POLICY BRIEF

Increasing representation of women in leadership positions at the University of South Carolina

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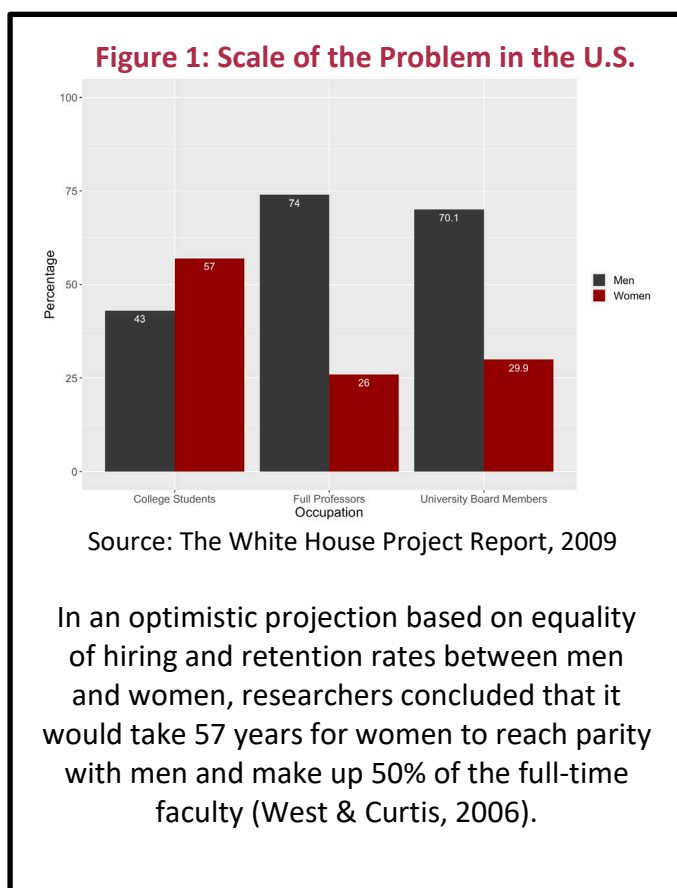**Advocacy and Policy Subcommittee, Provost's Action Committee on Women's Initiatives (PACWI)**
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What is the issue?

Women's advancement to higher leadership positions within universities is hindered despite more women receiving post-secondary degrees (**Figure 1**). The presence or absence of women-identifying academic leaders can have far-reaching influences not only on institutions themselves but also on the scope of research and knowledge, which affects academics and lay members of the community. In addition, a lack of women-identifying academic leaders can hinder recruitment of students looking for an environment that represents their own identity (Madsen, 2012). When successful women-identifying leaders work with students (women or men), faculty, and staff, these individuals can develop positive experiences that may help change their perspectives toward women in leadership positions (Madsen, 2012). Additionally, research from the corporate sector shows that companies are more profitable and have better performance when women hold top leadership roles—suggesting that the University of South Carolina may enhance its ability to reach its strategic plan goals if it increases women representation in upper-echelon leadership roles (Hunt et al., 2020). Of note, corporate sector research also suggests that senior-level women are key to championing diversity and inclusion (McKinsey & Company, 2020). This corresponds to University of South Carolina's strategic priority #4 – *Increase Diversity*.

Figure 1: Scale of the Problem in the U.S.

Source: The White House Project Report, 2009

In an optimistic projection based on equality of hiring and retention rates between men and women, researchers concluded that it would take 57 years for women to reach parity with men and make up 50% of the full-time faculty (West & Curtis, 2006).

Scholars have cited three practices to address the problem of women underrepresentation in academic leadership: (1) raising awareness of the issue to the broad university community through improved external publicity, (2) creating leadership development programs for aspiring women leaders, and (3) mentoring, coaching, and sponsorship relationships for women in academia (Brower et al., 2019).

Understanding the problem

While there are many qualified women eligible to progress into leadership positions, systemic institutional barriers often thwart the advancement of women-identifying candidates (Cañas et al., 2019). The current representation of women across various areas in higher education illustrates this problem. Four key domains are expanded in the following sections: Faculty Appointments, STEM Disciplines, Institutional and College Leadership, and Impacts for Women of Color.

1

Faculty Appointments

Almost 40 years after the demise of formal legal barriers to women's participation in higher education, women's under-representation among the professoriate persists and worsens with academic rank and institutional prestige (Maranto & Griffin, 2011), both at the University of South Carolina and in U.S. universities (**Figures 2-4**). Compared to national averages by faculty rank, University of South Carolina has lower rates of women-identifying faculty members in higher faculty ranks.

Figure 2: Women Representation by Faculty Rank at all University of South Carolina Campuses
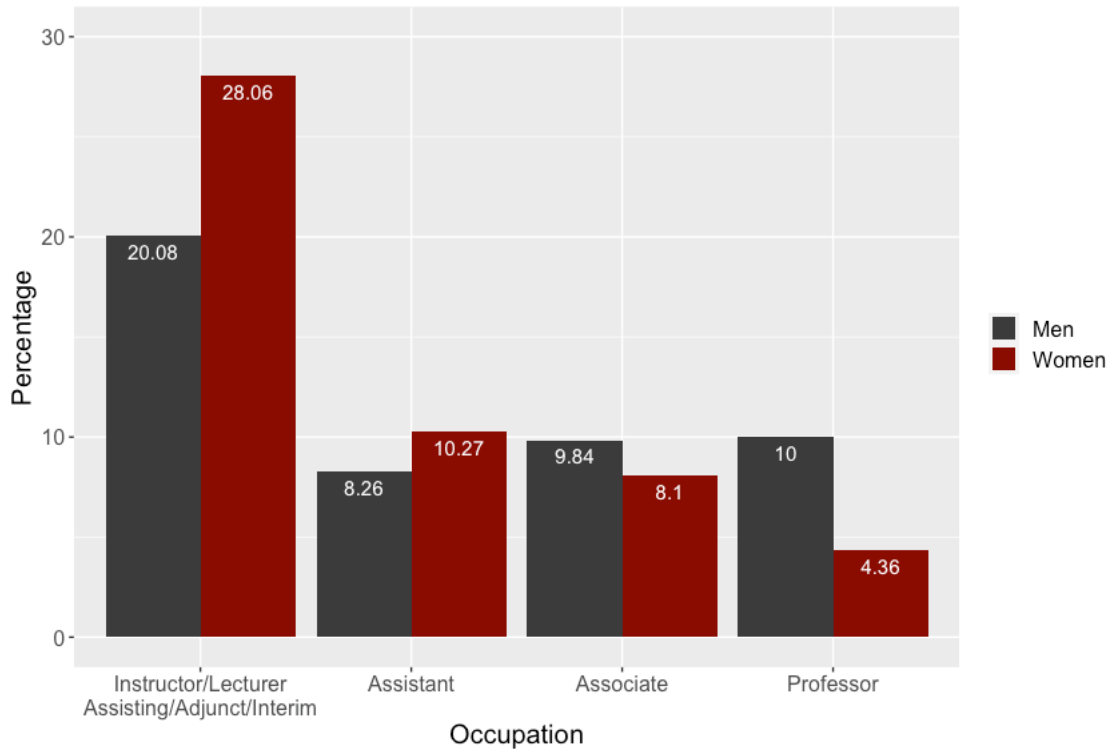
Source: National Center for Education Statistics

Figure 3: Women Representation by Faculty Rank in U.S. Universities
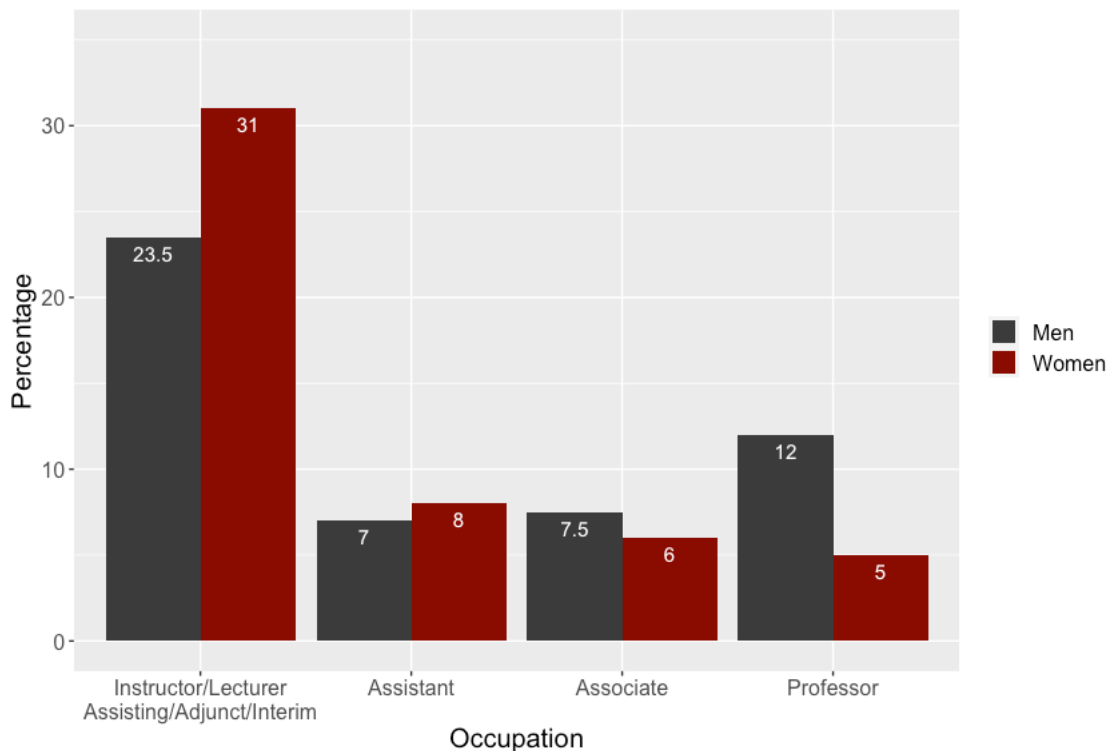
Source: National Center for Education Statistics

In addition to the intangible challenges related to identity and stereotypes, women tend to be assigned heavier teaching, service, and advising loads relative to their male counterparts, reducing their availability for higher profile work, including meaningful leadership roles (Hannum et.al., 2015). Discourses around excellence can also have an impact on higher education leadership, as they portray academic women as not measuring up for promotion and, at a national level, not measuring up for competitive funding. However, gender biases exist in the production of knowledge which can "limit scientific creativity, excellence, and benefit to society" (K. White & Burkinshaw, 2019).

Figure 4: Representation of Women in Higher Education Faculty Workforce at University of South Carolina – Columbia Campus, SEC Institutions, and Peer/Peer Aspirant Institutions, 2020
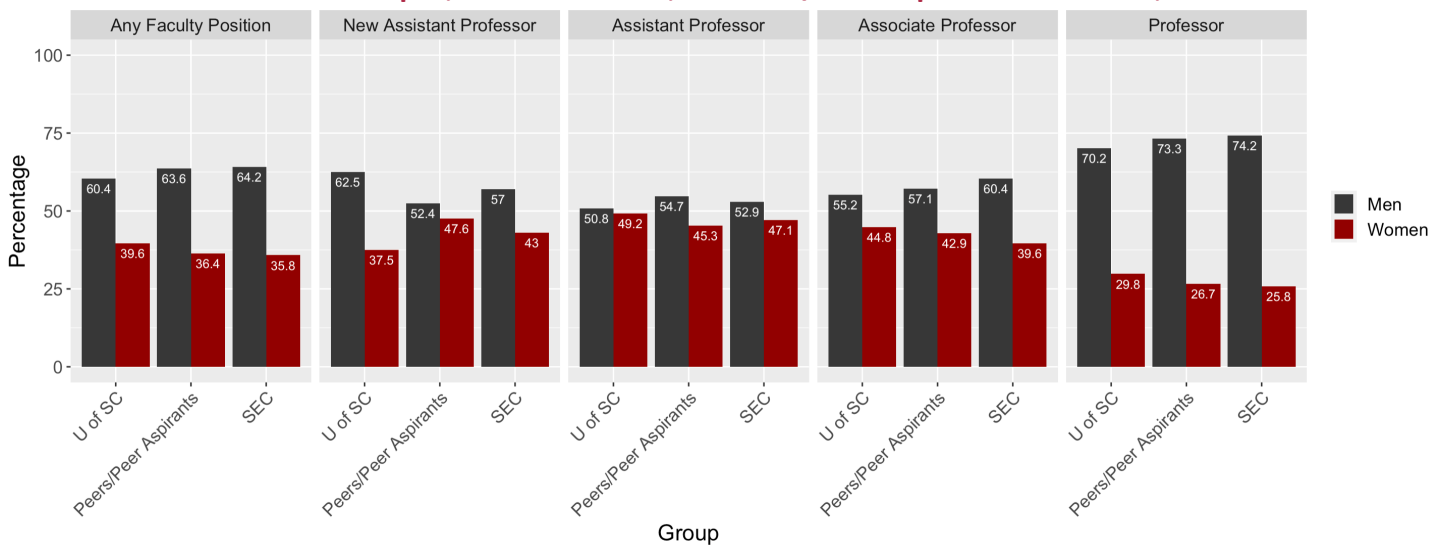
Source: College and University Professional Association

STEM Disciplines

Although women make up more than 50% of all graduate program enrollment, they earn less than 30% of the doctoral degrees awarded in physics, computer science, engineering, and mathematics (National Science Foundation, 2016). Obtaining a graduate degree in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) is often a prerequisite to becoming a faculty member, executive, or leader in STEM, where women form only 37% of the doctoral academic workforce (National Science Foundation, 2016). With STEM fields being primarily dominated by men, once women become full professors, they are more likely to experience discrimination at work and in scientific organizations (Jarboe, 2018). In the 2009–2010 academic year, in U.S. Liaison Committee on Medical Education (LCME)-accredited medical schools, 47.8% of the enrolled students, 48.3% of the graduates, 34.8% of the full-time faculty, 35.8% of the associate deans, and 27.9% of the senior associate/vice deans were women, illustrating a consistent decrease in representation as the leadership ranks progressed. More telling, only 13.0% of medical school deans were women. This percentage is far lower than the proportion of women presidents of colleges and universities (23%) or law school deans (20%) (F. S. White et al., 2012).

Institutional and College Leadership

A 2015 study found a greater proportion of women in lower-level administration compared to higher levels of administration (Cañas et al., 2019) This finding holds at University of South Carolina and in the U.S. at large, as shown in **Figures 5 and 6**.

Figure 5: Women Representation by Administrator Role at all University of South Carolina Campuses
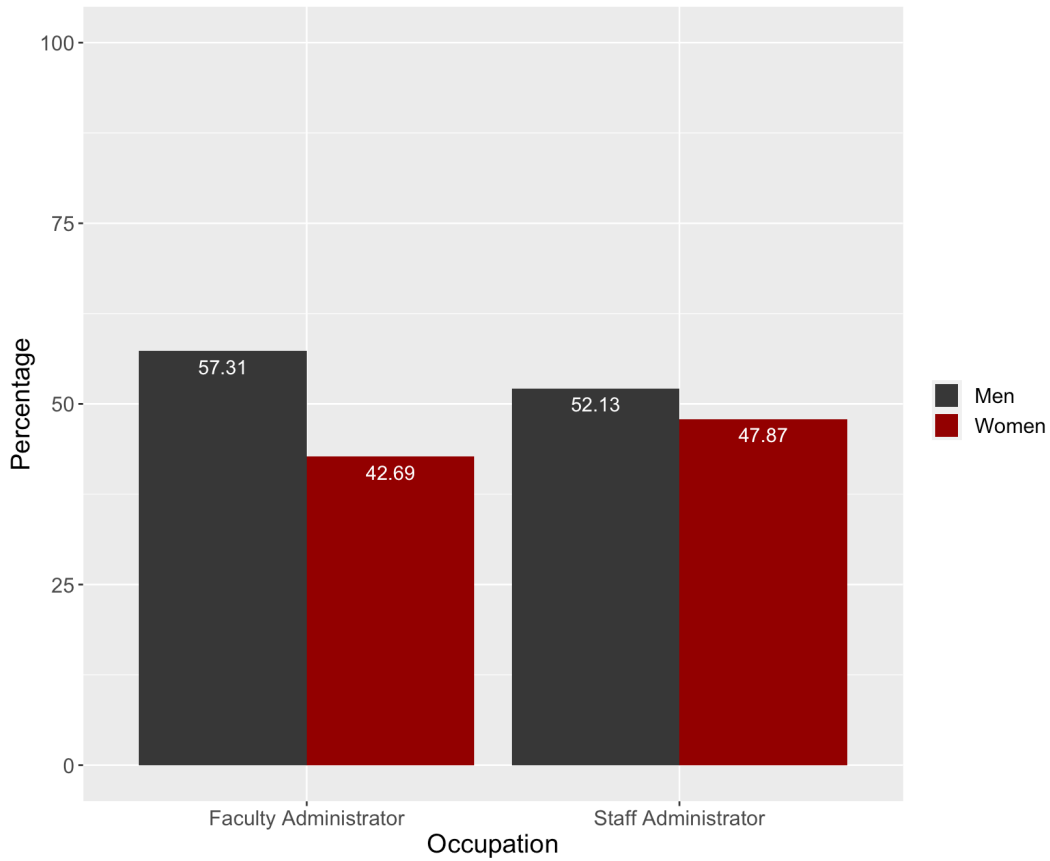
Source: National Center for Education Statistics

Figure 6: Representation of Women in Higher Education Executive Workforce at University of South Carolina – Columbia Campus, SEC Institutions, and Peer/Peer Aspirant Institutions, 2020
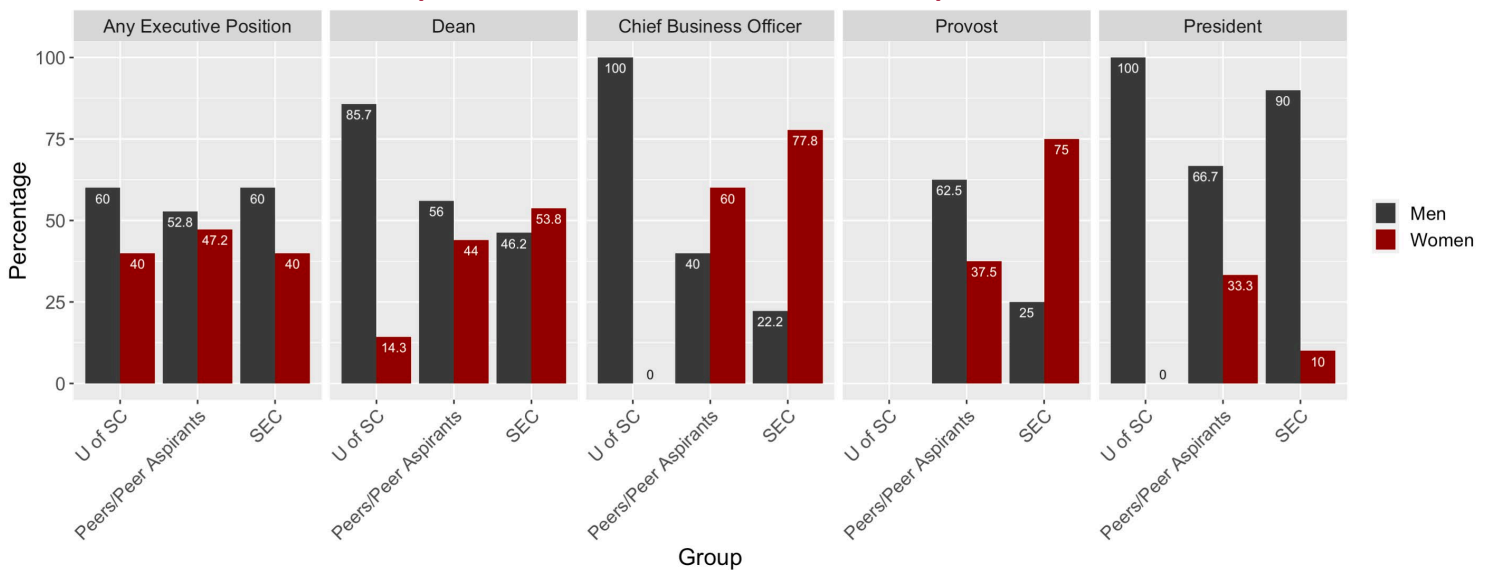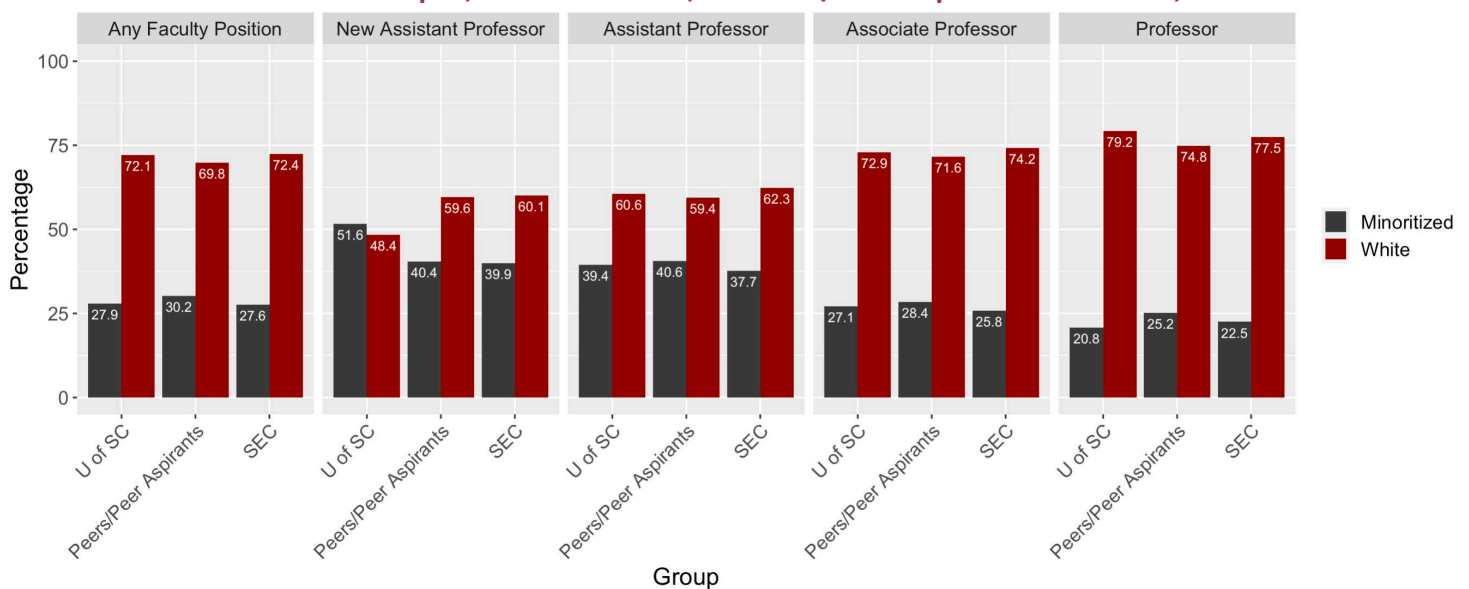

Source: College and University Professional Association

This gap can perhaps be explained by women's exclusion from higher-profile academic work when experience as a professor with a distinguished research background "is almost always a prerequisite" for being a Vice-Chancellor, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Pro Vice-Chancellor or Dean (Jarboe, 2018).

Impacts for Women of Color

In 2014, Black women in the U.S. constituted the largest group of minoritized women in academia at 236,375 individuals, with the vast majority serving in clerical positions, narrowly followed by faculty, and only 6% serving in upper-level leadership or administrative positions (National Center for Education Statistics, 2004). The representative numbers further dwindle down, the higher the academic (shown in **Figures 7-9**) or administrative (shown in **Figures 10 and 11**) rank. When examining women representation in faculty positions for different minority groups, University of South Carolina has lower rates of women of color in nearly all faculty ranks, compared to the national rates (**Figures 7-9**). Black women are still underrepresented in mid- to upper-management level administrative positions (Wallace et al., 2014). An examination of statistics of Black women in higher education revealed that few have reached the highest-level positions in the administration of colleges and universities in predominantly White institutions. Specifically, the American Council on Education reported that, "in 1989, Black women made up 4.2% of full-time administrators, which represents an 87% change from the previous decade." For Black women, these numbers have not significantly changed in proportion to the number of women in educational administration (**Figure 10**). Generally, not limited to women, we noted disparities experienced by minoritized individuals, both within our institution and all U.S. universities (**Figures 10 and 11**).

Figure 7: Minority Representation in Higher Education Faculty Workforce at University of South Carolina – Columbia Campus, SEC Institutions, and Peer/Peer Aspirant Institutions, 2020
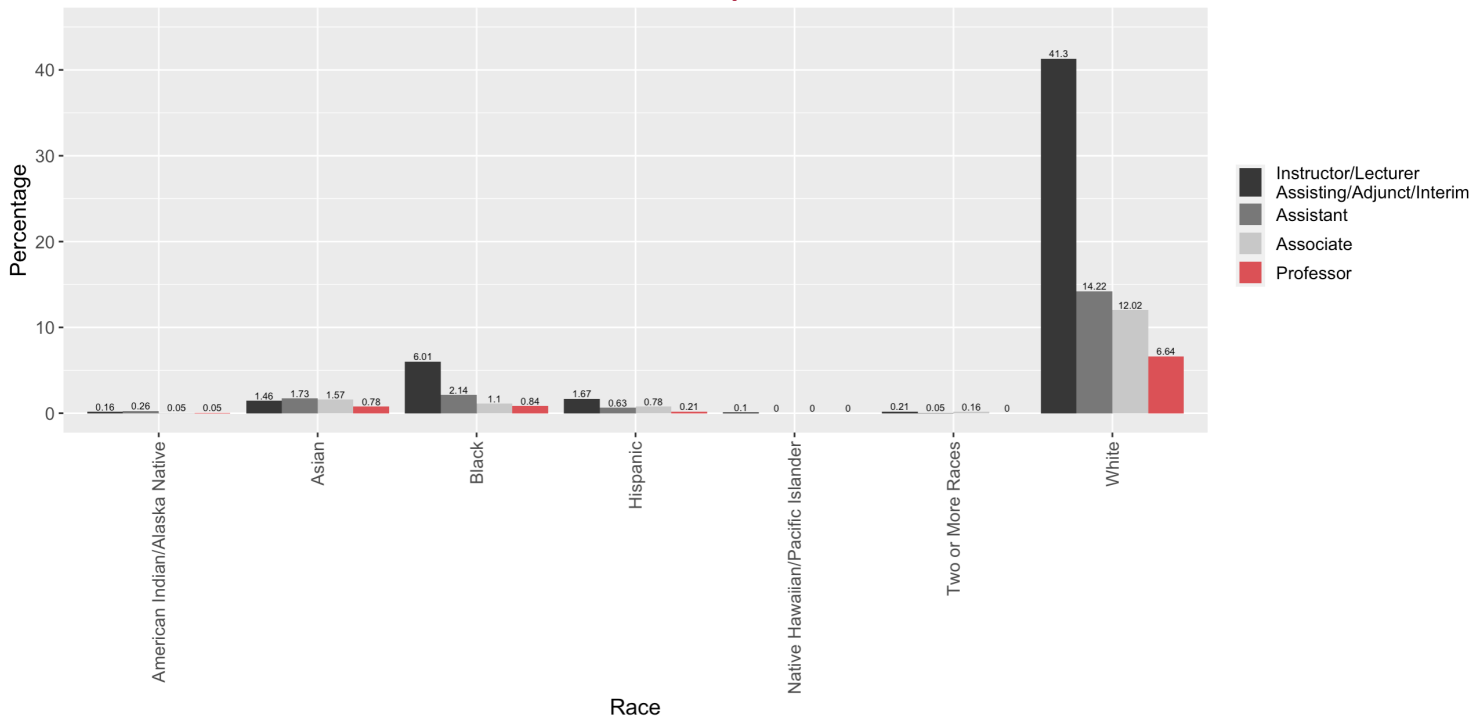

Source: College and University Professional Association

Figure 8: Race/Ethnicity Representation in Women Faculty by Rank in U.S. Universities
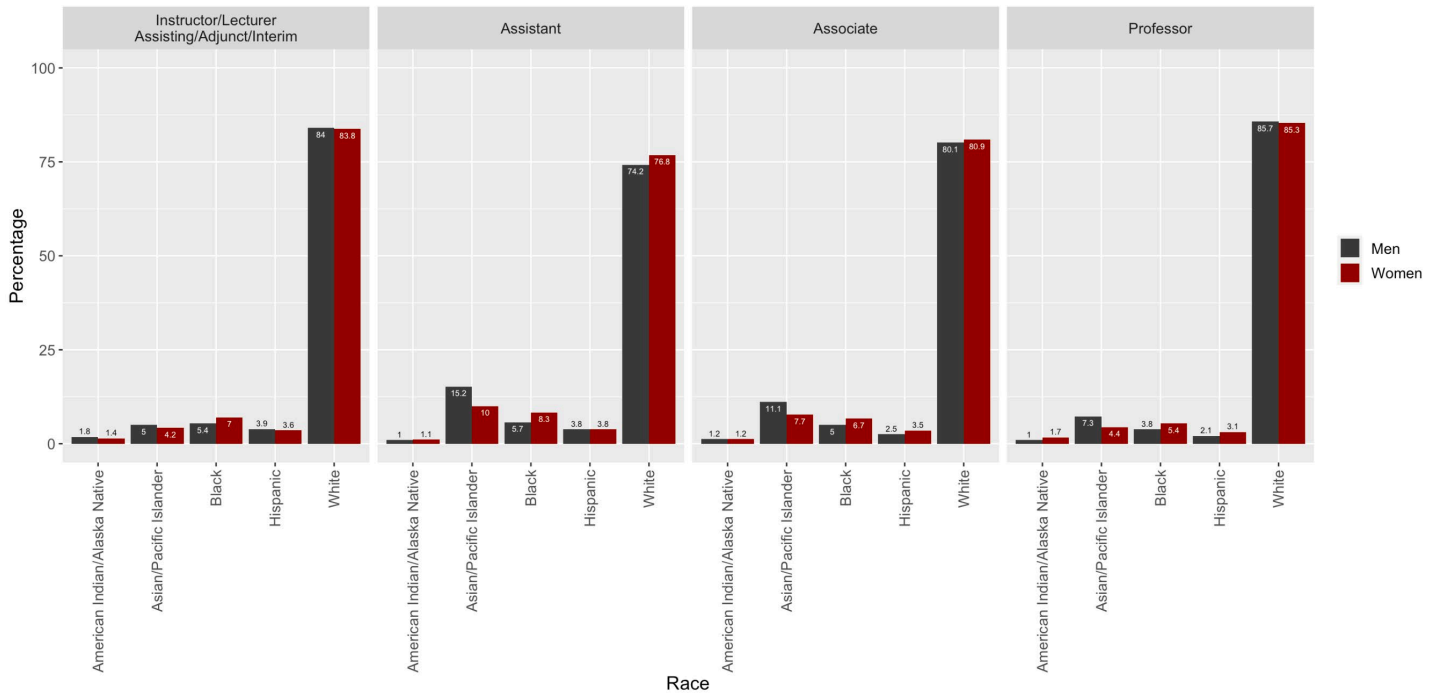
Source: National Center for Education Statistics

Figure 9: Race/Ethnicity Representation in Women Faculty by Rank at all University of South Carolina Campuses

Source: National Center for Education Statistics

Figure 10: Representation of Minority Individuals in Higher Education Workforce at University of South Carolina – Columbia Campus, SEC Institutions, and Peer/Peer Aspirant Institutions, 2020
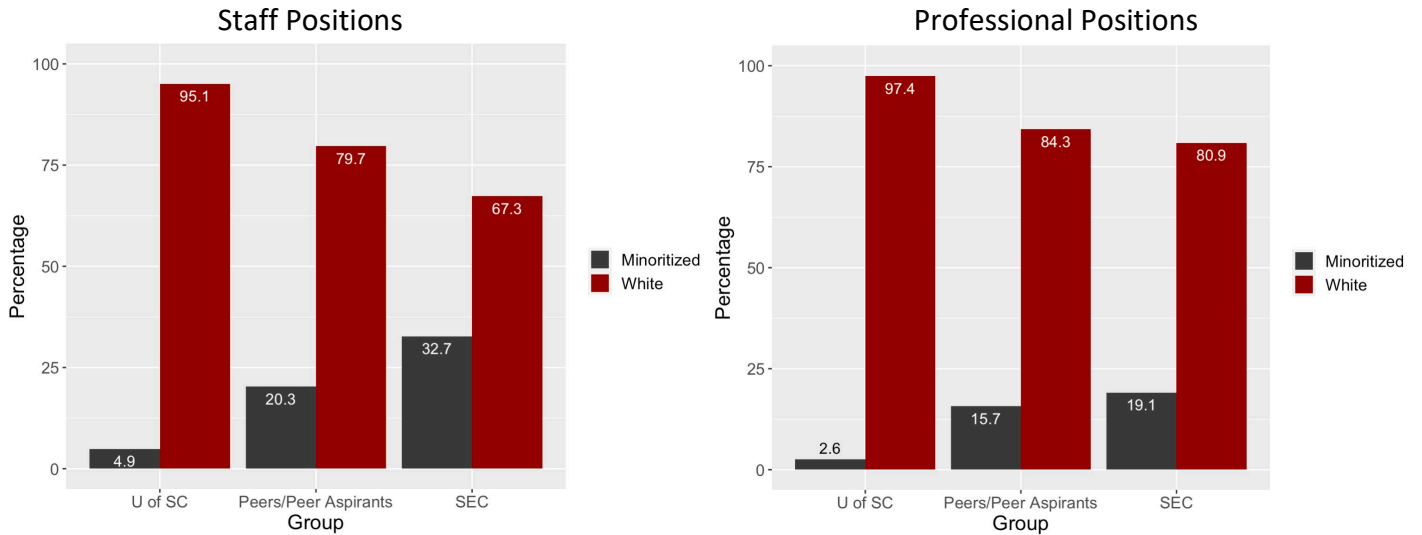
Staff Positions include clerks, assistants, technicians, laborers, and operators. Professional Positions include program coordinators, librarians, admissions counselors, heads/supervisors of various campus offices. See Source for details.

Source: College and University Professional Association

Figure 11: Representation of Minority Individuals in Higher Education Executive Workforce at University of South Carolina – Columbia Campus, SEC Institutions, and Peer/Peer Aspirant Institutions, 2020
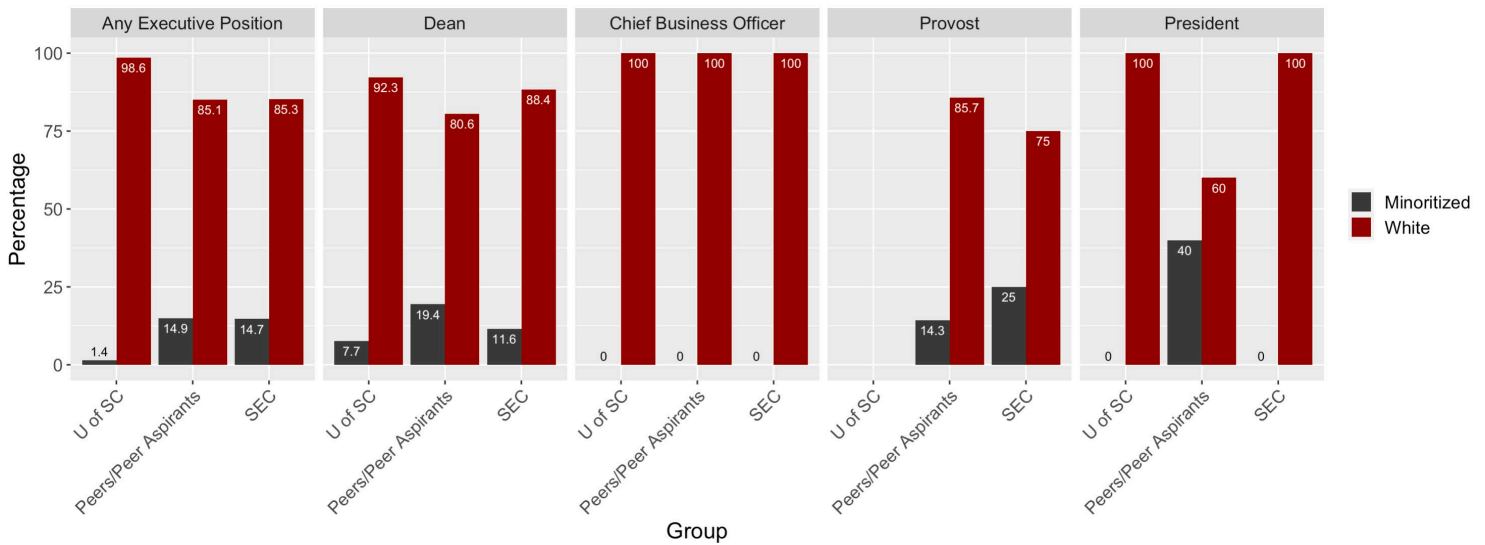
Source: College and University Professional Association

Governing Boards

The 2010 Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB) survey on board composition reflected the inequity in the number of women represented in the board of trustee chair role. The board composition survey conducted by AGB showed that women make up less than one third of governing board membership at independent and public institutions of higher learning, despite being 37% of the professorial workforce (Scott, 2018). Boards of trustees are often male dominated, and replacements are selected from their professional networks (Hannum et al., 2015). The networks tapped for these positions do not always adequately represent a range of identity groups. Previous research also suggests that adding one or two women may not be enough to reap the benefits of difference and argue that a more substantial amount of representation is needed (Hannum et.al., 2015). At the University of South Carolina in 2019, of the 19 members other than the governor and education secretary, 17 are men and 18 are white. To represent the state's population, board members should include at least five times as many women and minorities as is currently the case. Many states and nearly all private university boards have term limits, ranging from 9 to 12 years, however, one-third of University of South Carolina's board members have already served more than 12 years. A phased move to term limits is considered effective governance, which would allow the board to recruit women with fresh views and experience.

Where University of South Carolina Stands

The College and University Professional Association (CUPA) monitors trends in higher education workforce through the CUPA-Human Resources (CUPA-HR) database. Strengths of the CUPA-HR database are that the data are the most up to date (effective date of data 11/01/2020) and covers 93% of the U.S. doctoral institutions. An important limitation is that some of the data are masked by creating larger categories when small categories of data may violate confidentiality or privacy of institutions' human resources policies. For example, when examining race/ethnicity data, this report only presents data pertaining to white and minoritized university employees as opposed to specific minority groups.

This report leverages the database to conduct benchmarking of the University of South Carolina – Columbia Campus against two comparison groups: Peer/Peer Aspirant (PPA) and Southern Conference (SEC) institutions with available data. The PPA list was provided by the Associate Provost in 2020.

SEC Comparison Group	Peer/Peer Aspirant Comparison Group
Auburn University	Auburn University
Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College	University of Florida
Mississippi State University	University of Georgia
Missouri University of Science and Technology	University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Texas A & M University	University of Maryland College Park
University of Alabama	University of Massachusetts – Amherst
University of Arkansas Main Campus	University of Missouri – Columbia
University of Florida	University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
University of Georgia	University of Tennessee – Knoxville
University of Kentucky	University of Virginia
University of Mississippi	
University of Missouri – Columbia	
University of Tennessee – Knoxville	
Vanderbilt University	

Highlights

Strengths
- **Female Faculty**. University of South Carolina (39.6%) has slightly higher women representation than SEC-35.8% and PPA-36.4% in nearly all faculty ranks.

- **Diverse Entry-Level Faculty**. University of South Carolina leads by recruiting more diverse new assistant professors (51.6% minority) compared to SEC (39.9% minority) and PPA (40.4% minority).

- **Female Professionals**. University of South Carolina has similar proportions (58.3%) of women in professional positions as SEC (58.7%) and PPA (60.3%).

Areas of opportunity
Representation of Women
- **Executive Positions**. University of South Carolina has fewer women (40%) in executive positions compared to PPA (47.2%), but similar to SEC (40%).

- **President Positions**. University of South Carolina trails the SEC and PPA in women representation in President positions: SEC-10% and PPA-33.3%.

- **Chief Business Officer Positions**. University of South Carolina trails the SEC and PPA in women representation in Chief Business Officer positions: SEC-77.8% and PPA-60%.

- **Dean Positions**. University of South Carolina has many fewer women in Dean positions (14.3%) than SEC (53.8%) and PPA (44%) institutions.

Representation of Minority Groups
- **Executive Positions**. University of South Carolina has lower minority representation (1.4%) in executive positions compared to SEC (14.7%) and PPA (14.9%).

- **Staff and Professional Positions**. University of South Carolina has less diverse staff (4.9% minority) and professional staff (2.6% minority) than SEC (32.7% and 19.1% minority, respectively) and PPA (20.3% and 15.7% minority, respectively).

- **Full Professorship**. University of South Carolina trails behind SEC (22.5% minority) and PPA (25.2% minority) institutions in terms of diversity of full professors (20.8% minority at University of South Carolina).

The bottom line:

- The challenges women face in higher education are: (1) under-representation of women and bias among those making hiring decisions on governing boards and search committees; (2) women's reluctance to promote their professional accomplishments; (3) lack of geographic mobility due to partners' careers and loyalty to current institution; and (4) lack of leadership experience, especially in areas such as finance and fundraising. Related to these challenges is the fact that family and child-rearing responsibilities often coincide with the prime years of a woman's professional life (Teague & Bobby, 2014).[1]
- Early formal leadership experiences provide the opportunity to see oneself as a leader, to build leadership skills, and for others to see a woman's leadership potential more clearly. Not engaging in leadership early in one's career can create an experience gap that is cumulative, becoming most pronounced at the highest levels (Hannum et.al., 2015).
- Both the American Council on Education and the American College President Studies predict significant turnover in president and chancellor positions and also indicate that upcoming retirements will affect the broader ranks of senior institutional leadership on most campuses (J. S. White, 2012).
- The decade ahead will be a critical period to prepare and promote women of all backgrounds to the highest executive positions and to strengthen the entire pool of women holding institutional leadership positions (J. S. White, 2012).

Conclusion

To address the deficits of women represented in leadership positions at the University of South Carolina, the Advocacy and Policy Subcommittee of PACWI recommends the following action items:

1. The University of South Carolina must create pathways for women to serve at the highest levels of university leadership including the President's leadership team upon completion of leadership development programs such as: the Pipeline for Academic Leaders (PAL), the System Leaders Fellowship (SLF) for the Palmetto College, the Emerging Leaders Program (ELP), or the advanced leadership program for women currently being developed by the Assistant Provost and Chief of Staff.
2. In order to model gender and racial inclusivity at the highest levels of our institution, the PACWI Advocacy and Policy Subcommittee recommends that representatives from the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion be consulted in order to recruit a more diverse pool of candidates for appointments to the Board.
3. University administration should foster an environment throughout all levels of the institution that includes identifying unit-specific barriers to hiring and leadership development for women and minorities and develop strategies to address these barriers.
4. The University of South Carolina should formally recognize and reward efforts to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion. Recognition could include but is not limited to tenure-track service and staff promotion.
5. The University should develop and enforce a policy that requires diversity training (to include gender and racial bias training) for all search committees.

By implementing these initiatives, the University will be well positioned to achieve its goal of transforming its leadership to be reflective of the gender representation of our state.

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[1] This brief was initiated prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. It does not address the additional pandemic stresses on working women, such as women exiting the workplace (the "she-cession"), suffering from burnout, or not seeking to advance in the workplace because of increased family care responsibilities. PACWI is unaware of any formal studies probing the impact of the pandemic on women in higher education.

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