathematics as proxies for the more broadly defined STEM fields.

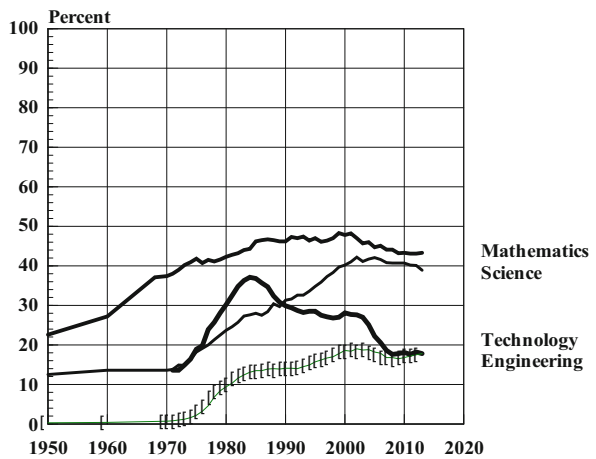
The unfortunate answer is that in all four of these STEM fields the number of BA degrees awarded to women has either plateaued or actually declined. As the trend data in Chart 2.11 document, BA degrees awarded to women in science, engineering, and mathematics increased significantly in the 1970s and 1980s. They peaked more than 10 years ago around 2000 and have since plateaued or declined. In the field of information technology the percentage of BA degrees awarded to women peaked in the mid-1980s and since then has plummeted to less than half the peak percent.

Interestingly, in some of the STEM fields, particularly in information technology and engineering, a higher percentage of the MA and PhD degrees are awarded to

**Chart 2.10** Trends in the enrollment of women and men in American colleges and universities, from 1947 to 2013, are shown on Chart 2.10 (Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics: 2014*, Table 303.10)



**Chart 2.11** Trends in the percent of BA degrees in stem fields awarded to women 1950–2013 (Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics: 2014*, Table 325)



women than the percentage of BA degrees awarded to women. The detailed percentages are shown on the following Table 2.1.

### Doctorate Degrees Awarded to Women

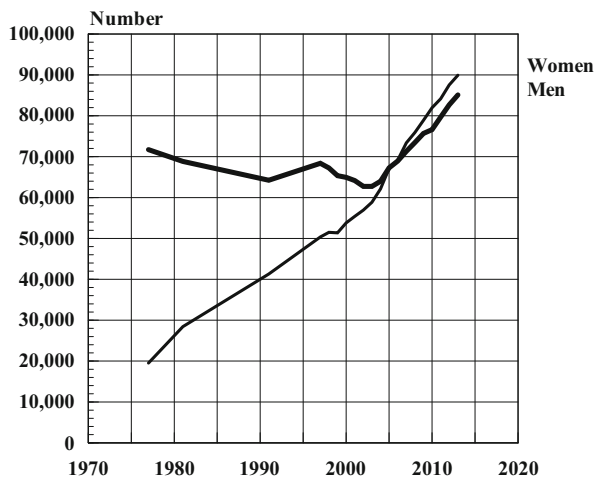
In judging the appropriateness of the share of faculty at American colleges and universities who are women it would be relevant to assess the number of women in the pool of people who might be considered for appointment as faculty. Most senior faculty in American institutions of higher education hold doctorate degrees.

**Table 2.1** The percent of B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. degrees awarded to women in the stem fields

	B.A.			M.A.			Ph.D.		
	Percent		Women	Percent		Women	Percent		Women
	Total	Women		Total	Women		Total	Women	
Science	28,050	10,907	38.9	7,011	2,636	37.6	5,514	1,868	33.9
Technology	50,962	9,088	17.8	22,777	6,239	27.4	1,826	353	19.3
Engineering	102,984	18,351	17.8	45,325	10,831	23.9	9,467	2,162	22.8
Mathematics	20,453	8,851	43.3	6,957	2,779	39.9	1,823	531	29.1

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics: 2014, Table 325

**Chart 2.12** Doctorate degrees awarded by American colleges and universities by gender 1976–77–2012–13 (Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics*: 2014, Table 324.20)



Consequently, it is relevant to develop information about the number of women earning doctorate degrees, as compared with the number of men.

In the mid-1970s, close to four times as many men as women earned doctorates in American colleges and universities. In academic year 1976–1977 men earned almost 72,000 doctorates while women earned only about 19,500. Then, the number of doctorates earned by men slipped to a low point of 63,000 in 2002, before climbing back up – but the number of doctorates earned by men in 2006–2007, was still fewer than the number earned by men 30 years earlier in 1976–1977. Meanwhile, the number of doctorates earned by women increased so rapidly and steadily, that by 2005 women earned as many doctorates as men, and by 2012–2013 women earned almost 5,000 more doctorates than men, 90,000 for women as compared with 85,000 for men. These trends by gender are shown in Chart 2.12

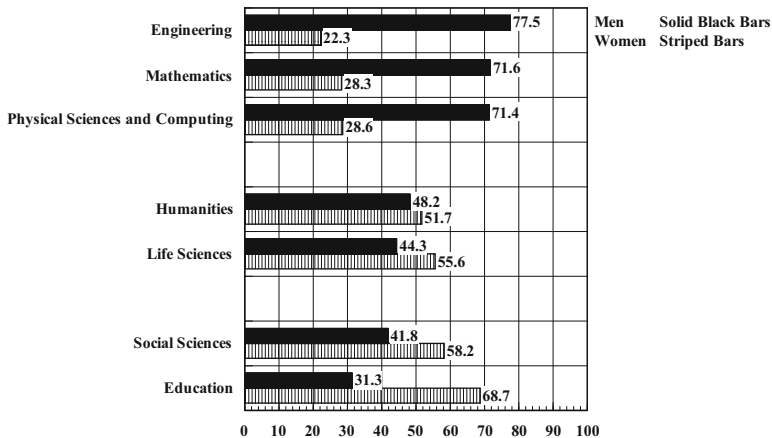
It is important to recognize, however, that the pattern of degrees earned by discipline by women is completely different from the pattern of degrees earned by men. Men dominate the fields of engineering as well as the fields of physical sciences, mathematics, and computer sciences. Men earned 77.5 % of the doctor’s degrees in

engineering in 2011–2012 as compared with only 22.3 earned by women. Likewise, men earned 71.4% of the doctor’s degrees in the combined fields of physical sciences, mathematics, and computer sciences compared with only 28.5% earned by women.

On the other hand, women dominate the fields of life sciences, social sciences, and psychology, and especially education. Women earned 68.7% of the doctorates in education in 2011–2012, as compared with only 31.3% earned by men. The single field where women and men earn about the same share of the doctor’s degrees is the humanities. Women earned 51.7% while men earned a fairly close 48.3%. The shares of doctorates earned by gender in selected disciplines is shown on Chart 2.13

### Women College and University Presidents

Women have made great strides at the highest executive levels with increasing numbers being appointed college and university president, including at highly prestigious institutions. Hannah Grey notably moved from serving as Provost at Yale to become Acting President in 1977–1978 on the occasion of the unexpected resignation of Kingman Brewster, the President of Yale to become the American Ambassador to the Court of Saint James. Hannah Gray was then appointed to be President of the University of Chicago serving for 15 years from 1978 to 1993. She was the first women President of a major university in the history of the United States. Drew Gilpin Faust became the 28th, but first women, president of Harvard University in 2007 after creating and then being appointed the first Dean of the Radcliff Institute for Advanced Studies established after the merger of Radcliff with Harvard.



**Chart 2.13** Percent of persons receiving doctoral degrees in selected disciplines by gender 2011–2012 (Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics*: 2014, Table 324.80)



Interestingly, President Faust was appointed after the resignation of President Laurence Summers in the wake of strong faculty criticism about remarks he had made respecting the capabilities of women. At a press conference on the Harvard campus after her appointment Drew Faust observed “I hope that my own appointment can be one symbol of an opening of opportunities that would have been inconceivable even a generation ago.” She also added, “I’m not the woman president of Harvard, I’m the president of Harvard.”

Since 1986 the American Council on Education has conducted surveys of the American College Presidents and in 2014 published the eighth edition of a comprehensive report. In 1986 women held 11 % of the presidents of American colleges and universities. Many were presidents of women’s colleges and when these colleges became co-educational, were merged with other institutions, or were closed there were fewer opportunities for women to become college presidents. By 2014, however, women accounted for almost one-third of the college presidents, though a high proportion of them head smaller, less prestigious institutions.

The 2014 ACE study shows that in 2011 overall a higher percentage of public institutions (29.4 %) than private (21.9 %) are headed by women presidents. Generally speaking, the percentage of women presidents is lowest (between 5 % and 10 %) among the most prestigious universities, and increases (up to 30–40 %) for the 2-year associate institutions, as the prestige of the institutions diminishes.

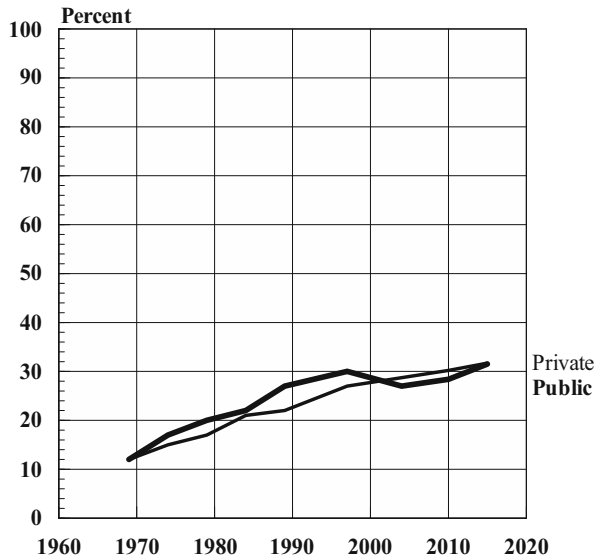
## **Women on College and University Boards of Trustees**

Considering women in positions of leadership in American higher education it is extremely important to examine the representation and role of women trustees on the governing boards of institutions. The increasing numbers of women serving as trustees has, according to surveys of the Association of Governing Boards of Colleges and Universities (AGB), shifted the priorities of the boards somewhat toward academic quality and the student experience with less emphasis on finances.

All of the public and private non-profit (also known as “independent”) colleges and universities in the United States are governed by Boards of Trustees, while for-profit institutions are guided by their business owners. The public and private non-profit Boards set policy guidelines and generally select and evaluate the performance of the president. Members of a public institution board may be appointed by the state governor and reflect political preferences. Often members are reappointed for several terms. The private nonprofit boards may be self-renewing, with a board committee nominating new board members at the expiration of the term of a previous board member.

In the realm of public institutions, women made great strides in their share of membership on governing boards for three decades, almost trebling from 11 % in the late 1960s to 30 % the late 1990s. In the following decade after 2000, the share of women on public college and university governing boards actually dipped slightly and did not regain their 30 % share until 2010. According to AGB’s most recent

**Chart 2.14** Percent of American college and university governing board members who are women 1970–2015 (Source; Association of Governing Boards of Colleges and Universities, 2010; Updated in the September/October 2015 issue of *Trusteeship*, page 2)



report, by 2015 the share of women governing board members at public institutions had only reached 31.5 %, in effect making virtually no gains at all in the last 15 years, as shown on Chart 2.14.

In the realm of private non-profit institutions, women have made almost steady gains from 1969 when they accounted for a mere 11 % of governing board members to 2015 when women rose to 31.7 %. Currently the share of women governing board members is virtually the same in the public and private institutions, again as shown on Chart 2.14.

There are still very few women serving as members of the most powerful board committees which are finance and audit. And very few women are serving as chairmen of either public or private governing boards. The tendency of boards to reappoint serving members at the end of their initial terms makes it difficult for women to break through the “old boy” networks.

Close to half of the members of the governing boards of American colleges and universities come from business. The fact that women are still not well represented among the senior ranks of American business executives may help explain why they are not a higher percentage of college and university board members. Very few board members are faculty members, whether women or men faculty.

## **Factors Outside Academia Affecting Women in American Higher Education: Critical Factors That Helped Women Succeed in American Higher Education in the Past**

### ***Title IX***

Title IX was written into the 1972 Amendments to the original Higher Education Act passed by the U.S. Congress in 1964. It prohibits sex discrimination in any educational program or activity receiving any type of federal financial aid. It covers all programs at an institution if any program receives the financial aid. And it covers all programs, not just athletic programs. It was signed into law by Richard Nixon in 1972 and survived decades of legislative, regulatory, and judicial attempts to eliminate its provisions or at least vitiate them.

When the U.S. Department of Education was created in 1980 during the administration of President Jimmy Carter, it was given jurisdiction over Title IX through the Office of Civil Rights. It helped create a climate in which academic women sought to clarify and enforce their rights. Enforcement of Title IX, or at least the threat of a legal case based on Title IX, continues until today to be an important force is helping women succeed in academic pursuits.

### ***Affirmative Action***

The first use of the term “affirmative action” was in an Executive Order issued in 1961 by President John Kennedy that required federal contractors to take “affirmative action” to hire employees without regard to race, creed, or national origin. Gender was not initially taken into consideration but in subsequent years the criteria were expanded to protect women. Affirmative action is based in policies, not legislation. It is the outgrowth of the civil rights movement and attempts to create equal opportunity, primarily in education and employment, for members of underrepresented minorities and, subsequently, for women. It has been highly controversial as critiques claimed it would lead to deterioration of quality. Proponents argue that idea is absolutely wrong. Affirmative action is about actively broadening the pool of qualified candidates, not about lowering standards.

Affirmative action programs for women in education include actively broadening the pool of talent from which candidates for employment are selected. It also extends to grants and graduate fellowship programs aimed at helping women students move into fields where their participation has been discouraged, such as engineering, math, and the physical sciences.

## ***Faculty Unions***

The National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) are unions of American teachers both of which have divisions organizing higher education faculty, and the American Association of Professors (AAUP) operates as a union in some circumstances.

Faculty unions could possibly have had some impact on relative faculty salaries by gender. Though the gap in the salaries of men and women faculty in the associate and assistant faculty ranks has not narrowed, the fact that the gap is relatively small could possibly be explained by the fact that the higher the membership in faculty unions, the smaller the gap between the salaries of women and men faculty.

## **Important Trends That Will Affect Women in American Higher Education in the Future**

### ***Demographic Trends***

Both faculty and administrators are aging. A large share are older men will be facing normal retirement in very few years. This will lead to shortages of faculty and administrators which will create new opportunities for women who are prepared.

### ***Economic Trends***

On one hand, institutions facing economic and financial constraints are trying to balance their budgets by hiring women at lower salaries than they pay men. Women advocates of equal pay for equal work are trying to eliminate discrimination against women to end the differential pay, but progress is slow.

## **Overall Conclusions About the Participation Rate and the Changing Role of Women in American Higher Education**

The participation rate of women in American higher education simply measures the numbers. The changing role is a different assessment which examines whether the actual functions women perform in higher education are evolving over time.

The conclusions about the participation of women in American higher education are drawn primarily from analysis of trend data published by the U. S. Department

of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, in recent editions of the Digest of Education Statistics. These trend data clearly document two conclusions:

The first conclusion about the participation of women is clearly positive: There has been a phenomenal increase in the participation of women in American higher education over at least the last two decades, as students, faculty, and administrators.

The second conclusion about the participation of women is clearly negative: A higher percentage of women than men are employed at lower-paying colleges and universities; a higher percentage of women than men are employed in lower-paying jobs at the lower-paying institutions, and in each of these jobs women are paid less than men. Most discouraging is the fact that the salary gap is not narrowing between women and men faculty at any rank, and at the rank of professor the gap in salaries continues to widen. Over the course of a professional career of, say, 35 years this difference could reach to as much as half a million dollars or more.

With respect to the changing role of women in higher education, the conclusion would be modest. The teaching disciplines continue to be gendered, with women representing a much higher percentage of faculty in education and the social sciences and a much lower percentage in the sciences. Movement of women into the STEM fields could be characterized as a changing role, but gains in the STEM fields in the 1980s have slipped away in the following decades. A few women are moving into executive positions and taking on broader decision-making roles than they had as faculty. And women have to a modest degree changed the priorities of college and university governing boards from finances to the quality of education and student experiences. But summarizing the results of the Association of Governing Board's 2015 survey of trends in the number of women trustees, Susan Johnston AGB's Executive Vice President titled her report as "A Disappointing Showing."

## **Broader Questions Raised by These Trends**

Trends documented in this chapter raise broader questions: One important question is how were the higher education institutions able to increase faculty employment by an astounding 84% over the two decades, from 1991 to 2011, a period generally characterized by constrained resources, while student enrollment increased by only 46%?

A corollary question is why have the majority of these new hires been women? Why were 62% of the additional faculty hires over these same 20 years accounted for by women? American higher education institutions have been hiring more women than men for decades. Perhaps men have more lucrative opportunities in business than women do, so some men choose an alternative career to academia.

Another important question is what is the current and expected future impact on higher education of the use of instructional and communications technology and the

widespread use of online teaching and learning. Further, might the impact be different for women and men? The expanded use of instructional technology and greater reliance on online teaching was expected to reduce the number of faculty needed to teach face-to-face classes, but it apparently has not, at least not yet. Is the IT being used more to enhance face-to-face classes and not to replace those classes and reduce the number of faculty needed?

These questions are generated by hard, verifiable trend data documenting differences between the outcomes for women and men in academia. The answers to these questions range far into the realm of speculation. Searching for the explanations for these differences stimulates critical questions about the continuing role of direct and indirect discrimination against women in American higher education. Work needs to be done to replace these questions with factual answers to use as the basis for an action agenda.

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