

# THE BALANCING ACT

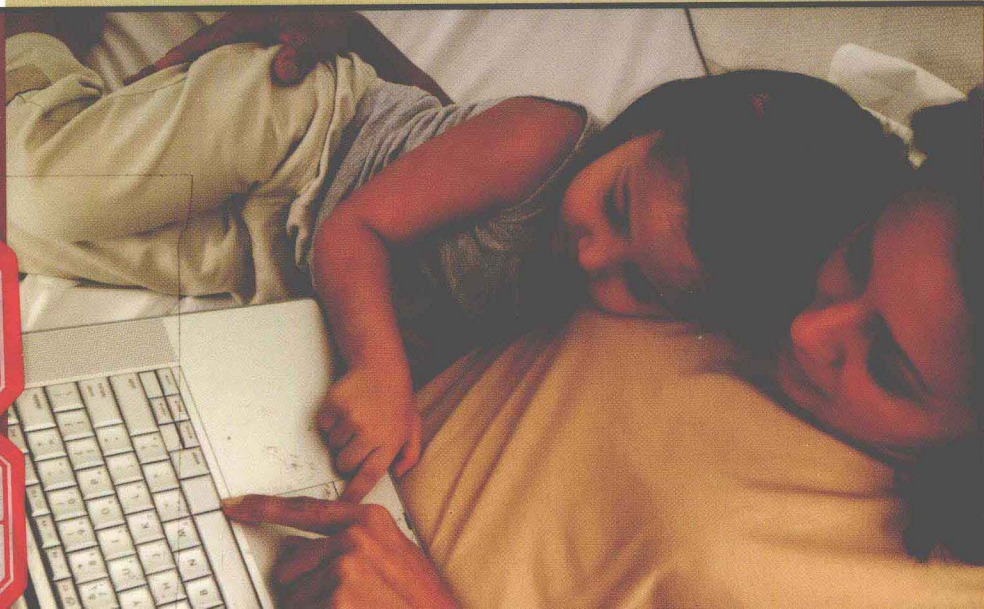
## Gendered Perspectives in Faculty Roles and Work Lives

Edited by Susan J. Bracken, Jeanie K. Allen, and Diane R. Dean

FOREWORD: ANN E. AUSTIN

WOMEN IN ACADEME SERIES

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*Susan J. Bracken, Jeanie K. Allen,*  
*and Diane R. Dean*

Foreword by Ann E. Austin

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*Sue Bracken*

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## FOREWORD

*Ann E. Austin*

Today in the early part of the twenty-first century, American higher education institutions continue to hold a highly significant place in the national and international landscape. Universities and colleges serve society through the research produced, the students taught, the community issues addressed, and the ideas examined, challenged, and expanded. The faculty members in each university and college are the key resource ensuring that the work of higher education institutions occurs at a high level of quality and excellence. For many years, the notion of the professoriate brought up images of full-time, tenured or tenure-stream faculty members, most typically male and white. But the ranks of faculty members are changing rapidly. Many universities and colleges are appointing faculty into part-time and non-tenure-stream positions. Many institutions also are committed to diversifying the faculty ranks to include more women and scholars of color. Additionally, the nature of faculty work is changing, as universities and colleges welcome more diverse students; engage in a wide array of activities to serve their communities; respond to various expectations from employers, parents, legislators, and others; and adopt technology to aid and expand their impact.

This book addresses the broad topic of the changing nature of faculty roles and work lives, and more specifically focuses on the challenges confronted by—and the strategies used by—women and men faculty members as they manage their professional roles and personal lives. As part of a book series on “Women in Academe,” this first volume concerns work/family issues for men and women faculty as well as gendered aspects of the academy. In particular, it offers views of faculty lives and work that expand readers’ understanding of who the current faculty are and the kinds of issues that many faculty members confront each day as they strive to fulfill multiple responsibilities at work and at home. Additionally, it suggests institutional policies that may more fully support the diverse faculty members working in universities and colleges today.

In this foreword, I take up several issues. First, I answer the question of why readers, institutional leaders, and faculty members themselves should care about the academic workplace and how faculty members experience their work lives. Second, I highlight key themes that weave through the chapters of this book, all of which concern the nature of the academic workplace and how faculty members manage their responsibilities. Third, I explore various implications of the issues and themes highlighted in this work. What steps and strategies might institutional leaders and academic colleagues consider at their own institutions to enhance the quality of the academic workplace? What institutional policies and practices would support more fully the diverse group of faculty members who are carrying out the important work American universities and colleges are committed to?

### **Why Academic Work Life Issues Are Important**

Discussion of the academic workplace tends to bring out a range of opinions. Some observers, often those not directly familiar with work within a college or university, comment that the academic workplace looks very appealing and far less demanding than the business world or other sectors. Such observers cite as evidence that faculty members typically meet classes only between six and fifteen hours a week, and have great autonomy as to how they spend the rest of their time. They note that many faculty members can arrange their own schedules, come and go as they like, and seem to have little direct supervision. Faculty members themselves are usually quick to point out that meeting classes is the tip of the iceberg, since, for example, good teaching requires extensive preparation, time out of class with individual students or small groups, and serious attention to assessment, grading, and feedback. Furthermore, most faculty members have other responsibilities, which, depending on the individual's appointment, can include research and publication, student advising, institutional committee work and leadership duties, development of new curricula, interactions and ongoing work with groups within the community, involvement in scholarly and professional associations, guidance and mentoring of new faculty members and graduate students, and attention to maintaining records and work-related materials.

Other observers, often individuals within the academy who have been in faculty rank for a number of years, observe that the nature and organization of faculty work, particularly in institutions with tenure systems, has worked



well for many years. These individuals often love their work, take it very seriously, and are highly conscientious in fulfilling a multitude of tasks. They deeply appreciate the autonomy and flexibility that faculty members have come to enjoy, particularly at major research universities, and they understand and uphold the responsibility that the academy and individual faculty members have to society for the privilege of engaging in faculty work. For these individuals, concerns expressed by other faculty members about the nature of faculty work and the challenges of managing multiple responsibilities can appear ungrateful, cynical, and even ridiculous. These faculty members may wonder whether newer faculty are unwilling to work hard, not enough committed to their work, or simply prone to complaining.

Recognizing that discussion of the academic workplace can elicit these kinds of concerns from observers external and internal to universities or colleges, I offer several reasons why institutional leaders and faculty members should consider seriously the nature of the academic workplace and the challenges confronting many faculty members today. Interest in the academic workplace is not new (Austin & Gamson, 1983); but attention to the nature of the academic workplace is especially important today. The core of my argument is that attention to the quality of the workplace and to institutional strategies and policies for supporting a diverse array of faculty members to manage the demands in their lives will enrich the quality of work in universities and colleges. Such attention does not diminish the expectation that faculty members must be committed, serious, and engaged, but rather provides an environment in which all members of the faculty can contribute optimally to the critically important missions of universities and colleges. Such attention to the quality of the academic workplace also recognizes that the twenty-first-century university and college includes a diverse group of faculty members—women and men in a range of appointment types—with an array of circumstances, needs, and interests. And furthermore, the involvement of such a diverse group of faculty members is essential to institutional excellence.

What are the reasons that the quality of the workplace should be an institutional concern? First, as significant retirement rates are projected in the coming decade, universities and colleges will need to hire extensive replacements. And, since the proportion of women completing academic degrees is increasing (National Center for Education Statistics, 2001, 2003), many of

the most well-trained and promising young scholars that universities and colleges may wish to recruit for open faculty positions will be women.

Furthermore, increasing the ranks of female faculty, as well as increasing the number of faculty of color (women and men), are important goals at many universities and colleges. As student bodies become more diverse, students need to see role models among the faculty with characteristics similar to their own. Thus, universities and colleges want to attract and retain a diverse faculty.

However, aspects of faculty work are not as promising for women as for men. Although women have been entering the faculty ranks for some time, inequities still are common in the experiences of male and female faculty members. Overall, salary patterns and promotion patterns are not yet equitable. And, as chapters in this book point out, family responsibilities can present challenging circumstances for women faculty. The chapter by Mason, Goulden, and Wolfinger shows that women with children are less likely than men to be appointed to tenure-stream positions in the first years out of graduate school. In the long term, women faculty are more likely than male colleagues to delay childbearing until their late 30s and they are twice as likely to indicate they have had fewer children than they would have liked. In their chapter, Wolf-Wendel and Ward explain that pregnant women, often new to their positions, sometimes must find their own temporary replacements for the class periods they will miss to give birth, and women with babies often grapple with an inhospitable environment for handling some of their parental responsibilities.

Offering an academic workplace that enables women candidates to envision the possibilities of including both professional and family dimensions in their lives is likely to be an important part of attractive recruitment packages. Equally important for retention of a diverse faculty body will be for institutions to provide environments that support women faculty as they simultaneously build excellent careers and meet their personal responsibilities.

Interest in family-friendly work environments is not only a women's issue, however. An earlier study sponsored by the American Association for Higher Education titled *Heeding New Voices* reported that, among aspiring and early-career scholars, both men and women hope to create careers that enable them to find "balance" and flexibility in their personal and professional lives (Rice, Sorcinelli, & Austin, 2000). Men and women scholars seek environments where they can manage effectively both personal and profes-

sional responsibilities. While childbirth obviously has a direct physical impact on women, men in their 20s and 30s often want and expect to participate actively in child rearing and family life, particularly given changes in gender roles in recent decades in American society. Thus, institutional policies that recognize personal needs, such as arrangements for spousal hires and family leave options, are attractive to many early-career faculty members.

Additionally, some doctoral students considering faculty careers are concerned about the overly hectic pace of life that they observe among their faculty members (Austin, 2002; Nyquist et al., 1999). Some of these potential faculty members are musing over whether an academic career will truly offer them the kind of work environment in which they can pursue their scholarly passions and the kind of life in which they can find both personal and professional meaning. Furthermore, some early-career faculty are reconsidering a professorial career (Rice et al., 2000). Such musings are important if they affect the likelihood of talented young scholars choosing to enter or remain in academe. Interest in the quality of the academic work life becomes not only a personal issue, but also an institutional one.

In addition to enhancing the interest of early-career faculty in entering and pursuing careers in academe, institutional attention to the quality of the academic workplace has implications for scholarly productivity. Faculty members who know that family needs, such as child care, are adequately addressed can turn their attention more fully to professional matters. Institutions that provide arrangements for short-term care for sick children, for example, enable faculty who are parents to manage teaching responsibilities even when faced with sudden illness in the family. The Creamer chapter in this volume argues that institutional efforts to remove barriers that inhibit or limit collaboration among faculty couples could enhance scholarly productivity. The Hart chapter details a case study of an institution that attempts meaningful change.

Many organizations already offer policies that help employees manage and balance the various responsibilities in their lives. As prominent members of their communities, higher education institutions can join other organizations in providing examples of how to construct workplaces that meet organizational goals while also recognizing human needs of organization members. Finding ways to help talented people achieve success and fulfillment in both their professional and personal lives is a challenging but worthy goal for an advanced society. Engaging in efforts to try out and assess the

impact of various policies is another way in which higher education institutions can contribute to the overall betterment of the broader society.

For all the reasons discussed here, higher education institutions should consider the nature and quality of the academic workplace and particularly the ways in which universities and colleges support faculty members in managing professional and personal roles. The issue should not be interpreted as an example of uncommitted individuals who are unwilling to engage in the sustained and often difficult work of being a scholar. Rather, efforts to create workplace environments that address the needs of many faculty members to handle professional and personal responsibilities will strengthen the excellence of American higher education. Faculty bodies will become more diverse. Individual faculty members, who in today's world represent a great array of personal circumstances and appointment types, will be supported as they commit themselves to doing their best work. And examples will be provided for the broader public of ways to create workplaces that achieve organizational goals while enabling individual employees to live fulfilling lives with multiple responsibilities. This book provides information, insights, and suggestions to further the conversation.

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# INTRODUCTION: THE PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

Women's Studies, Higher Education, and Praxis

*Susan J. Bracken, Jeanie K. Allen, and Diane R. Dean*

This book features a collection of research studies about contemporary faculty roles and work lives in higher education. As coeditors, we began this project as an outgrowth of our involvement with the former *American Association for Higher Education's Women's Caucus*. Historically, the caucus dedicated its work to the professional development and advocacy for women in higher education. Our goals as recent leaders of the caucus were to create opportunities to increase the visibility of gendered research that influences women's work lives within the academy and, subsequently, to stimulate interest and collective action in improving faculty work lives for women and men. Together, our respective areas of scholarship include women's studies, adult education, interdisciplinary studies, and higher education.

As coeditors, we have had many opportunities during the past three years to share with each other our professional pathways, our personal stories, and our academic interests. We quickly learned that we all share an appreciation for the importance of praxis and the contribution of women's studies as a presence in the academy. In each of our own academic careers, women's studies has played a strong foundational role in shaping our scholarship and professional pathways. It was this series of conversations that prompted us to include a women's studies focus as part of our own reflections in this work.

Therefore, we will briefly revisit the historical development of women's

studies in American higher education, and its influence on the scholarship featured in this volume. Honoring the contributions of those who came before us and understanding the stories, strategies, policies, and issues are not merely tributes to the past, but they offer an opportunity to substantively reflect and to develop frameworks for understanding current efforts to improve the nature of faculty roles and work lives. From that foundation, we will then present a brief outline of what we believe continued interdisciplinary study and strategic praxis can do to further the research and practical application of the scholarship of the contributing authors and of others who are interested in understanding and improving the holistic and equitable quality of faculty work lives.

### **Fleeting Shadows of the Past: Women's Studies and the Institution of Higher Education**

Many of us associate the late 1960s with dramatic social change in the United States—the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War, and the women's movement were debated and visible in all aspects of societal life. This period of flux and angst was also reflected within higher education. Life on campuses was markedly different than it is now, with differential gender rules for administrative life, student residence halls, social climate, academic expectations, and areas of study. Very few women were entering the academy as faculty members (12% of doctoral degrees awarded in 1966 were to women compared to 51% in 2001), and those who were either graduate students or new faculty were experiencing campuses that were not sensitive to gender issues of access, pay equity, sexual harassment, campus safety, or diverse academic content.

It was within this context that women's groups formed on campuses across the United States in order to deal with climate issues—paralleling the women's consciousness-raising groups forming in communities. In addition to self-discovery and growth in understanding gender roles in society, the campus women's groups lobbied for fair treatment; improved women's health, safety, and other services; entrance to disciplines that were essentially inaccessible to women; resolution of hiring and promotion issues; and more. Participants primarily focused on understanding how women's social identities were shaping their lives and the lives of others and, in turn, how this knowledge and understanding connected to higher education policies and



practices. Marilyn Boxer (1998) describes the reaction of male faculty members to the rapidly changing landscape:

Getman's candid account neatly complements Hochschild's 1973 essay, for he relates how women's new aspirations to academic careers affected marital relationships and departmental manners. Recalling a dinner party at a Midwestern university in 1969, Getman quotes a chemistry professor as commenting "during dessert" that the "women's movement is going to destroy scholarship in America. We're a perfect example. I am on the verge of a major conceptual breakthrough that I could achieve soon if only Ginny wouldn't keep insisting that I look after the children all the time." Another guest, a professor of English, lamented that he thought that his wife wanted him "to stop working on my novel so that she can get her B.A." Getman now realizes that the comfortable male-dominated world in which we dwelt was soon to become a thing of the past. (p. 235)

Joan Williams (1999) theorizes that a number of the structural problems with contemporary faculty roles stem from this traditional and masculine vision of academic faculty life designed around the notion of a male faculty member with an available full-time stay-at-home spouse supporting his work. She suggests that real change will result when we begin to design faculty roles that take into account the realities of modern society.

In 1969, the first women's studies program in the United States opened its doors at San Diego State University, followed the next year by Cornell University in 1970. They offered beginning courses on general women's issues, and served as the primary voice and advocacy group for women in higher education. Initially, there was doubt as to the staying power of women's studies—some thought it was a fad that would come and go, particularly in terms of intellectual theoretical development as an academic discipline (*Women's Studies*, 1970). Berkeley commissioned a senate study examining the status of women. The findings were not surprising: only 15 women on the entire campus had the rank of full professor; faculty, administrators, current and former graduate students reported numerous, serious inequities such as "rules which prevented wives with Ph.D.s from being hired at the same campus where their husbands worked, reluctance to tenure qualified women or promote them through academic ranks; preference awarded to men in graduate admissions, and after admission, in financial and intellectual support; crediting male colleagues for research and research reports written