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Political Science in a Different Voice: Women Faculty Perspectives on the Status of Women in Political Science Departments in the South

Committee on the Status of Women, Southern Political Science Association

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Introduction

As we approach the American Political Science Association's Centennial Celebration and reflect upon the history of the discipline, perhaps nothing has changed the face of political science more than the growing numbers of women in the profession. The entry of women into the field of political science, however, was not always welcomed. Gender discrimination posed barriers to women's academic career advancement. Even into the late 1980s, subtle discrimination perpetuated what researchers described as a "chilly climate" for women faculty. Through a commitment to gender equity by the APSA, the Women's Caucus, regional associations, and political science departments, significant progress has been made in the last decade. This progress, however, has been measured only from the perspective of department chairs through surveys regarding issues of recruitment and retention of women. The limited information that department chairs have been able and/or willing to provide has frustrated our attempts to clearly measure the status of women in the profession. This study, made possible by a Centennial Research Grant from the American Political Science Association and a supplemental grant from the Southern Political Science Association, adds the direct perspective of women faculty in order to understand fully the scope of the barriers that remain.

Background

Since the late 1980s, the Southern Political Science Association (SPSA) has monitored the progress of women in political science by regularly administering surveys to political science department chairs in the region. Three surveys have been conducted, the first two reported limited progress towards gender

equity in the profession, noting in particular the underrepresentation of women at the top of the profession (see Stetson et al. 1990, and Guy 1992). More recently, the 2000 survey of department chairs reported significant progress in increasing the representation of women at all ranks, but especially at Ph.D. granting institutions where the number of women in tenured positions at the rank of associate and full professor doubled since the previous survey (see van Assendelft et al. 2001). In 1990, women held only 5.8% of full professor positions and in 2000 they constituted 11.2% of full professors.

While women have made considerable progress towards gender equity in the profession, many of the recommendations made by the Committee on the Status of Women (CSW) over the past decade have not been enacted. The 2000 survey of department chairs indicated that issues of recruitment remain salient. Few departments formally and/or actively recruit women applicants. As many as a third of department chairs are unaware of their college's or university's policies regarding maternity leave or childcare. Few schools offer family friendly policies. There was also a notable absence of formalized mentoring and only limited research support for junior faculty members. These results prompted the CSW to strongly recommend a follow-up survey of women faculty—rather than department chairs—to gain the direct perspective of women on the issues raised in previous surveys.

With funding from the APSA and SPSA, in January of 2002 the CSW sent surveys to 878 female faculty members in political science departments in the South. After sending two waves of surveys and follow-up postcards, a total of 168 usable responses were returned, yielding a response rate of 19.1%. After adjusting for the number of surveys returned to sender and

Note

The Committee on the Status of Women in the Profession (CSWP) of the American Political Science Association is pleased to present—and to call to the attention of members of the profession—the following report of the Committee on the Status of Women of the Southern Political Science Association. In recent years, particularly at the initiative of former President Bob Putnam, various committees of the Association have been exploring the question of "family-friendly policies" as these might affect the careers of political scientists. The CSWP has welcomed this initiative, as it responds to some of the needs this Committee has addressed in its various reports on the status of women in the profession (most recently, in the June 2001 issue of PS). This report, an update on the status of women in the political science profession in the South, makes clear how important "family-friendly" university and departmental policies are to the success of women (and of men!) in the profession. During the coming year, the CSWP will be reviewing family-friendly policies in other academic organizations, as well as exploring some corporate initiatives. Our plan is to report our findings to members of the profession in PS during 2004.

Martha Ackelsberg
Smith College
CSWP President

by removing retired faculty, graduate students, and women outside of political science departments from the denominator ($n = 85$), our adjusted response rate is 21.1%.¹ Although the response rate for the 2002 survey of female faculty is significantly lower than the response

rate for the 2000 survey of department chairs, a representative sample of female faculty at all ranks responded.

In the 2002 survey of female faculty, a plurality of women are employed at the assistant level (40%), with slightly fewer women at the associate level (33%), and even fewer at the full professor rank (19%). The remaining 7% are in other positions, primarily as instructors or in visiting positions. These numbers are nearly identical to those reported from our 2000 survey of department chairs where 44% of women were employed at the assistant level, 35% at the associate level, and 21% at the full professor level. The proportion of male and female faculty by rank in the southern region is consistent with national trends. In the southern region in 2000, women comprised 31.2% of assistant professors, 26.1% of associate professors, and 11.8% of full professors. The 2001–2002 APSA Survey of Departments reports that nationwide women hold 35.6% of positions at the assistant professor level, 26.3% at the associate professor level, and 13.9% of positions at the full professor level.

Our data are also representative in terms of the types of institutions where women are employed. In the 2002 survey of female faculty, respondents are fairly evenly spread across colleges and universities. Approximately one-third (31.1%) are employed by colleges where a Bachelor's degree is the highest degree offered, another 27.4% work in master's programs, and the remainder (41.5%) are at Ph.D.-granting institutions. The 2001–2002 APSA Survey of Departments indicates that nationwide 30.1% of women are employed in B.A. political science programs, 25.8% in master's programs, and 44.1% in Ph.D. programs.

The majority of women in our sample specialize and/or have teaching responsibilities in American Politics (59%), nearly equal percentages teach courses in International Relations and Comparative Politics (26% and 29%, respectively), while the fewest women specialize in Political Theory (16%). Seventy percent of female faculty members in the South teach in one subfield of the discipline, 24% teach in two, and 3% teach in more than two subfields. Women who teach at undergraduate colleges are the most likely to teach in more than one subfield. In fact, approximately 46% of women teaching at undergraduate colleges in the South teach in at least two different subfields, while less than one quarter (24%) of women in masters programs do so, and even fewer (15%) women at Ph.D.-granting universities do so. For those faculty

Table 1
Distribution of Junior Female Faculty by Presence of Senior Female Faculty

	Departmental Characteristics			
	0 Female Faculty Members	0 Female Full Professors	1 Female Full Professor	>1 Female Full Professors
Total # of Departments	61	97	64	28
Total # of Women Faculty	0	228	226	241
% Junior Women Faculty	0	41.3	29.5	29.2

Source: Data compiled by the authors from the 2002–2004 APSA *Directory of Political Science Faculty*. The Data are missing for 151 (37%) of the 405 political science departments located in the southern region.

members teaching in more than one subfield, the most common combination is International Politics and Comparative Politics (nearly 50% of those teaching in two subfields indicated these two subfields), while the second most common combination is American Politics and Political Theory (24%).

The purpose of our survey was to allow women faculty to share their perspectives on the status of women in political science. The questionnaire used in the 2000 survey of department chairs was adapted to include numerous open-ended responses. We inquired about various recruitment and retention issues and report the results of our survey here.²

The Findings: Perspectives of Female Faculty Members

Recruitment

To what extent are departments actively recruiting female candidates for full-time faculty positions? What are women's perspectives regarding the effectiveness of their department's efforts to recruit female candidates? In our 2000 survey of department chairs, we found that departments hired female faculty in nearly identical percentages as the proportion of female graduate students in political science (38%). Out of all of the departments in the South, approximately a fourth of them had not hired a single female in the past decade. A large majority (75%) of political science departments have at least one full-time female faculty member, though, and the average political science department in the South has two women. As Table 1 indicates, even though women are fairly well distributed across colleges and universities in the South, over 40% of the junior female faculty are in departments where

there are no female full professors. An additional 30% are in departments with only one female full professor.

With such numbers in mind, does recruiting additional female candidates seem to be a key priority for departments? Apparently not, according to our data. Approximately one-third of the departments reported having a policy to increase the numbers of women on their faculty (35%), leaving two-thirds of the departments without such a policy. According to our 2002 Survey of Female Faculty, the impressions of female faculty are a bit different, as fewer women indicated that their departments had any policy to recruit female candidates (22.3%). When we look at those women who have actually served on departmental search committees, an even smaller percentage indicate that such a policy is in place (17.4%). Further, one-third (33.3%) of female faculty said that their departments lacked special resources to recruit women.

Our respondents report that departments, colleges, and universities make various efforts to recruit women to the faculty ranging from contacting graduate programs to encourage female applicants to apply for positions, to advertising job openings in Women's Caucus newsletters, to including women faculty on search committees. When asked, however, "How would you evaluate your department's efforts to recruit and hire women?" many women indicated that more needs to be done to diversify their departments. "I am one of only four women in the history of the department and the two who proceeded me left dissatisfied. There's good reason to think my other remaining colleague won't stay long. The department has serious problems with recruitment in general, much less searching only women. The 'powers that be' have traditionally been

very conservative and not at all favorable to aggressive AA/EO.” Another faculty woman writes. “I was an affirmative action hire and I was treated by my colleagues as such. I experienced considerable sexual harassment. Nonetheless, I have endured.” Our data suggest that an important factor in successfully recruiting and hiring women seems to be the presence of other women faculty in the department. The following comment demonstrates one woman’s perception of this difference. “I recently left a department where I was the only woman. The chair there was very good at giving lip service to hiring more women. I am currently in a program that is about half women—the difference in the environment is NIGHT AND DAY” [original emphasis]. In general, respondents from departments where women faculty hold senior rank and/or administrative positions also note a positive impact on diversity. “There is an impressive number of female faculty at all levels of achievement that make [the school] an appealing workplace for recruiting women.”

Tenure and Promotion

After women are hired, how do they progress toward tenure and promotion? How do they evaluate their departments’ efforts to tenure and promote women? What steps do departments take in order to maximize their faculty members’ productivity and progress? We asked a variety of questions to get at this issue. First, we inquired whether or not their departments have written standards for tenure and promotion, and whether or not these standards were explained during the hiring process. A majority of women responded in the affirmative to both of these questions—60% say their departments have written tenure and promotion standards, and slightly fewer indicate that such standards were explained (56%). More than three-quarters (77%) of the women indicated that they were evaluated on a regular basis, and annual reviews were by far the most common (85%). Thus, female faculty, for the most part, have a sense of their department’s tenure expectations, and receive fairly regular evaluations to mark their progress toward tenure.

Many departments also appear to be implementing a variety of programs and opportunities to assist faculty in their progress toward tenure and/or promo-

tion. One such way is by instituting some form of mentoring programs for junior faculty. Nearly half (46%) of the female faculty indicated that such a program was in place in their department or university. Noticeably fewer women actually have mentors (32%), but closer examination reveals that rank is inversely associated with having a mentor. That is, assistant professors are the most likely to have a mentor (nearly half

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do—48%), full professors are the least likely to have a mentor (only 6% of these women do), and associate professors fall in between (27%). Further, the data suggest that mentoring programs make a difference. In fact, women in colleges or universities with mentoring programs are more than twice as likely to have mentors than those women employed at institutions without such programs (47% vs. 20%). Our data indicate that junior faculty are typically assigned a mentor by the chair of their department or the dean of the college or school. Male and female colleagues serve as mentors but our respondents remarked on the relative lack of women in senior positions. “Several senior colleagues have mentored me informally—all men, given the scarcity of senior women.” The paucity of senior women in departments in the South virtually necessitates that junior faculty will have male mentors.

Turning to other programs, we found that more than three-quarters of the women indicated that their institution provided some sort of faculty development money (80%) and that a majority provide course release time for junior faculty (57%). Course release time is more common in the larger, Ph.D. granting departments while faculty development money is fairly evenly distributed across the different types of institutions.

We also asked women to give an assessment of their department’s efforts to tenure and promote women. Again the

presence of women on the faculty, especially in senior ranks, was perceived as increasing the likelihood that a junior woman would be tenured and promoted within the department. One woman who judged her department’s efforts as “good” reported, “We have three full professors who are women, two assistants. This year we tenured a woman. Women are no more likely to be denied promotion than men in my department.” Contrast this assessment with that of a junior woman at another institution with only one tenured woman faculty member in her department. “Not great, to date. One very qualified woman has received tenure. She is the only woman ever tenured in this department and had to appeal an initial decision denying her tenure before she received it. It’s possible things have improved. The next tenure decision on female faculty will arise when a colleague and I come up for tenure in five years, unless a retirement or relocation results in a tenured hire.” A female faculty member who described her department’s record as “excellent” shared the secret of their success: “Junior faculty are reviewed and mentored informally and formally. Faculty development funds are provided for travel to conferences. Grants are available for research (although limited and competitive).”

Yet, for every success story there were failures reported that require attention if political science departments are to tenure and promote women faculty. A woman who labeled her department’s efforts as “horrible” writes, “I won tenure as the University Rank and Tenure Committee overturned the Government Department. Before me, three women left before coming up and are now tenured elsewhere. The University is trying to take action to correct this policy, especially as another woman faculty member has just resigned, leaving only a single woman as full-time faculty.” Another woman remarked, “This department thinks once a woman is hired, that is the end of its job. Lots of glass ceilings and glass walls around here.” Her perspective is shared by a colleague at another institution who notes, “There are real problems here, lack of mentoring, higher service loads, and women’s greater attention to teaching all put women junior faculty at a disadvantage. Of the three women (of seven junior faculty) all of us are either looking to leave this university or academia.” Sadly, these problems do not seem to end with a tenure decision. A senior woman remarks that the chilly climate in her department has deteriorated into what she labeled a “toxic

culture.” “My department opposed my promotion to associate professor, but my chair advocated my case. My promotion to full was not opposed. It’s not the policies that obstructed me, it was the male faculty. Policies can only advance an institution so far, if the culture is toxic and if the motivation to deny women promotion and tenure exists, women will suffer.”

Retention

What efforts do departments of political science in the South make to retain their female faculty? Although our data are not longitudinal in nature, we received a variety of responses about women’s impressions of their departments’ abilities to retain women faculty. For some respondents the environment within the department is as important to retention as institutional resources. “The department’s efforts are excellent, given its position in a state university. The intellectual atmosphere and support in the department are outstanding. The obstacles to retention tend to be university-wide (relatively low salary and benefits).” One faculty member remarks that efforts to retain faculty have met with mixed results within her department. “Our efforts are good, but have been only partially successful. [The school] will match salary counter offers, but cannot match the allure of better facilities, lower teaching loads, and the prestige of larger departments, Ph.D. programs, etc. In my case, I received a substantial offer from another institution. [The school] met my demands for a pay increase, and promoted me to boot.” At the other end of the spectrum a woman expressed a desire to resign her position rather than remain at her institution. “Let us say that I would give up tenure to get out of [the school]. It is horrible for women.”

The 2000 survey of department chairs recommended that departments do more to let female job candidates know about various family-friendly benefits, especially recommending that chairs do more to familiarize themselves with department and/or college policies in these areas and to ensure women that the climate is friendly. In our 2002 survey of female faculty, we found that written sexual harassment policies are in effect virtually everywhere, with 98% of the respondents indicating that their institutions had such

a policy. How they were informed about such a policy varied. The majority of women were acquainted with their institution’s sexual harassment policy during faculty orientation. Many mentioned that the policy was included in the faculty handbook or posted on the college or university web site. A few women had attended faculty workshops where the details of the sexual harassment policy were discussed, sometimes with legal counsel present.

We also inquired about the existence of family leave policies and how they

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might affect a faculty member’s tenure clock. In the 2000 survey of department chairs, we reported that only “19.5% of departments . . . have a formal maternity leave policy, 9.4% have an informal policy, and 15.6% did not know one way or the other” (van As-sendelft, et al. 2001: 336). Turning to the female faculty themselves, a larger number (47.9%) reported that their colleges and universities had a formal policy regarding family leave, while a small minority of female faculty (10.3%) did not know whether or not such a policy existed. Many women indicated that the federal Family and Medical leave Act was the only family leave policy in effect. “We abide by all federal laws. So we can take up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave. Oh boy.” Another respondent highlighted the discrepancy between the federal policy and a semester calendar. “The FMLA is our only policy. Twelve weeks without pay—our semesters are 16 weeks.” Some women were unclear about the specific details of family leave policies at their own institutions. One woman simply wrote, “I don’t know—it [the family leave policy] arrived after my child.” Although we did not inquire

about faculty members’ marital status or whether or not they had children there are some indications that women without children were least informed (as many of the women wrote in the margins of the survey that they would look into these policies when ready to start a family). One woman candidly remarked, “I don’t know because I’m single and have no children.”

Many expressed the continued need for family friendly policies. “Our University still seems stuck in the model of requiring women to plan pregnancies for summer. An attempt was made to update the leave policy, but male faculty seemed opposed to different treatment for female faculty in any manner. Discussion of replacement funds and paid leave had to be dropped. Sexism on this committee was an eye opening experience.” Even those who think that sexism is not a problem for women in political science departments, acknowledged that family leave issues continue to be a concern. “As a woman, I’m very tired of playing victim and avoid those circles on campus. I believe this struggle for women as a special category is over. Family leave remains the key issue for women as well as men.”

Can the tenure clock be stopped when junior faculty take family leave? Approximately one-third of female faculty indicated that the tenure clock could be stopped for family leave reasons, another one-third said the tenure clock would not be stopped, and the remaining women did not know the policy details or were employed at institutions without formal leave policies. Of those women who knew the details of stopping the tenure clock, the majority (58.8%) of them indicated that one year was the norm. The next most common response was that the tenure clock would be stopped for the length of the leave, and a few additional women indicated that leave time was negotiable (15.7%) or lasted for one semester (5.9%).

Finally, we asked about the presence of child-care facilities on college and university campuses. About 40% of the women indicated that their colleges had on-site childcare facilities, while another 28% responded that dependent care reimbursement accounts were available. These facilities and options are important for women faculty trying to balance career and family. “The most crucial issue for many women is balancing work and children. My university has NO maternity policy. This is unbelievable. Also has withdrawn financial support for childcare center. Will turn over to for-profit = low quality.”

Conclusion: Visions of Political Science in the New Millennium

In the end, the women who took the time to respond to our survey and provided us with thoughtful comments about their experiences as political scientists appreciated the opportunity to have their say and to be heard: "I think women still have a long way to go to achieve the respect and salary levels that men enjoy. I do not think this is intentional, but the fact is that a discrepancy exists. Thanks for conducting this survey!"

We recognize that issues related to "campus climate" are difficult both to

quantify and resolve. As one woman writes, "As I see it the problem is no longer in hiring women or even in getting them to complete a Ph.D. Rather it is in keeping them up with the men offered tenure in terms of salary, respect, rewards, awards, acknowledgment and power. Of all these, my department is completely inadequate. Discrimination and disrespect are now subtle, rarely written, often silent, and simply consist of being ignored, excluded, buried but then used every time they need a woman on a committee."

Allowing the different voices of the women in our survey to be heard is an important first step towards opening discussions about the perceptions of gender

equality in political science. In contrast with previous surveys of department chairs, this survey allowed women to share their own thoughts and perspectives about their status in political science departments in the South. To those ends, we consciously strove to reflect the diversity of experiences—both good and bad. In doing so, we found that some women are quite content and feel both valued and respected in their departments while other women report far less positive experiences. To continue monitoring the status of women in the profession, the CSW recommends future surveys of both male and female faculty and graduate students, in addition to department chairs.

Notes

1. The project was funded by a Centennial Research Grant from the American Political Science Association and a supplemental grant from the Southern Political Science Association. Mailing labels for female faculty were obtained from the American Political Science Association. A total of 878 women were surveyed in Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia, Maryland, West Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana,

Texas, Arkansas, the District of Columbia, and Delaware. Surveys were mailed in January of 2002, with a cover letter by Mary Ellen Guy, 2002 SPSA President. A second mailing of surveys was sent out in March after addresses were cross-referenced in the 2002–2004 *APSA Directory of Political Science Faculty*. Follow-up postcards were mailed in April and May. There was a total of 168 usable responses returned, yielding a response rate of 19.1%. However, numerous

surveys were returned to sender, or invalidated by respondents who indicated that they were graduate students, retired, or outside of political science, adjusting the response rate to 21.1%.

2. In selecting quotes for inclusion here, we tried to be as representative of the entire sample as possible. Indeed, many women gave their departments and/or schools glowing report cards, others were far more negative in their assessments, and many fell somewhere in between.

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