

THE STUDY OF NEW SCHOLARS HARVARD GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

SYNOPSIS

I. BACKGROUND

What are the major purposes of this initiative?

- To enable the academy to attract the best and brightest scholars and teachers.
- To increase the recruitment, retention, success, and satisfaction of all new scholars, with special attention to women and faculty of color.

Why the concern?

- Recent studies substantiate beyond doubt that many new and prospective faculty members are dissatisfied and disillusioned with academic careers. Their concerns include the balance between research and teaching, features of the promotion and tenure system, and quality of life, especially the balance of professional and personal commitments. Taken together, these elements weaken the attractiveness of the academic profession - 35.4% of 4,000 doctoral students surveyed in 1999 became *less* interested in an academic career as their graduate education proceeded.
- Women and persons of color are particularly skeptical and discouraged. Whether judged by percentages, rank, salaries, tenure status, or institutional prestige, neither group has made significant progress since the advent of affirmative action in the mid-1970s.

How is the project funded?

- Support for this project has been provided by the Ford Foundation and the Atlantic Philanthropies for three years.

II. THE CENTRAL IDEA

The basic idea underlying this initiative is a simple one: to provide selective colleges and universities, as well as prospective junior faculty members, with reliable and comparative information on how junior faculty, already employed on these campuses, evaluate these institutions as places to work. These data will prompt institutions to create more attractive work environments and, at the same time, enable candidates for junior faculty positions to make more informed choices about where to work.

III. WORK PLAN

How will we proceed?

- Step 1. Focus Group Discussions.
We will conduct a series of focus groups with full-time faculty in years 3-6 of their academic employment to learn how they view specific institutional policies and practices, structural and cultural barriers, work climate, the ability to balance professional and personal lives, current job satisfaction, and estimated likelihood of success in achieving tenure or contract renewal.
- Step 2. Pilot Survey.
Drawing from the focus groups and prior surveys of satisfaction among academics and other professionals, we will develop a survey instrument for full-time, tenure and non-tenure track, junior faculty to rate the relative attractiveness of the terms and conditions of employment at their institution, and their level of satisfaction and fulfillment. This survey will be piloted at 10-12 highly selective colleges and universities.
- Step 3. Policy Audit.
We will collect from the pilot institutions all relevant faculty employment policies on promotion and tenure, as well as provisions particularly important to junior faculty (e.g., leaves, childcare, orientation, mentoring). We will then compare institutional policies and practices; assess the satisfaction levels of junior faculty across institutions as a function of policy provisions; and identify the institutional characteristics and personnel practices of the best places to work.
- Step 4. National Rollout.
Based on the pilot, the survey will be modified as necessary. We will then invite all members of the Association of American Universities, the 50 top-ranked liberal arts colleges (*U.S. News & World Report*), and a few selective historically Black colleges and universities to participate in a national survey which we would hope to administer every three to four years thereafter.

IV. DISCLOSURE

What information will be disclosed to whom?

The goal is to strike a balance between the concerns of institutions and the needs of prospective faculty. For the pilot phase, institutions will be known to each other. Survey results will be provided for each institution, however, comparative data will only be available anonymously.

With the pilot institutions and other scholars, we will determine what format publicly disclosed data should take once we have results on a national scale. The data could, for instance, be presented in the form of a report card where institutions, as a whole, would receive grades on various policies and practices (e.g., promotion and tenure policies, family-friendliness) and on certain dimensions of junior faculty satisfaction (e.g., opportunity to participate in governance,

institutional support for research, clarity of expectations, climate, balance of work and family, collegiality). In addition, we could provide comparative data for a self-selected peer group where the scores of the other institutions would be anonymously designated.

At the moment, we expect to disclose publicly aggregate institutional data for both universities and four-year colleges. For universities, scores would also be disclosed publicly for schools, e.g., law, business, education. (Schools of medicine and allied health will not be included in the survey.) Departmental data will be available to all institutions as long as the anonymity of survey respondents can be preserved.

Whatever the final format of published reports, these principles will apply:

- All institutions will have a one-year "silent" phase to analyze the data and make appropriate changes in policy and practice. That is, initial scores will not be publicly disclosed.
- No data will be disclosed either publicly or to the institutions that would jeopardize the respondents' anonymity.
- No disaggregated data will be presented for any demographic category with fewer than five respondents.

V. BENEFITS

What are the benefits for institutions participating in the pilot study?

- Institutional baseline data. Pilot institutions will learn systematically how satisfied their junior faculty members are with respect to departmental and institutional climate, and academic personnel policies and practices that affect their performance and satisfaction.
- Comparative benchmark data. Participating institutions will be able to determine their school's position relative to anonymous data from the other pilot sites, and each institution will be able to make internal comparisons across schools and departments (as long as the survey respondents' anonymity can be assured).
- An internal diagnostic. The pilot results will provide data to inform discussions and decisions concerning junior faculty satisfaction and measures of success. Successful departments can be analyzed and publicized as exemplars of best practices, and less successful departments can be targeted for improvements.
- A competitive edge. Participating institutions will have a clearer picture of how to increase the satisfaction, fulfillment, and productivity among new scholars, and lower voluntary turnover rates. Institutions with an earned and documented reputation as "a great place" for junior faculty to work should be able to attract a stronger, more diverse pool of applicants and successfully recruit more first-choice candidates.
- Shared learning. Pilot sites will learn from one another about how to interpret and use data in order to leverage necessary reforms in policy and practice, reward exemplary actions, and stimulate academic units that lag behind.

What are the benefits for junior faculty members?

- Better information. Candidates for positions as junior faculty members will have systematic, comparative, and heretofore unavailable, data about institutional climate, work life, and levels of fulfillment and satisfaction among their peers.
- Better questions. The survey data will equip candidates to ask better questions about important work-life considerations and academic personnel policies.
- Better decisions. With better information, new scholars should be able to make better decisions about where to work. This, in turn, should reduce mismatches and voluntary turnover.

VI. PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS

Who will conduct the study?

Dr. Richard Chait, Professor of Higher Education, and Dr. Cathy Trower, Senior Research Associate, at the Harvard University Graduate School of Education are co-principal investigators. They most recently conducted "The Project on Faculty Appointments" funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts and have published, separately or together, dozens of articles, chapters, and books about faculty employment policies and practices.