

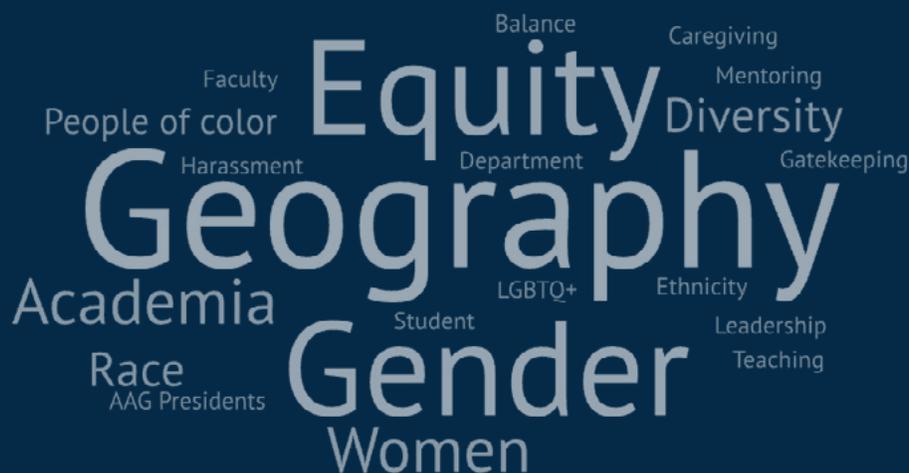


AAG

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION  
*of* GEOGRAPHERS

THE STATE OF GEOGRAPHY

# The Status of Women and Underrepresented Groups in Geography: A Multidimensional Analysis



January 2026

# The Status of Women and Underrepresented Groups in Geography: A Multidimensional Analysis

**AAG State of Geography Report: Status of Women in Geography**

January 2026

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# Executive Summary

## Overview

The Status of Women in Geography (SWG) Project examines the status of women and other underrepresented groups in the discipline of geography in the U.S. From 2022 to 2025, the project team collected and analyzed a wide range of information, including data from surveys, interviews, web searches, and documents from the American Association of Geographers (AAG) and the Committee on the Status of Women in Geography. Mixed methods were used to analyze historical aspects and current trends in the challenges, contributions, and opportunities for both faculty and graduate students within the discipline. Findings from this research reveal nuanced information about the climate where geographers work, biases and discrimination they face, strategies for achieving work-life balance, and initiatives taken to advance the status of women and other marginalized groups in the discipline.

This report offers critical information to help departments and the AAG prioritize efforts to diversify and grow geography. The project also provides recommendations to achieve a more diverse membership and inclusive environment for academic geographers and members of the AAG. This project is aligned with the AAG 2023-2025 Strategic Plan, Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) initiatives of the AAG, and other programs that support faculty and graduate students as part of broader efforts to diversify the discipline.

## Scope of the Project

The unique approach and extensive scope of this SWG Project significantly expands available data on the status of women and underrepresented groups in the discipline of geography. This research examines the levels of satisfaction, barriers, and successes among specific groups in geography. Information was collected at the individual, departmental, and institutional levels based in the U.S. through historical analyses, surveys, documents, and interviews.

The mixed-methods approach provides a detailed view of the experiences of women and other underrepresented groups in geography. The outcomes of this research provide rich data, analyses, and results on the status of women and other minoritized groups, such as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), Women of Color (WOC), and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Queer (LGBTQ) people in geography which will be valuable for the AAG, its Specialty Groups, and geography departments, among others. The research team has published papers in *The Professional Geographer*, and results have also been presented at national and regional geography annual meetings to disseminate the findings and get feedback on the project. These findings are strongly relevant to the discipline of geography and other academic disciplines and professional organizations working to enhance the status of women and other marginalized groups.

The data collected by this project can serve as a baseline for future analysis to assess the impact of the recent dismantling of DEI initiatives on women, BIPOC, WOC, and LGBTQ communities. The members of this project continue to disseminate information related to these resources and findings in support of the discipline of geography and other academic groups.

## Summary of Sections

### Part I. Historical Status of Women in Geography

Academic geography has historically been dominated by white male faculty. Over the past 50 years, this trend has gradually shifted as departments increasingly hired and promoted female faculty. An examination of PhD-granting departments since 1969 indicates a gradual increase in the number of departments with at least one woman faculty member, and in more recent years, a significant number of departments with more balanced numbers. The number of women PhD graduates has risen sharply during this period. Recent data show that gender balance has been achieved at lower ranks, such as lecturer/instructor and assistant professor, but women still only constitute one-quarter of full professors. More departments are reaching a critical mass of women faculty, and representation is improving across all ranks; thus, the needle is moving toward parity. Despite underrepresentation at higher faculty ranks, women are holding departmental leadership roles in slightly higher proportions, suggesting they may be selected (or self-select) for these service-oriented leadership positions at higher rates than they are being promoted.

### Part II. Challenges and Opportunities in Academic Geography

This section draws from our national survey of US-based AAG members which examined the experiences of graduate students and faculty in the areas of work-life balance and caregiving, workplace climate, and barriers to advancement.

Challenges with work-life balance are common in academia, yet are experienced differently across gender, race, and career stage. For faculty, caregiving and departmental service roles are highly gendered, as women tend to be more responsible for caregiving while men tend to prioritize work and income generation. Although only a small percentage of graduate students in our sample reported childcare-related responsibilities, they still faced challenges in achieving work-life balance.

The gendered nature of caregiving has shifted over time with family policy changes, increasing male involvement in domestic responsibilities, a rising number of people without children, and dual-earning households. Nonetheless, women continue to face more difficulties achieving work-life balance and report less satisfaction with accommodations for caregiving. These topics generated important responses in the survey concerning strategies for achieving work-life balance. An ethos of care in the workplace and elsewhere plays a crucial role in the experiences and success of women and underrepresented groups in academia.

Various aspects of departmental and institutional climates for both faculty and graduate students include hostile workplace environments, a sense of belonging within departments and among colleagues, feelings of safety, support from mentors, colleagues, and peers, and role in decision-making. Survey responses to both closed- and open-ended questions were mixed, with important differences by gender, race, ethnicity, professional status, and institutional type. The qualitative responses provided rich insights into the experiences of individual faculty members and graduate students as they navigate their professional and personal goals, challenges to advancement, and strategies for succeeding in their workplaces and personal lives. Climate issues were also evident in interview responses and career trajectories of the surviving AAG women presidents interviewed for this project.

Finally, despite increasing numbers of women faculty in many departments, they still represent a disproportionate share of faculty at lower ranks. This significantly hinders representation in graduate advising and research supervision. Lower numbers of women and faculty of color in the tenure stream often mean that many graduate students lack role models, and those that do exist are often subject to cultural taxation and higher advising loads, whether formal or informal, as such service may be invisible, or valued differently than other

service expectations, and reduce time for research. Revisions to tenure and promotion (T&P) guidelines may help address many of these barriers, along with revisions to how service is measured and valued.

While the discipline has achieved gender parity in PhD degrees awarded, gender equity at higher faculty ranks still lags behind. Often referred to as a leaky pipeline, this drop-off, or leak, occurs at various stages of the career, which we examine using the Hostile Obstacle Course (HOC) framework. Women and BIPOC scholars often experience more challenges navigating hostile environments between the start of their career and promotion, with work barriers such as policies and hostile workplace climates that disproportionately burden marginalized groups, and personal barriers derived from work-life balance expectations that differ from their male colleagues.

More PhD students (49%) than master's students (44%) indicated they considered leaving academia, and more women (50%) than men (40%) reported they considered leaving. First-generation students considered leaving at a higher rate than continuing-generation students. Further, those from R2 institutions indicated a higher rate of considering leaving academia compared to those from R1 institutions. Graduate students identified the primary reason for considering leaving academia was to increase salary and reduce stress.

About 50% of faculty in our sample indicated that they considered leaving academia while the reasons varied by gender, race, and rank. While both men and women faculty cited increased income as one of the primary reasons for considering leaving academia, more women faculty indicated a reduction in stress or a hostile climate as their primary reasons than male faculty.

### **Part III. Gatekeeping and Gendered Knowledge Production**

A review of the gender of AAG presidents, journal editorship, and committee composition revealed that women's representation in leadership has improved but remains uneven. As of 2025, 20 of 122 AAG presidents have been women, with significant progress since 2000 when women held 57% of these roles. However, the AAG presidency remains concentrated in research-intensive (R1) institutions, primarily in the East and West Lakes divisions.

Committee analysis (2007–2022) shows persistent gender imbalances. While the two important AAG membership elected committees, Nominating and Honors, are relatively balanced; others, like Healthy Departments and Archives and Association History, remain male-dominated.

When analyzing the journal editorship data, *The Annals of the American Association of Geographers (Annals)* and *The Professional Geographer (PG)* have seen modest gains in recent years, yet women account for only 21% of editors of *Annals* (eight out of 37 served as editor). Additionally, three women have served as co-editors over its 110+ years. In its 79 years of history, the PG appointed only 17% of editors and co-editors as women (three out of 17 editors and three women as co-editors).

Overall, despite significant progress in addressing gender balance in key leadership roles, institutional biases persist. Much remains to be done to elevate marginalized voices and diversify the types of knowledge produced within the discipline by increasing women's presence in key gatekeeping roles that can significantly shape recognition, awards, and leadership pipelines within the discipline.

### **Part IV. Leadership and Networking**

Studies have shown that women's leadership influences the culture of an organization by providing role models and mentors for early-career women and enhancing diversity and inclusion in academia as a whole. Women represent only 16% of AAG presidents in AAG history (20 out of 122 presidents), yet they have played critical roles in changing AAG's culture.

The AAG women presidential interviews yielded important information about how these women advanced in their careers and succeeded in leadership positions in the AAG and elsewhere. For example, three of these

women were elected as members of the National Academy of Sciences and seven are AAG Lifetime Achievement Honors recipients. Others held university- or department-level leadership positions, or served the AAG as National Councilors or journal editors prior to their presidency. Their presidential initiatives to advance feminist and anti-racist scholarship, care labor, social justice, and promotion of geography in the US and international scientific communities have been impactful in geography and beyond.

## **Part V. Recommendations for the Advancement of Women and Underrepresented Groups**

Major recommendations from this project include institutional support, recruitment and hiring, leadership development, data management, and resource allocation. The following recommendations overlap with work already taking place in the AAG and expand on specific measures to ensure the advancement of women and other underrepresented groups in geography.

### **Key Recommendations**

- Build equitable and transparent policies that support individual well-being and advancement.
- Create supportive environments for graduate students, particularly those with complex life circumstances and first-generation students.
- Protect faculty, especially women and minoritized people, from structural bias.
- Empower department chairs to create supportive communities, not just bureaucratic units.
- Develop and implement inclusivity plans at the department level and at the AAG that supports people from all backgrounds and identities.
- Establish AAG-led efforts on climate, equity, governance, and leadership pathways.
- Review T&P policies and value placed on service by aggregating and analyzing department-level data at the AAG level.
- Standardize data collection and develop guidance for best-practices to improve accountability and transparency and empower faculty and students.

### **Specific Measures**

#### **Climate**

- Develop and share department/program-level best practices on anti-harassment to promote a sense of belonging in a welcoming environment.
- Ensure open and transparent leadership so that all individuals have a voice within the unit and at their institutions.
- Establish clear, accessible mechanisms for reporting concerns across diverse needs and identities.

#### **Work-life Balance**

- Implement policies and practices that ensure the work-life balance and well-being of faculty and students, including caregivers.
- Ensure that tenure and promotion (T&P) guidelines address effects of stopping the tenure clock and avoid penalizing parental leave or caregiving responsibilities.

- Educate evaluation committees on gendered impacts of “gender neutral” policies such as parental leave or productivity metrics.
- Provide flexible teaching formats when evening or weekend classes create inequitable childcare burdens.
- Encourage universities to expand childcare availability beyond traditional daytime hours.

### **Graduate Student Support**

- Develop comprehensive professional and personal development programs (e.g., grant writing, project management, public speaking, financial literacy, and wellness).
- Create policies that support nontraditional, first-generation, and minority graduate students, including those with caregiving obligations or employment outside academia.
- Assess barriers in departmental policies and remove those that disproportionately disadvantage students outside traditional academic norms.
- Build community for students through mentoring networks, social support, and an inclusive department culture.

### **Faculty Workload and Advancement**

- Monitor service loads to prevent overburden women and minoritized faculty who often shoulder disproportionate labor.
- Reduce service demands to balance with teaching and scholarship requirements among associate professors so they can advance to full professor.
- Provide structured mentoring for associate professors and faculty from underrepresented groups.
- Develop policies and procedures to solicit feedback from students, including student evaluations of teaching, that avoid structural bias and discrimination.
- Use dashboards or tracking systems to ensure transparency in T&P evaluations using anonymized and aggregated data on publications, grants, service, teaching, and advising.

### **Department Chair Support**

- Offer structured training for new chairs, who often assume the role without preparation.
- Develop metrics or recognition programs for effective chairs.
- Encourage peer networks among chairs to support morale, recruitment, and retention.
- Create reward and incentive structures for these service roles.

### **Leadership Development**

- Develop targeted leadership workshops at AAG to train diverse faculty to create a pipeline for leadership at department level and at the AAG.
- Expand training and networking opportunities for faculty, students, and department chairs
- Use the AAG’s Department Leadership workshops to provide formal training and certification for department leaders

- Create an advocates and allies program for male faculty engaging in gender equity initiatives that build on best practices from other organizations.
- Offer stipends for leadership training workshops for people such as women and minoritized faculty as well as faculty from Non-R1 institutions who historically lacked access to these opportunities and resources.

## **Policy and Governance**

- Expand JEDI and Healthy Departments initiatives to support underrepresented groups, including first-generation students, members of the LGBTQ and BIPOC communities, and those from non-R1 institutions.
- Integrate policies and practices that promote a supportive departmental climate as part of the Healthy Departments Initiatives.
- Provide guidance to departments on inclusive governance, climate improvement, and equitable T&P criteria.
- Develop a repository of T&P policies and best practices from diverse institutions.
- Evaluate efficacy of existing anti-racism and anti-harassment policies that apply to all AAG-affiliated activities and publicly report the results.
- Establish guidelines for journal reviewers and authors and monitor the success of these policies using data-driven approaches, including publication and rejection rates by gender and race of the authors.
- Promote equity and inclusion principles for editorial leadership and AAG committee composition.
- Expand participation of women and minoritized faculty in key AAG committees such as awards, honors, fellowships, and throughout governance structures at AAG.

## **Data Collection and Accountability**

- Collect expanded statistics on women and underrepresented groups in the discipline
- Analyze anonymized data from departments on hiring, retention, and T&P outcomes
- Develop a dashboard at the AAG level to disseminate, systematically track, and analyze in geography
- Conduct regular climate surveys and share aggregated results with departments

## Introduction

In 2022, select members of the Committee on the Status of Women in Geography (CSWG), a standing committee of the American Association of Geographers (AAG), in collaboration with diverse women scholars, formed a plan to revisit prior research on gender parity in geography programs, and to expand that research to examine current issues that impact not just women, but other marginalized scholars in geography. The project specifically seeks to understand career challenges for faculty and graduate students as they navigate the complex interplay of career advancement, work-life balance, and departmental climate. Findings will inform efforts to reduce barriers for women, especially women of color (WOC), members of the BIPOC and LGBTQ communities, foreign-born faculty members, and international students, thereby creating a welcoming and inclusive environment for all geographers. Additionally, the research included interviews with past women presidents of the AAG to add insights and perspective to the historical and contemporary data.

While the number of women in geography has increased in the US since the seminal work of Zelinsky (1973), and subsequent work by Zelinsky, Monk, and Hanson (1982), Grunfest (1989), and Lee (1990), the status of women and other underrepresented groups in the discipline of Geography has been the subject of considerable research and discussion (Chen and Eaves 2024; Falconer Al-Hindi 2019; Foote 2010; Mountz et al. 2015; Sheppard, Reades, and Freeman 2023). These studies report that women and other marginalized groups remain underrepresented among faculty and graduate students, particularly in leadership roles in this field (Peake 2017; Pulido 2002; Schurr, Müller, and Imhof 2020). Many scholars claim this is due to discrimination in recruitment and hiring, lack of support, and sometimes hostile environments in geography departments and the discipline as a whole.

The Status of Women in Geography (SWG) project aims to assess the current status of women and other traditionally marginalized communities in the discipline of Geography. Specifically, the study aims to:

1. Examine the status of women in geography in the US using historical data, including gender-based analysis of faculty by ranks, departmental chairships, AAG presidents and committees, and journal gatekeeping.
2. Analyze the status of women and other minority groups based on the survey of US AAG academic members and interviews with AAG women presidents to identify challenges they experience in advancement and balancing work and life, as well as their experiences within the academic climate.
3. Provide recommendations to the AAG and geography departments to improve the experience and representation of faculty and students in the discipline.

The research draws from current and historical data collected through the AAG and other sources, surveys, and interviews. These data are also used to examine leadership trends at the department level and within AAG by gender. We also analyze trends in membership and chair positions for key AAG elected, appointed, standing, and ad hoc committees and task forces ([Governance - AAG](#)), as well as leadership roles (journal editorship) of the two long-standing AAG flagship journals, *Annals of the AAG* and *PG*, based on gender. Historical analysis of departmental composition evaluates changes from 1969-2019 while other measures are limited to shorter and more recent timespans.

## Conceptual Framework and Methodological Approaches

The approach and perspectives in this project are grounded in expansive, contemporary work in women's and gender studies (Blithe 2019), including feminist geography (Askins and Blazek 2016; Datta and Lund 2018; Franklin et al. 2021; Sheppard, Reades, and Freeman 2023), queer geography (Kinkaid, Parikh, and Ranjbar 2022), Black geographies (Adams, Solis, and McKendry 2014; Pulido 2002), and women in STEM fields (Berhe et al. 2022; Cannady et al. 2014). Our analyses of the status of women and underrepresented groups in geography

are informed by concepts such as intersectionality, women in leadership, institutional dynamics in higher education (Muhs et al. 2012; Niemann et al. 2020; Ryan et al. 2009), neoliberalism in academia (Berg, Huijbens, and Larsen 2016), and academic climate. These and other conceptual frameworks continue to shape the analyses of our research on the historical background, current status, and future directions of diverse groups in higher education. Finally, cross-disciplinary literature in geography, women's and gender studies, higher education, and the sciences contributed to the analysis in this project. We draw from the Hostile Obstacle Course (HOC) framework for a nuanced understanding of equity issues in academia that examines how women and other marginalized groups face both structural and cultural obstacles as they move through the academy (Berhe et al. 2022). This framework also addresses critiques of the often-used leaky pipeline metaphor (Mason and Goulden 2002). A summary of diverse sources of data used in this project can be found in Appendix A.

The rich and complex nature of this research required a variety of methods and approaches to capture the wide array of themes and data sources. In general, this project employs a feminist methodology that entails attention to diverse voices and power dynamics in the research process. It also includes relational dimensions of reflexivity at different stages among the researchers and participants (Falconer Al-Hindi and Eaves 2023; Hiemstra and Billo 2017). Understanding the subjugated identities of these participants is critical to sharing and interpreting the themes and outcomes of this work. These methods draw from both quantitative and qualitative dimensions of the material that provide a contextualized and more nuanced analysis of our findings.

Historical Analysis: The historical analysis collected data from a stratified sample of AAG resources, such as the Guide to Geography Programs, cross-referenced with websites, published works, and other resources to confirm departmental composition by rank and gender, using binary categories, along with departmental leadership. These data were then summarized to identify temporal trends.

Challenges and Opportunities: Workplace challenges and opportunities were largely drawn from an extensive survey disseminated to all US-based faculty, post-doctoral researchers, and graduate student AAG members in early 2023. Survey analysis consists of 502 responses from faculty and 272 graduate students from US-based institutions. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to analyze the diverse and wide-ranging types of data gathered as part of this project, including descriptive statistics and cross-tabulation. Qualitative methods included content analysis using NVivo14 software. Coding of the survey responses was done by identifying high level themes and subthemes of work issues and strategies. These methods unveiled the actual experiences and perceptions of the respondents in their work and personal lives as academic geographers.

Gatekeeping: The role of gendered gatekeeping in geographic knowledge production and governance was examined through an analysis of AAG presidential history (1904-2025), the editorial leadership of two flagship journals since their inception, and two decades of key AAG committee compositions. A Delphi survey was conducted in 2023 among all living AAG presidents to rank all AAG standing committees for influence within the organization's governance framework; memberships and chairships were analyzed from 2007 to 2022. Further, the historical editorship of the *Annals* (1911-2025) and the *PG* (1949-2025) was also assessed to gain insights into the role of gender in knowledge production. Summary statistics and spatial analysis of presidents and journal editors of the AAG were conducted over its history to identify institutional trends and privileges.

Leadership: All living women presidents of the AAG (17) were interviewed during the first half of 2023 to discuss their career trajectories, initiatives while president, and assessment of the current status of and future improvement for women in geography. In addition to manually analyzing the interviews and other materials, NVivo 14 was used to examine trends and main themes.

## Outcomes and Recommendations

This section summarizes the findings of this research, along with recommendations for work to be done at various levels within the discipline. Resources from a variety of sources are also provided to improve the status of women and underrepresented groups with a focus on faculty, students, departments, and the AAG. It is important to underscore the relevance of this work given the political climate, attacks on DEI and other affirmative action initiatives, and on academic freedom in general. This research highlights the need for continuing analysis and interrogation of the divisive and destructive elements of racist, misogynistic, ableist, and anti-LGBTQ sentiments and policies in higher education.

# Part I. Women Faculty and Leadership in Geography PhD Programs: Historical Perspectives

## Overview

Diversity among faculty members benefits recruitment and retention, supports engagement, and promotes the success of diverse students, thereby reducing underrepresentation gaps in geography and related disciplines (Drury, Siy, and Cheryan 2011; Fox Tree and Vaid 2022). Gender is a commonly measured aspect of diversity, and has been examined by prior scholars in STEM disciplines, and in geography specifically, (Adams, Solis, and McKendry 2014; Lee 1990; Sheppard, Reades, and Freeman 2023; Winkler 2000; Zelinsky 1973). In this section, we build on these prior studies and examine the changing gender representation of geography faculty and chairs at PhD granting institutions between 1969 and 2019 in the United States in a stratified sample of the period. We also look briefly at the gender of PhD graduates annually since 1990 in the United States. Our source of data for faculty and chairs was the AAG Guide to Geography Programs and our source for graduate students was data from the US Department of Education. During this period, the number of women PhD graduates has risen sharply to equal or exceed men, and faculty at the lower ranks of lecturer or instructor and assistant professor have also approached parity. However, the number of women in tenured positions is far from parity, especially at the full professor level, where women represent one-quarter of the total. Despite this underrepresentation at higher faculty ranks, women are holding departmental leadership roles at slightly higher proportions, suggesting women are selected or self-selecting for these service-oriented leadership positions at higher rates than they are being promoted.

## Key Findings

- The last half-century has seen considerable growth in the percentage of geography women faculty overall. The percentage of women faculty increased from 1 percent in 1969 to 37 percent in 2019 in PhD-granting departments.
- Isolation of women in geography departments has greatly decreased since the 1970s. In 1969, the only women faculty in PhD programs were solo women; since at least the early 2000s, there have been fewer than 10% of departments with only one female faculty member.
- Gender parity has been achieved for lecturers and instructors, and the percentage of women assistant and associate professors has reached critical mass. However, the percentage of female full professors still lags behind males. By 2019, there were only 25 percent female full professors in geography PhD programs.
- The proportion of PhD graduates in geography has grown from approximately one quarter women in the early 1990s to critical mass or parity since the early 2000s.

- A larger percentage of women are serving in departmental leadership roles, growing from ~11% of departments in 2005 to ~32% in 2019.
- There is considerable potential for future increased representation given that approximately half of all recent geography PhD graduates are women.

## Historical Trends by Gender

As with many disciplines in US academia (Mason and Goulden 2004), geography was an overwhelmingly male discipline for decades (Lee 1990; Zelinsky 1973; Zelinsky, Monk, and Hanson 1982). More recent studies (Adams, Solis, and McKendry 2014; Winkler 2000) have documented growing percentages of women in the discipline in 1997, 2005, and 2010 through the AAG Guide to Programs in Geography and surveys. Following such traditions, the SWG project conducted a historical trend analysis to examine the status of women in geography.

This section examines historical trends of faculty and chairs by gender and rank in US geography PhD programs for 1969, 1989, 2005, 2011, and 2019. We stratified the sample roughly by decade, but limited availability of AAG Guides to Geography Programs forced more irregular spacing. The AAG guidebook and other data provided by AAG used for the historical analysis in this project did not include any information on gender. As such, we interpreted gender in binary form based on information from department and other websites, including self-authored descriptions of research, Linked-In profiles, Rate My Professor comments, and obituaries.<sup>1</sup> (See footnote 1 for details.)

Geography programs were classified by the highest degree offered, and then examined by gender, rank, and leadership with a focus on PhD-granting departments due to their critical role in shaping geographic knowledge and producing future faculty. Several factors complicate this research design. For the first two guides in 1969 and 1989, most programs were labeled as “Geography” or in some cases Geography and a related discipline such as Geology or Anthropology. In more recent decades, there has been a trend towards renaming departments with a more interdisciplinary focus, an increase in merged departments, and programs offering graduate degrees in GIScience. Additionally, listing in the Guide is voluntary and fee-based, meaning some programs may have elected not to be included in all (or any) years. The numbers and percentages presented in this report are therefore an estimate of the trend because of these dataset complications.

Faculty rank was compiled according to full, associate, and assistant professors, including departmental faculty who hold positions of research professor. Although research faculty comprised less than 1 percent of the total faculty and were concentrated at a few universities, they can often chair or serve on graduate committees, and their minimal teaching load allows them to fund students through grants, so their importance as faculty advisors and mentors cannot be overlooked. Instructors and lecturers were grouped, and adjunct faculty were counted separately but are not shown in our tables and graphs, as these titles can vary significantly by institution. Emer-

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1 Categories and identities ascribed to individuals are challenging and involve a somewhat troubled history in research that attempts to measure and analyze people’s gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, and other social categories. We have made every effort to avoid misrepresentation, and apologize for those individuals whose identities are omitted or not adequately represented in our analyses.

We encountered several barriers to properly representing individuals such as available data in the AAG records that used binary gender categories for faculty, students, and editors. The project has worked to address these shortcomings at various stages of the research. We also faced similar limitations (only binary classes for gender) when using CIP code-based data for analyzing the gender of PhD awardees. Additionally, inspection of the websites of more than 70 PhD programs in the U.S. in January 2023 found that only two of those websites (University of Florida and University of Nevada-Reno) had pronouns listed in the faculty directory; on the main faculty page. In both cases, it was optional for faculty members to include pronouns with only about half of the faculty opted to do so. In none of these cases did any faculty use nonbinary they/them pronouns alone or in combination with another gender.

In sum, we recognize the limitations of our approach, but maintain that this is the most feasible approach to gain insights to historical trends in gender.

itus faculty, affiliated faculty from other departments, research associates, cartographers, librarians, and state climatologists without a faculty title were not counted in our compilation. For PhD programs, the gender of department chairs were also categorized and quantified.

Data on PhDs awarded was obtained from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) using the Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP code) for geography degrees awarded by gender. The goal here is to gain insights into the representation of and role models for women, recognizing that the constraints and limitations of our methods might unintentionally misgender some people.

## Gender and Faculty Rank in PhD Programs

Figure 1 shows the comparison of gender composition by rank for PhD-granting institutions from 1969 to 2019. In 1969, the overall makeup for PhD programs was overwhelmingly male. There is a steady increase in the percentage of women at all ranks, but it slows at the associate professor level, and lags considerably at full professor. By 2019, women made up 37% of the overall faculty, but just 25% of full professors. Among all disciplines, 29% of all full professors at doctoral institutions and 32% of all full professors across all institutions in 2019-2020 were women (AAUP 2020).

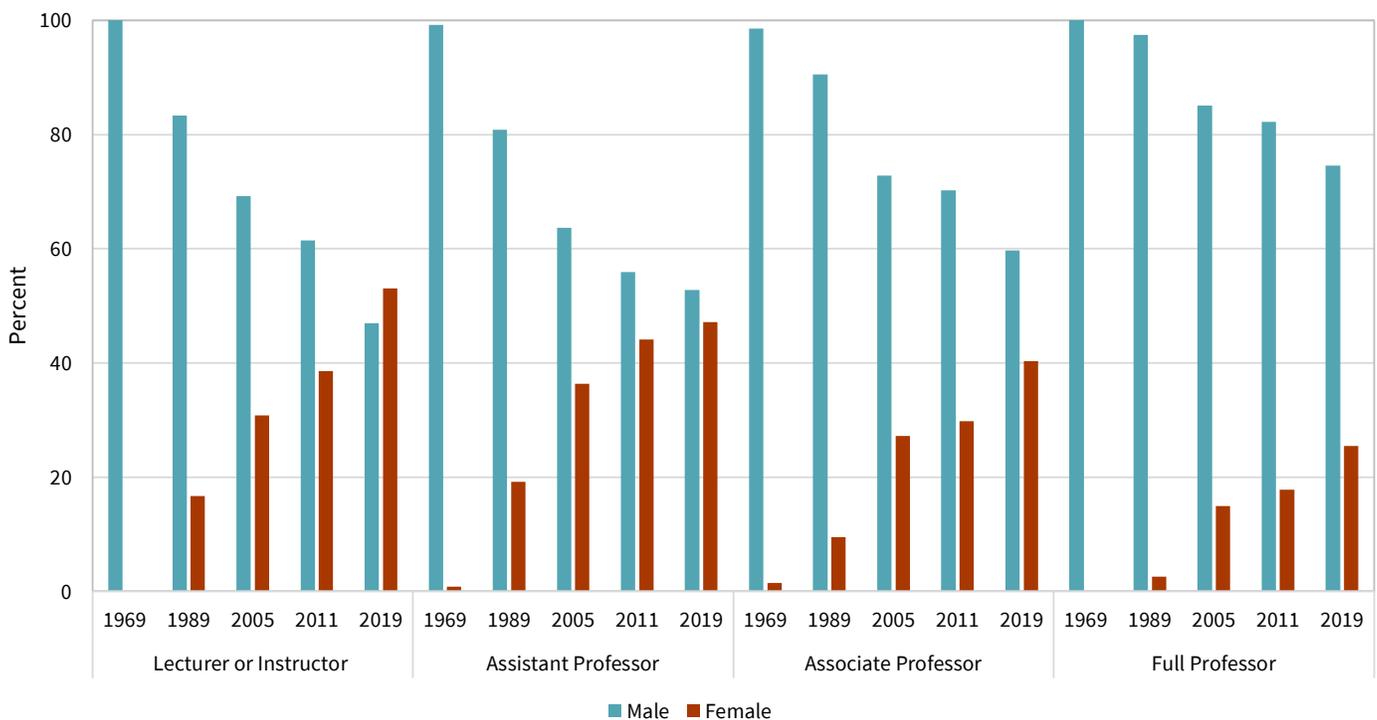


Figure 1. Geography Faculty in PhD-granting Institutions by Gender and Rank (1969-2019). Source: AAG Guide to Programs in Geography

These findings suggest that significant strides have been made toward gender parity in PhD programs since the early work of Zelinsky (1973) and Lee (1990). Critical mass, which is an important step in achieving community, shifting departmental culture, and driving change (Carrigan et al. 2011; Etzkowitz et al. 1994; UN 1992), is generally considered to be about 30% of a group. The threshold of critical mass has been present in many departments since about 2000, and some have been at or near parity for nearly a decade. Overall, there is gender parity with similar numbers of male and female faculty at the rank of lecturer/instructor and assistant

professor. However, at the higher ranks, associate professors are not yet at parity, and full professors are not yet at critical mass.

Figure 2 shows PhDs awarded by gender. Given the average time of 12 to 15 years required to achieve full professorship after earning one’s PhD, there is a discrepancy between females earning PhDs and attaining full professorships after this period of time. This gap between expected and actual full professorship may be attributed to some of the challenges discussed later in this report.

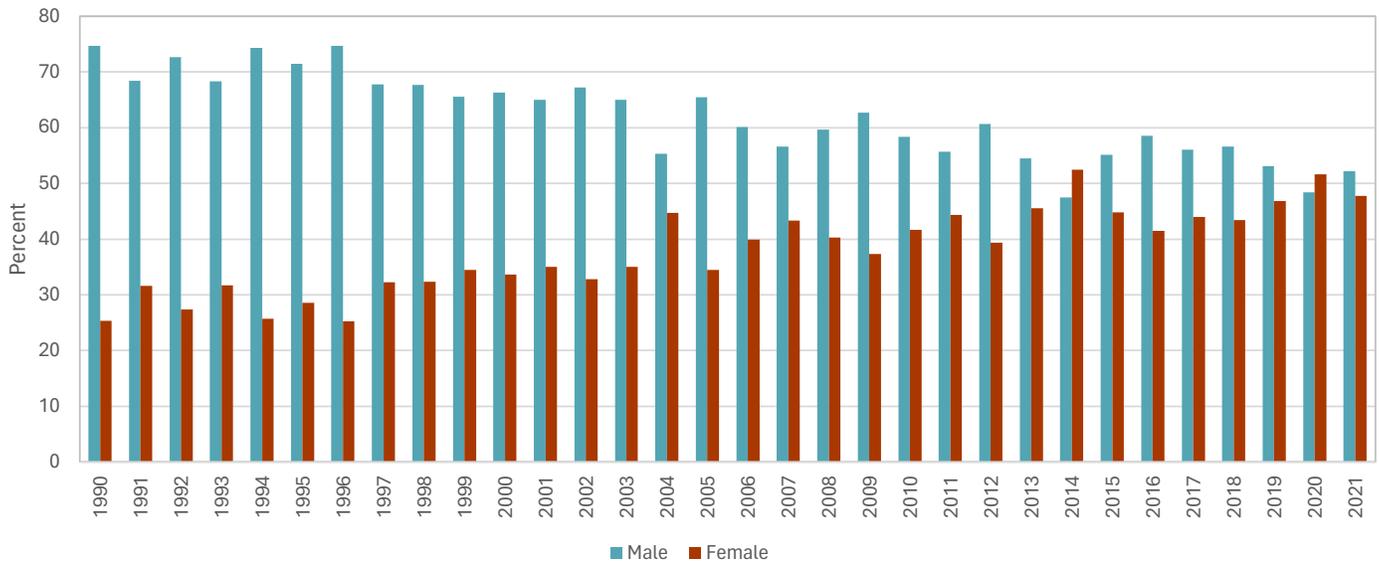


Figure 2. PhD Degrees Awarded in Geography by Gender (1990-2021). Source: US Dept of Education (nces.ed.gov, 2022)

### Female Chairs of PhD Programs

Leadership at the departmental level is critical to shaping the direction and operations of geography both within these units as well as across the discipline. The number of female chairs in geography PhD-granting departments has increased over the past five decades, from no female chairs in 1969, modest growth over the next three decades to 12 (~17%) by 2011, and then doubling by 2019 to 24 (32%) by 2019 (Table 1).

As noted earlier, this proportion exceeds that of female full professors, which suggests that delays in promotion may not always translate to delays in advancement to service-oriented leadership roles, or that a disproportional number of female associate professors are tapped to serve as department leaders. While increasing women in departmental leadership is a positive change, assigning major service duties to associate professors may further delay their advancement to full professorship.

Table 1. PhD Department Leadership by Gender (1969-2019). Source: AAG Guide to Geography Programs

Year	Male Chairs	Female Chairs	Total	% Female
1969	43	0	43	0
1989	46	4	50	8
2005	61	8	69	12
2011	60	12	72	17
2019	50	24	74	32

## Summary

Geography PhD programs have made progress toward gender parity since the late 1960s when there were few women faculty. In recent years, increasing numbers of female faculty have led to greater gender parity among lecturers/instructors and assistant professors in recent years. However, associate professors have more recently achieved critical mass, and full professors have not yet reached critical mass, with only one-quarter female faculty in PhD departments. There has been parity in the number of female PhDs for more than a decade, which is helping to supply faculty, and brings promise for gender parity at all ranks in the future. One surprising finding is that there was a higher percentage of female chairs than full professors. This suggests that women full and associate professors are doing a disproportionate share of leadership and service. Mossa et al. (2026) explore historical aspects of gender representation in geography in more detail. Part II discusses some of the challenges that exacerbate this inequity for women and marginalized faculty as they seek to advance their careers.

# Part II. Challenges and Opportunities in US Geography: Student and Faculty Perspectives

## Overview

The future success of geography as a discipline requires a qualified and diverse pool of PhD students and early-career faculty. While geography has made great strides in the past several decades with women now representing a large proportion of the talent pool, more progress is needed. Part I illustrates parity or near parity in lower ranks for at least the last decade (Figure 2). This begs the question of why women are not advancing at the same pace as men. Historically, more male students graduated, and faculty were disproportionately male, thus making up a higher percentage of associate and full professors. Further, males are less likely to drop out of academia than women, contributing to so-called 'leaky pipelines', which are well known across a variety of disciplines in higher education.

This section examines the reasons and context of these leaks with an emphasis on the experiences and challenges of women and other marginalized groups in career advancement, work-life balance, and departmental climate drawn from responses to the 2023 survey conducted for this project. These patterns are explained by the Hostile Obstacle Course (HOC) theory that examines how structural barriers and biases contribute to ongoing inequities in the academic workforce (Berhe et al. 2022). Unlike the leaky pipeline metaphor, HOC recognizes that the cultural and structural barriers to equal participation create a unique track of inevitable obstacles and experiences for women and minority faculty. An online survey was distributed to AAG academic members in the U.S. in early 2023. The survey generated 502 faculty responses and 277 graduate student responses from US-based institutions<sup>2</sup>. Appendix

<sup>2</sup> A total of 1049 responses were received, but only 862 were analyzed. Faculty responses from institutions outside the U.S. were omitted (34), as this did not fit our research aim. We received only 49 post-doc responses, which we considered too small a sample to provide meaningful analysis. We also excluded 104 responses that were outside the project scope, such as undergraduate students, or employees of non-academic institutions.

B shows the Student and Faculty Survey questionnaire. Appendix C shows a summary of survey respondents, which were then grouped into subcategories for analysis (students, faculty by rank, etc.).

## Key Findings

- Summary of work-life balance data and issues are similar among faculty and students, especially women, who typically take on more caregiving responsibilities.
- Hostile workplaces are challenging for both female and underrepresented faculty and students. Students are less aware of measures to take to avoid and stop hostile behavior.
- Both faculty and students emphasized the importance of support and mentorship for their advancement and success in academia. Many noted a lack of role models, especially for WOC, members of the LGBTQ community, and foreign-born academics in geography.

## Part IIa. Graduate Student Perspectives

### Overview

The number of female graduate students who are pursuing a degree in geography has increased over the years. While it appears that the field of geography has made considerable progress in recruiting women and other underrepresented graduate students, there are concerns about their retention and advancement within the discipline (Caretta et al. 2018; Hawkins, Manzi and Ojeda 2014). To ensure sustained growth and a continuous pool of qualified and diverse geographers, it is important to build a robust support system for these graduate students within geography departments and academic institutions (Kaplan and Mapes 2016; Solem, Kollasch, and Lee 2013). In 1995, Ellen Hansen and others wrote a seminal piece about strategies for women graduate students in geography, stating that universities and the profession need to “foster the development and use of alternative and entrenched networks that will help carry students through the difficulties of graduate school and the beginning years of an academic career” (Hansen et al. 1995: 312). Thirty years later, these comments underscore the continuing need to support women and other underrepresented groups in geography.

This section examines the challenges and support structures that exist for women and marginalized graduate students, as well as their academic advancement. The discussion focuses on when and how these students struggle with work-life balance, access to resources, department climate, and hostile workplace. Survey responses demonstrate that graduate students encounter multiple financial, academic, and emotional obstacles in efforts to advance their career goals. In some cases, these obstacles delay their time to completion or lead to dropping out of graduate school altogether. Their experiences vary by gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, and type of institution, but highlight what Hansen et al. (1995) argue in terms of the need for mentors, networks, and other support for students in geography.

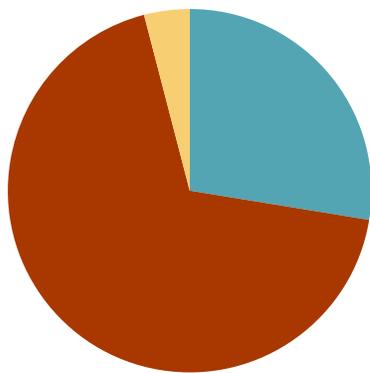
### Key Findings

- Nearly two-thirds of the student survey respondents were female and nearly half were white. 67% were PhD students (61% of whom were at R1 institutions), 24% were first-generation students, and 13% were international students.
- Nearly 40% of graduate students indicated they find it extremely or very difficult to achieve work-life balance while only 17% indicated having caregiving responsibilities.

- A small proportion of the students experienced or witnessed hostile behavior in their departments, but 32% knew what steps to take if they did.
- Given the variety of resources available, students still faced financial difficulties in managing graduate school. Graduate stipends ranged from below the Federal Poverty Guidelines for single individuals<sup>3</sup> to more than three times that amount.
- Primary reasons to consider leaving graduate school were to increase salary and reduce stress.
- Mentoring was reported as a key factor in the academic success of graduate students, with most of them turning to faculty advisors for support.

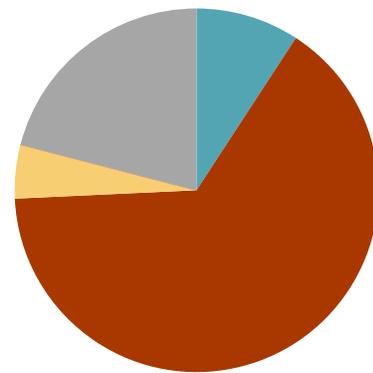
## Characteristics of Graduate Student Respondents

The 272 graduate students in our survey represented various degree programs (27% masters, 67% PhD, and 6% others), institutions, genders, racial and ethnic backgrounds, and international status. The majority of respondents were female, PhD students, and from R1 institutions (Figure 3a-c). 47% of respondents were white, 9% Asian or Asian American, 7% African American or Black, and 7% Chicano(a), Latino(a) or Hispanic. The remaining 31% indicated ‘other’ or did not answer. Nearly 13% of respondents were international students. Nearly one-fourth were first-generation students, and one-fifth of the respondents were international students. About 67% of the non-resident students enrolled at R1 institutions (Figure 3c). About 38% of the first-generation respondents were nonbinary (Figure 3d). When analyzed by race/ethnicity, 55% were Chicano(a), Latino(a), or Hispanic, 31% were African American or Black, 21% were Asian or Asian American, and 18% were White first-generation students (Figure 3e).



■ Graduate student Master's ■ Graduate student PhD ■ Other

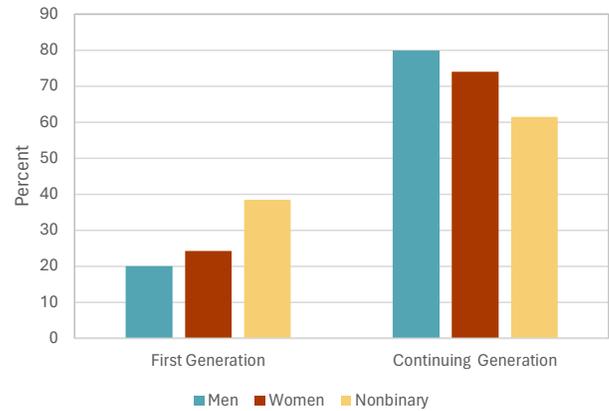
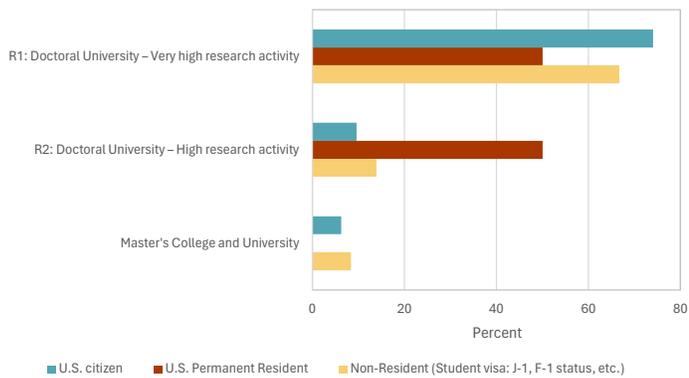
a)



■ Men ■ Women ■ Nonbinary ■ Prefer not to disclose ■ LGBTQ ■ No response

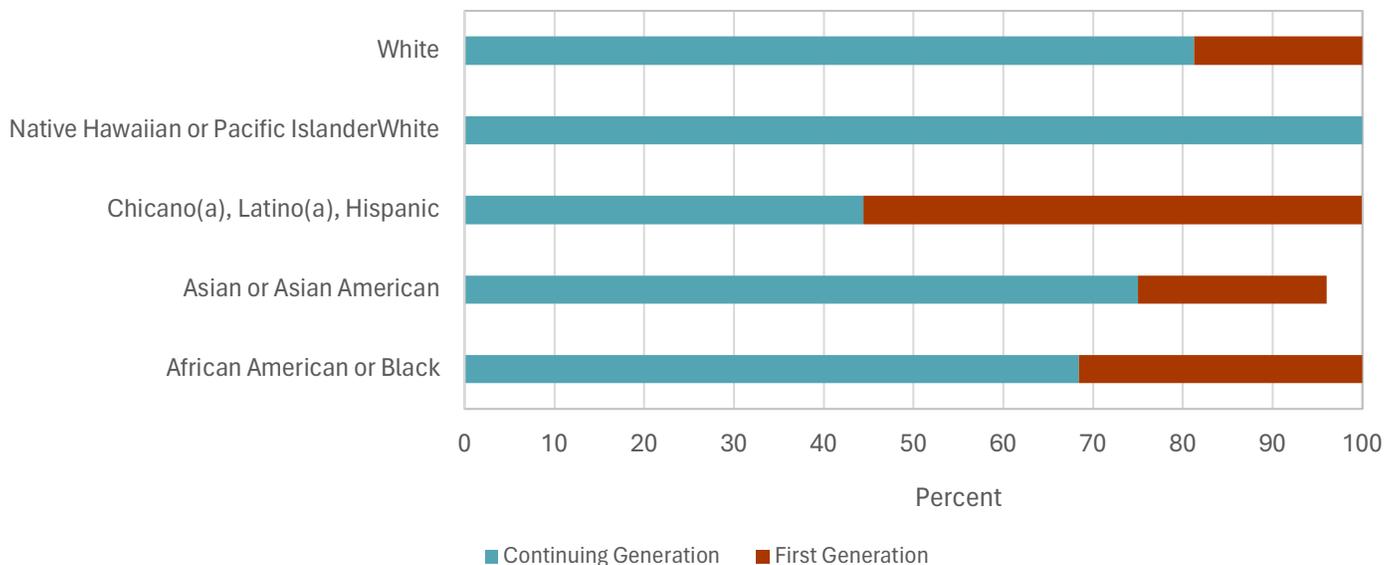
b)

<sup>3</sup> Federal Poverty Guidelines for 2025 are \$15,650 for single individuals, and an additional \$6,500 for each additional household member.



c)

d)



e)

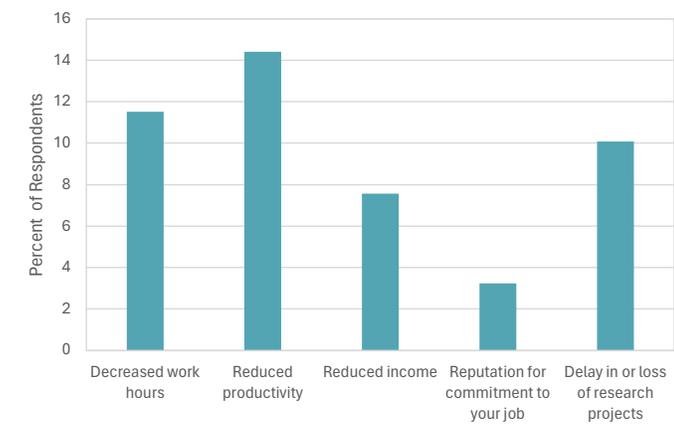
Figure 3. Characteristics of Student Respondents: a) Academic Status, b) Gender/Sexual Orientation, c) Institution Type by Citizenship Status, d) Generational Status by Gender, and e) Generational Status by Race

## Work-Life Balance and Caregiving among Students

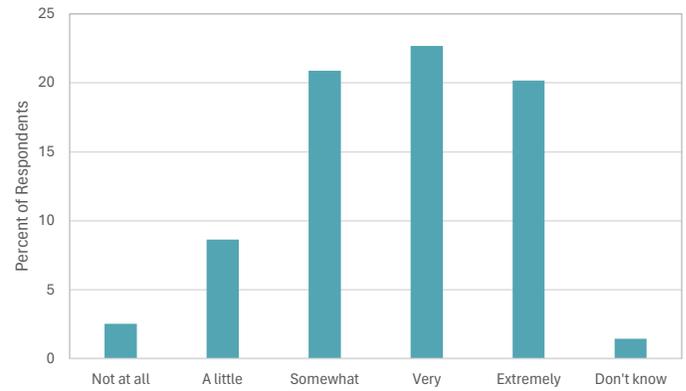
Attention to work-life balance is important to the educational performance and overall success of graduate students (Caretta et al. 2018; Jordan, Shortridge, and Darden 2022). The survey confirmed that work-life balance is a challenge for many graduate students (Figure 4a). Nearly half (47%) found it very or extremely difficult and over one-fifth found it somewhat difficult to achieve work-life balance, while only 3% said it was not at all difficult (Figure 4a). When analyzed by type of institution, students from R2 institutions found it particularly challenging to achieve a work-life balance.

Caregiving is an important part of the challenge to achieve work-life balance. In particular, graduate students face difficulties balancing their work responsibilities with personal health and well-being that relate to their caregiving roles with families, children, and elders (Hawkins, Manzi, and Ojeda 2014; Solem, Kollasch, and Lee 2013). Only 18% of student respondents reported significant caregiving responsibilities (Figure 4b), with non-binary respondents reporting higher caregiving responsibilities than men and women (Figure 4c). First-generation students reported having caregiving responsibilities at a slightly higher rate than non-first-generation

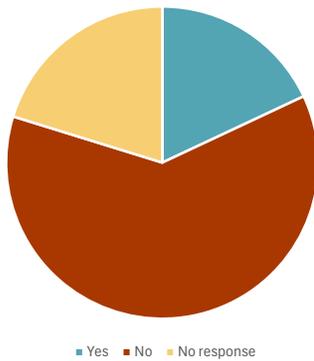
students (Figure 4d). Among the graduate students who claimed this impacted their professional life, 14% noted reduced productivity, 12% had decreased work hours, 10% experienced a delay in or loss of research projects, 8% reduced their income, and 3% said it impacted perceptions of their commitment to the job (Figure 4e).



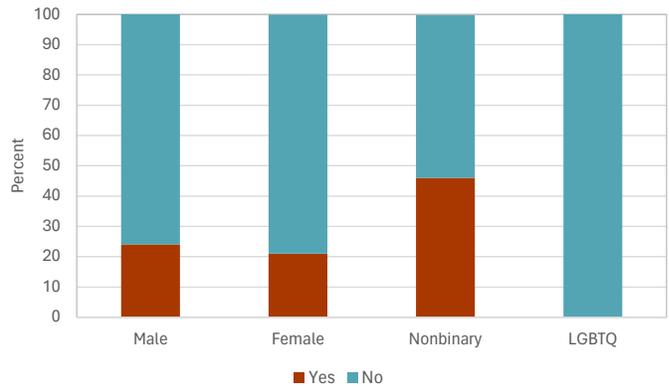
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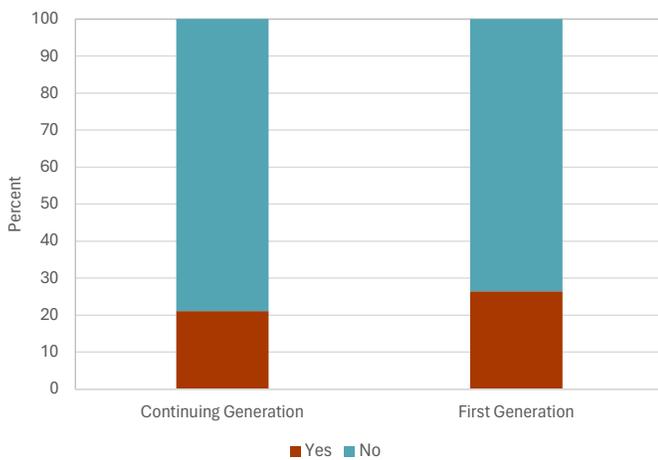
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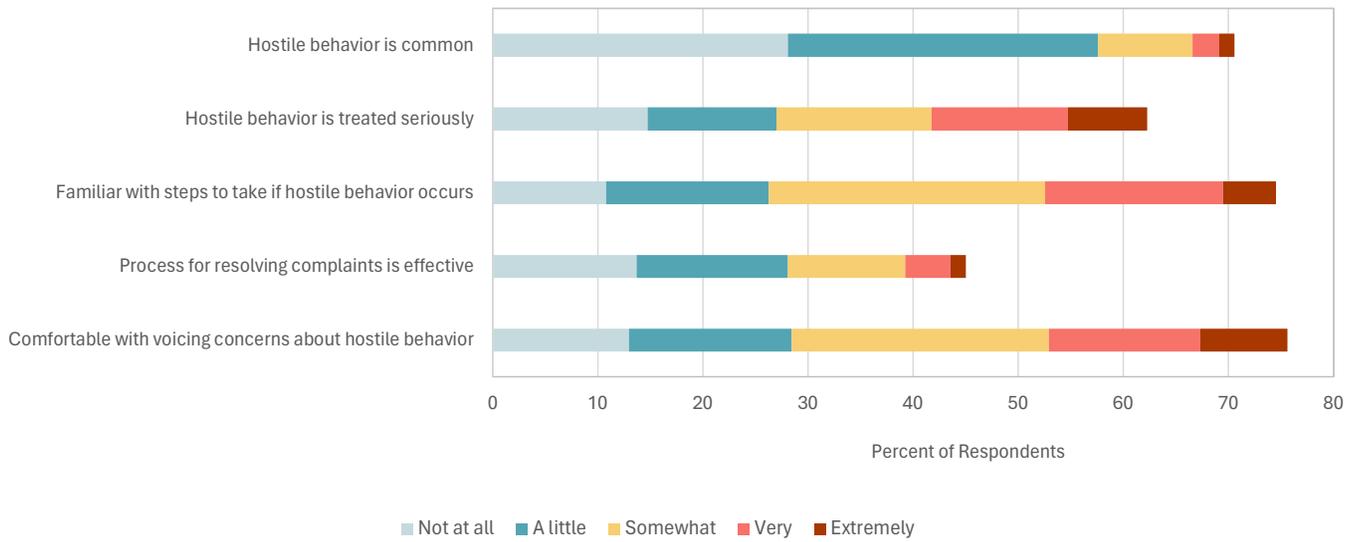
**Figure 4. Work-Life Balance for Graduate Students: a) Difficulty Achieving Work-Life Balance, b) Caregiving Responsibilities, c) Caregiving by Gender/Sexual Orientation, d) Caregiving Responsibilities for First Generation Students, and e) Impacts of Caregiving**

## Departmental Climate for Graduate Students

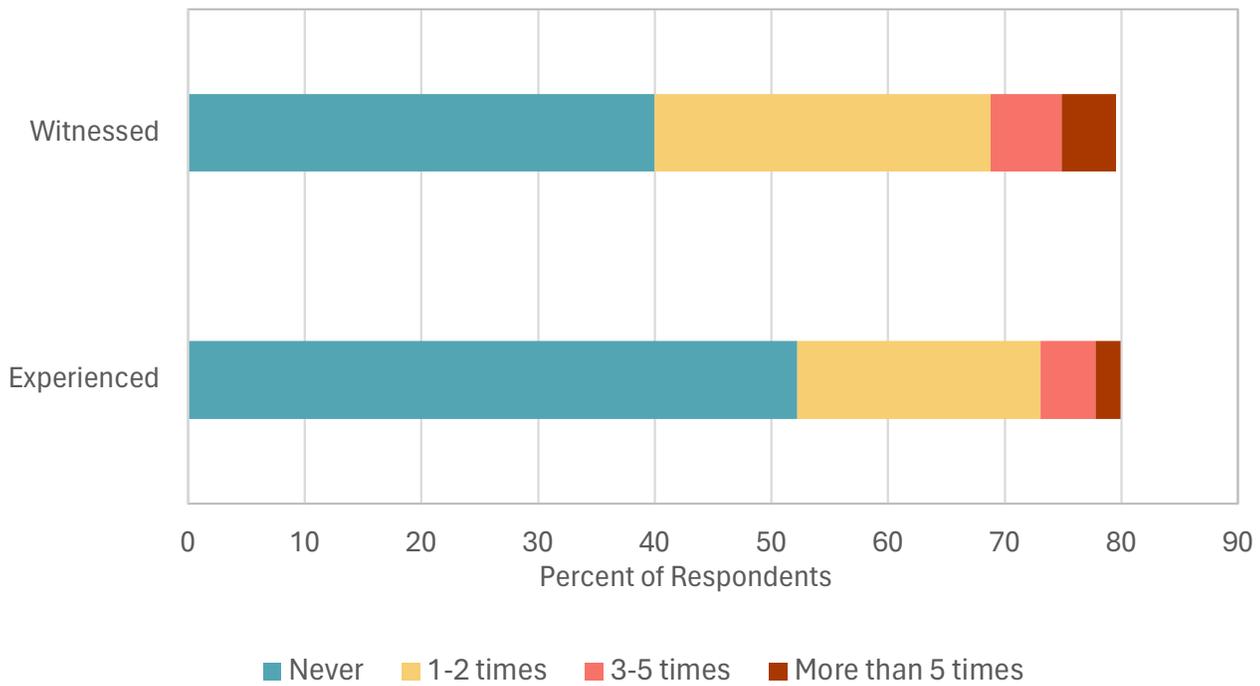
Numerous studies discuss the academic climate for graduate students and their impacts on student success (Caretta et al. 2018; Foote 2010; Kaplan and Mapes 2016). Graduate students in our survey reported varying degrees of challenges in their departmental climate (Figures 5a-b). Of the 272 graduate student respondents, nearly 60% felt that hostile or intimidating behavior was not at all or a little common in their departments. Harassment and hostility call for measures to prevent and address unwelcome environments. One component of these measures is knowing the steps to take or people to contact if they witnessed or experienced hostile or intimidating behavior, yet only 27% of the students responded that they were somewhat familiar with these steps, while only 5% were extremely knowledgeable (Figure 5a). In their evaluation of the effectiveness of the process for resolving complaints about hostile behavior in their departments, only 2% said the process was extremely effective, and 15% responded that the process was a little or not at all effective. Another question asked about how comfortable graduate students were about voicing concerns about this negative behavior. About 24% were somewhat comfortable, whereas only 7% said they were extremely comfortable voicing concerns (Figure 5a).

The survey also asked how seriously complaints by graduate students about harassment or hostile behavior were treated in their departments, universities, and the AAG. Responses varied widely, with 8% of the graduate students responding that these complaints were taken extremely seriously, and 12-16% responding that it was taken very, somewhat, a little, or not at all seriously (Figure 5a). Negative departmental climates are often compounded for women of color and international students who face multiple and intersectional forms of discrimination. According to a female student who specializes in critical geography, *‘... I had to change my advisor to someone who is based in Geography because he was the only person supporting my work. I have faced racist comments along with other women of color in my department with regards to the type of work we do in the field of environmental justice.’* International students experienced harassing comments about returning to their country of origin.

In terms of experiencing or witnessing hostile behavior in their departments (Figure 5b), the majority of students (52%) responded that they had never experienced this type of behavior in the past twelve months at the time of the survey. However, 21% experienced it 1-2 times, about 5% 3-5 times, and 2% more than five times (Figure 5b). Similarly, 40% responded that they had never witnessed hostile or intimidating behavior in the past twelve months, but more than one-fourth of the respondents witnessed it 1-2 times, 6% witnessed 3-5 times, and about 5% more than five times in the past twelve months (Figure 5b).



a)



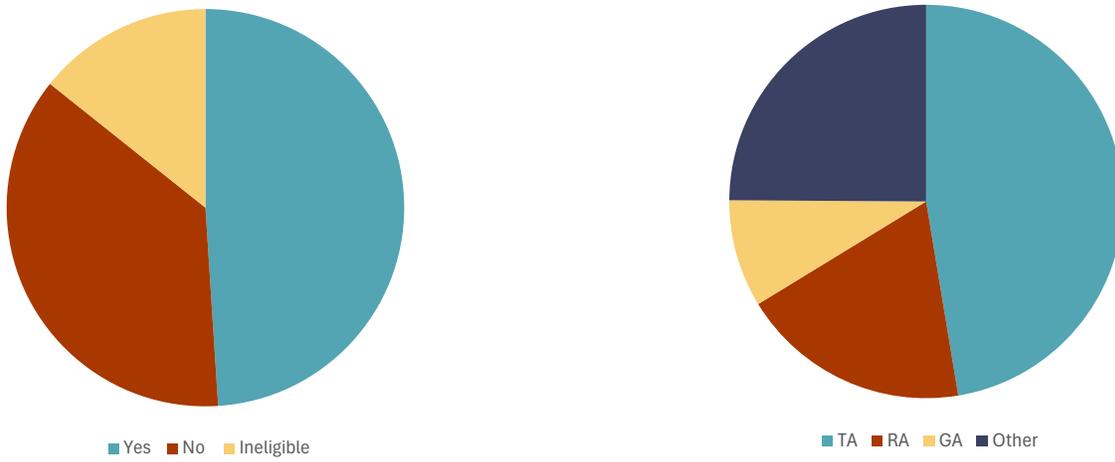
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Figure 5. Graduate Student Perceptions of Hostile and Intimidating Departmental Climate: a) Attitude Toward Hostile Behavior and b) Experienced and Witnessed Hostile Behavior



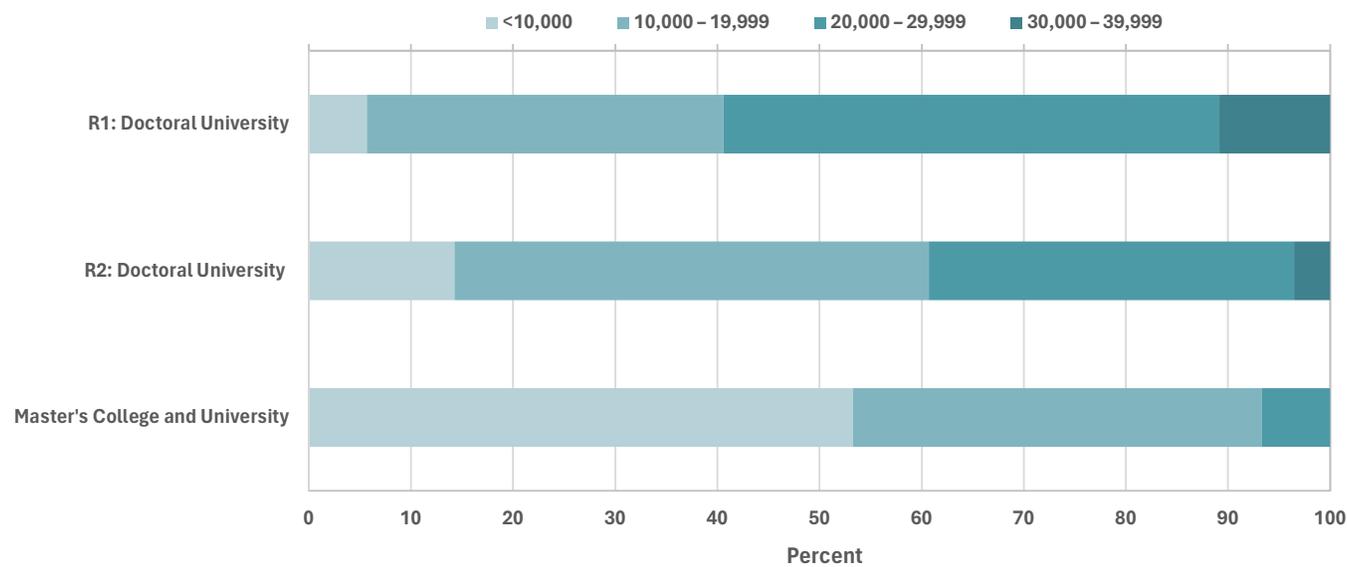


university to supplement their incomes and 12% said they are not eligible. The latter scenario applies to all international students (Figure 7b). Graduate student annual stipends were wide-ranging, from less than \$10,000 to between \$30,000 and \$40,000. In general, R1 and other doctoral-serving institutions offered higher stipends than R2 and master's-granting institutions (Figure 7c).



a)

b)



c)

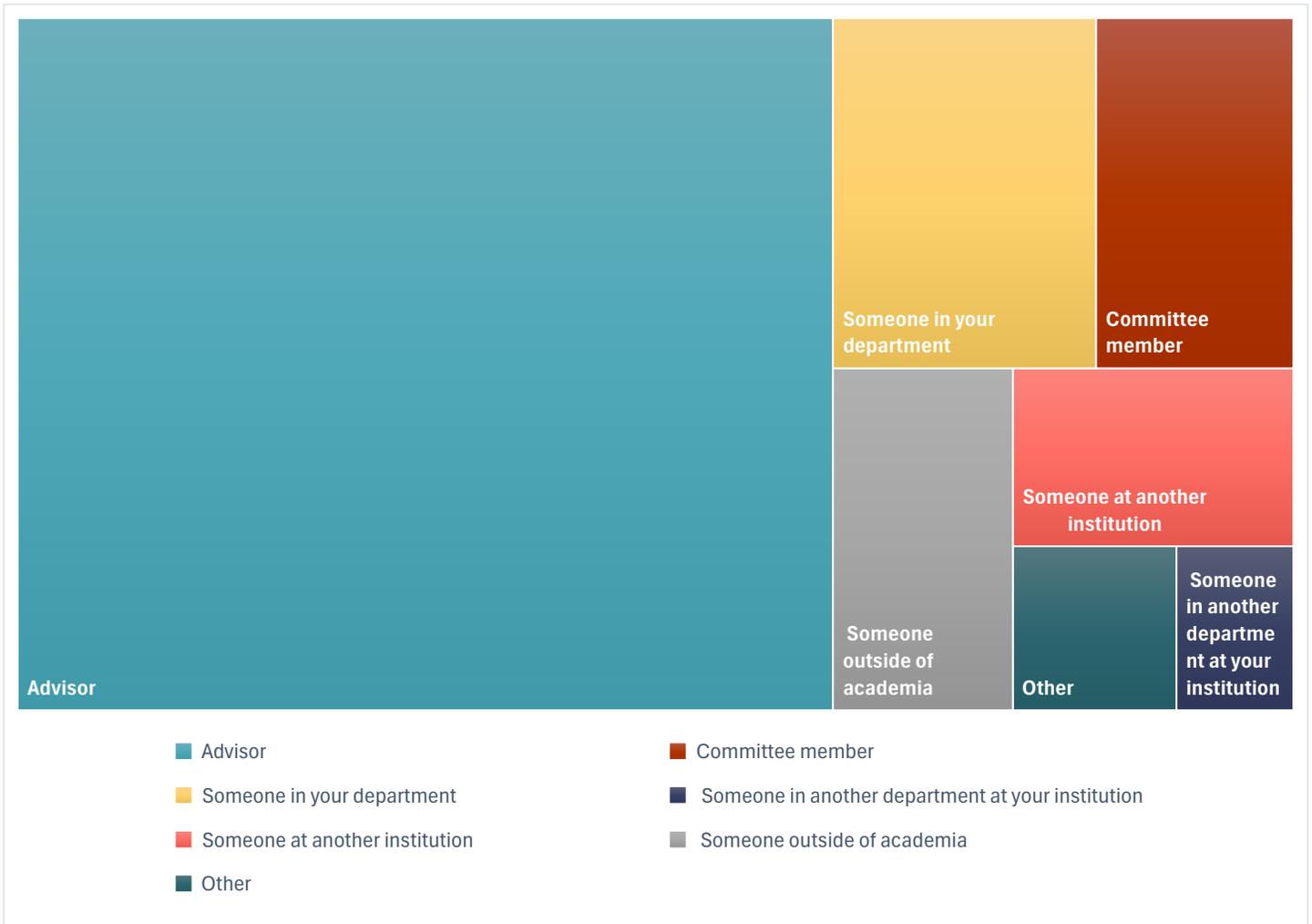
Figure 7. Graduate Student Access to Financial Resources by Type of Institution: a) Available Support, b) Job outside Academia, and c) Annual Stipend

## Support and Mentoring for Students

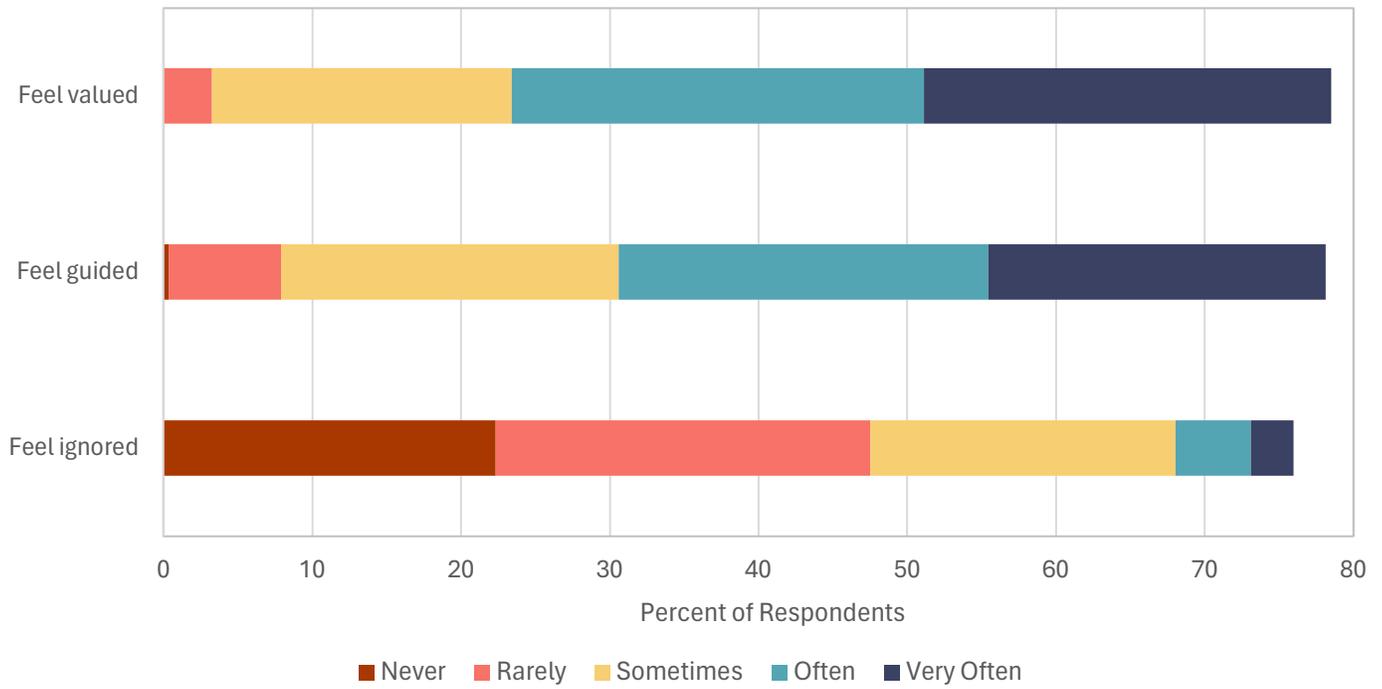
Mentoring and support from faculty, other scholars, and peers are a crucial part of the graduate student experience. AAG initiatives and availability of extensive scholarship emphasize the importance of role models and support networks for graduate students to succeed in their degree programs and careers in general (Chen and Eaves 2024; Foote and Solem 2009; Johnston-Anumonwo 2019; Mullings and Mukherjee 2018; Oberhauser and Caretta 2019). For example, the Advancing Geography Through Diversity Program (AGTDP) at Michigan State University focuses on department recruitment, resources, and policies to support underrepresented/minority doctoral students (Jordan, Shortridge, and Darden 2022).

Figure 8 provides details about the role of advisors, mentoring, and overall support for graduate students. The majority of these students indicated that they turn to their advisors for advice on teaching, research, and professional activities, while 8% turn to someone in the department and 6% their committee members (Figure 8a). The frequency and quality of interactions with advisors and committee members contribute to the overall support for and success of graduate students. As noted by one LGBTQ student, *“My advisor is very supportive, as are the faculty I work with, but the head of my department and my dean could do more to support graduate students.”* In general, responses regarding this support from faculty and others in their department were mixed. 39% indicated they felt valued very often, whereas less than 5% indicated they rarely feel valued during interactions with their advisors (Figure 8b). In addition, one fourth of the graduate students never felt excluded, nearly one third feel they often get the guidance they need, and one third never felt ignored. One woman of color commented on the overall positive level of support they experience, *“My department and especially the chair do a good job of creating a friendly work atmosphere. I genuinely value the relationships I have in the department. ... At this point we can usually assume that everyone is acting in good faith, even if there is conflict.”* In contrast, 27% of respondents said they sometimes felt isolated, while 18% felt isolated often or very often.

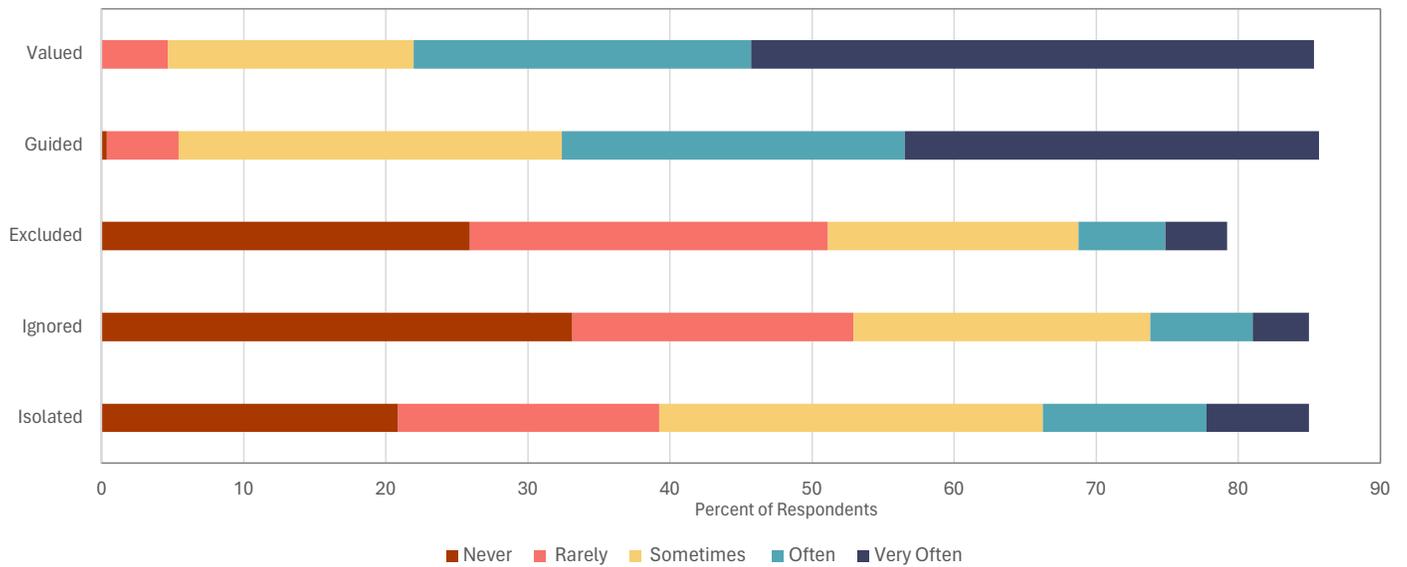
Graduate student interactions with their committees also seem to be relatively positive. The majority of respondents indicated they feel valued often (28%) and very often (27%), while only 8% feel ignored often or very often. About 7% of the respondents indicated that they feel their committee rarely puts in the effort to guide them (Figure 8c). Qualitative analysis of open-ended responses regarding student perspectives on departmental climate and support are represented in the word clouds below. Women emphasized support from other students, their advisor, and faculty while men emphasized the department and events, in addition to their advisors (Figure 9). One nonbinary student’s comments reflect the variation in support from peers and others in the department. *“There are faculty and graduate students who I turn to for support and guidance from, but there are others who I do not get a sense of that same support or feel valued from them.”*



a)



b)



c)

Figure 8. Graduate Student Responses Related to Support, Advice, and Mentoring: a) Sources of Professional Advice, b) Interactions with Advisor, and c) Interactions with Committee



a)

b)

Figure 9. Graduate Student Perspectives on Departmental Interactions and Support by Gender: a) Male and b) Female

## The Leaky Pipeline - Leaving Academia

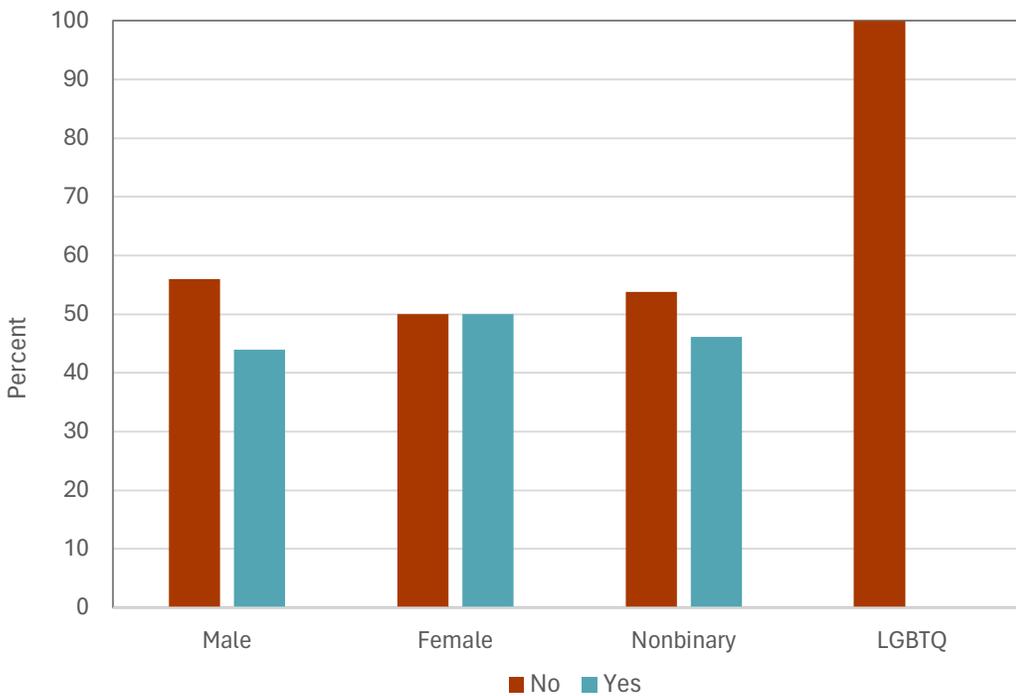
The barriers mentioned above often contribute to delays in academic progress or withdrawal from graduate school altogether (Hawkins, Manzi, and Ojeda 2014; Kinkaid, Parikh, and Ranjbar 2022; Mountz et al. 2015). Figure 10 (a-d) summarizes the graduate students in our survey who considered leaving academia by gender, race, ethnicity, first-generation status, and type of institution. Half or 50% of women and 42% of men reported that they considered quitting graduate school in the past twelve months. Similarly, 44% of nonbinary individuals responded that they had considered quitting, whereas none of the LGBTQ students had considered quitting (Figure 10a). In terms of racial and ethnic identity, 46% of African American or Black, 45% of Asian or Asian American, 44% of Chicano(a), Latino(a) or Hispanic, and 50% of white respondents stated that they had considered quitting in the past twelve months. The racial group with the highest likelihood of quitting was Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islanders at 100% (Figure 10b). While this group represents a very small proportion in our sample, this response indicates an alarming trend among an already underrepresented group.

Among first-generation graduate students, 58% had considered quitting, while 42% indicated they had not. Of those who were continuing-generation students, 43% had considered quitting graduate school, and 55% had not (Figure 10c). Thus, first-generation students wanted to quit graduate school at a higher rate than continuing-generation students. Of those who preferred not to disclose their first-generation college student status, 67% said that they had considered quitting graduate school, and 33% had not (Figure 10c). The type of institution also yielded differences among graduate students who considered leaving their programs. Graduate students at R2 doctoral universities had the highest percentage of respondents (61%) stating that they had seriously considered quitting in the past 12 months (Figure 10d). In contrast, no students at minority-serving institutions were likely to consider quitting, although some indicated challenges they were experiencing in obtaining information and receiving mentorship. One graduate student at an R2 institution commented,

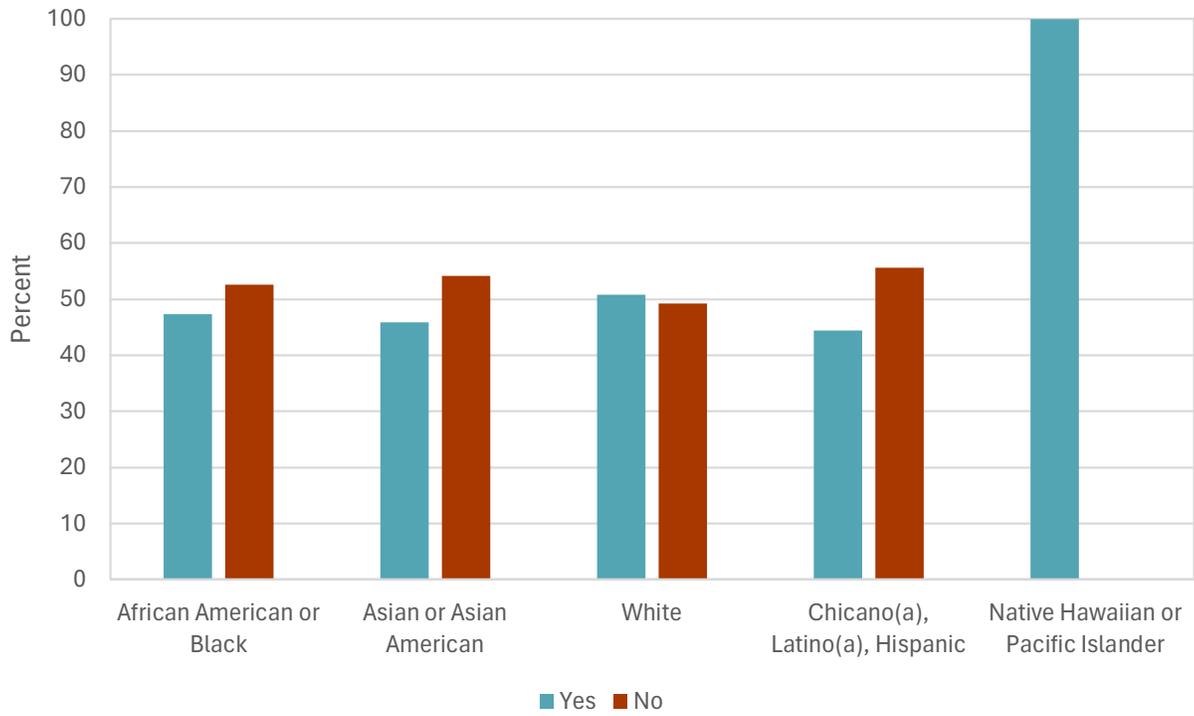
*I am part of a joint doctoral program (JDP), and have not received an email about the program from the JDP director since he took the position 1.5 years ago. I understand that the department is understaffed, but updates to the website (by anyone on staff) or a quarterly email would be appreciated to feel like we, as the graduate students, are still seen and recognized within the program.*

Other concerns about support were raised by this female student of color, “*I just want to learn and be mentored... even at an HBCU I am fighting for this. Dean is wonderful...but this is still my experience. I guess there is nothing he can do.*”

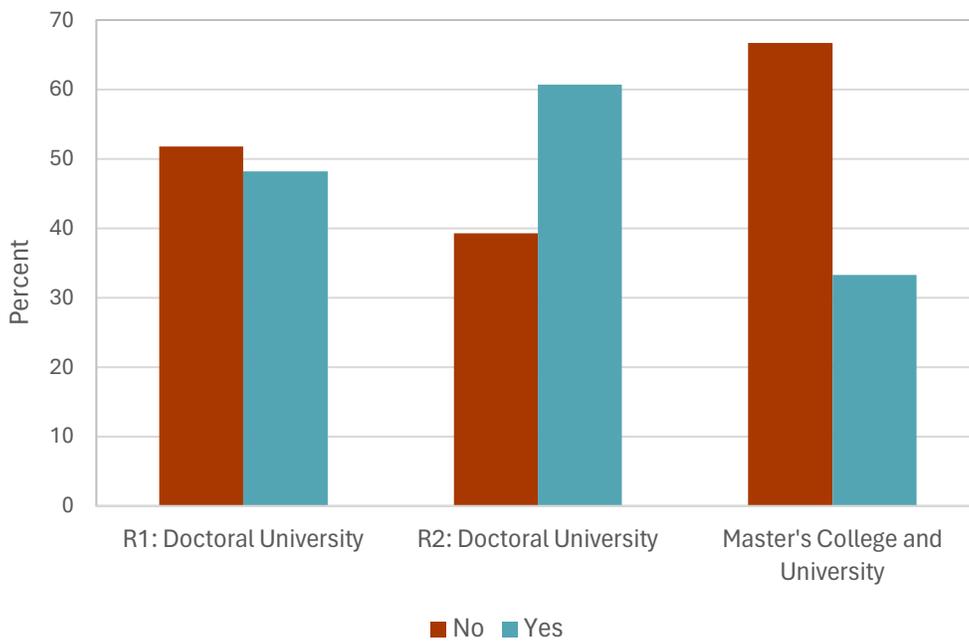
Several graduate students in our survey considered leaving academia over the past 12 months for a variety of reasons (Figure 10e). A large proportion of graduate students stated that the most important reason was to increase their salary and reduce stress (Figure 10e). Many cited a more supportive work environment, being near their family, and improving career prospects as secondary reasons for wanting to leave their institutions. First-generation students often need more mentoring and support in an unfamiliar landscape of graduate school. While salary may be limited by external factors, work-life balance challenges can be somewhat alleviated by supportive policies, mentoring, and outreach measures such as the quarterly email suggested above. Further, regardless of gender or race, graduate students are concerned about the future of academia. Examples of quotes include: ‘*Concern about the future of academics in general*’ (white female student) and ‘*Worries about future prospects*’ (white male student). To address these anxieties, departments can strive to become a community and not just a bureaucratic unit.



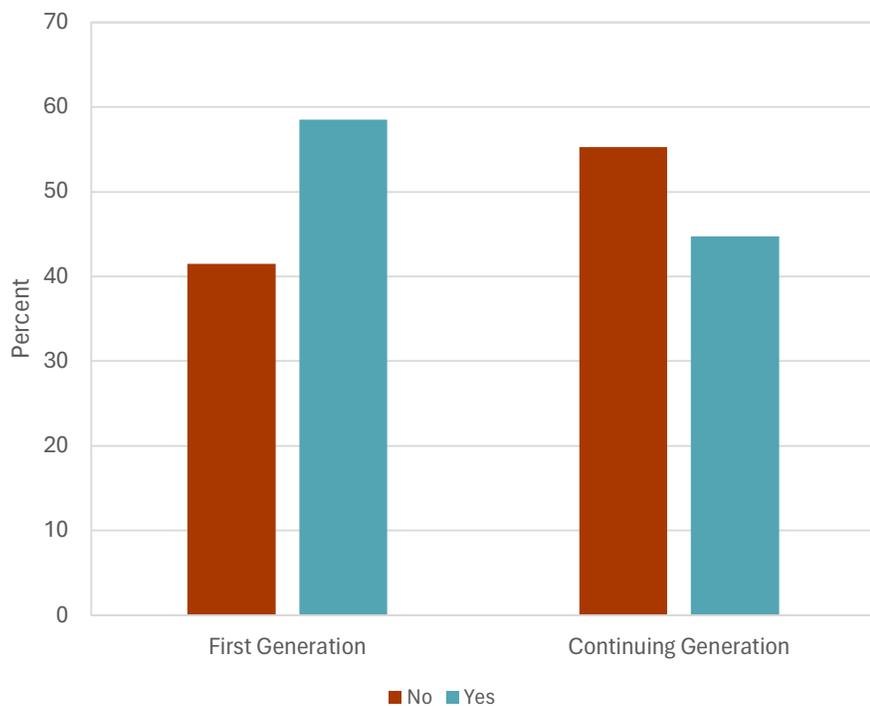
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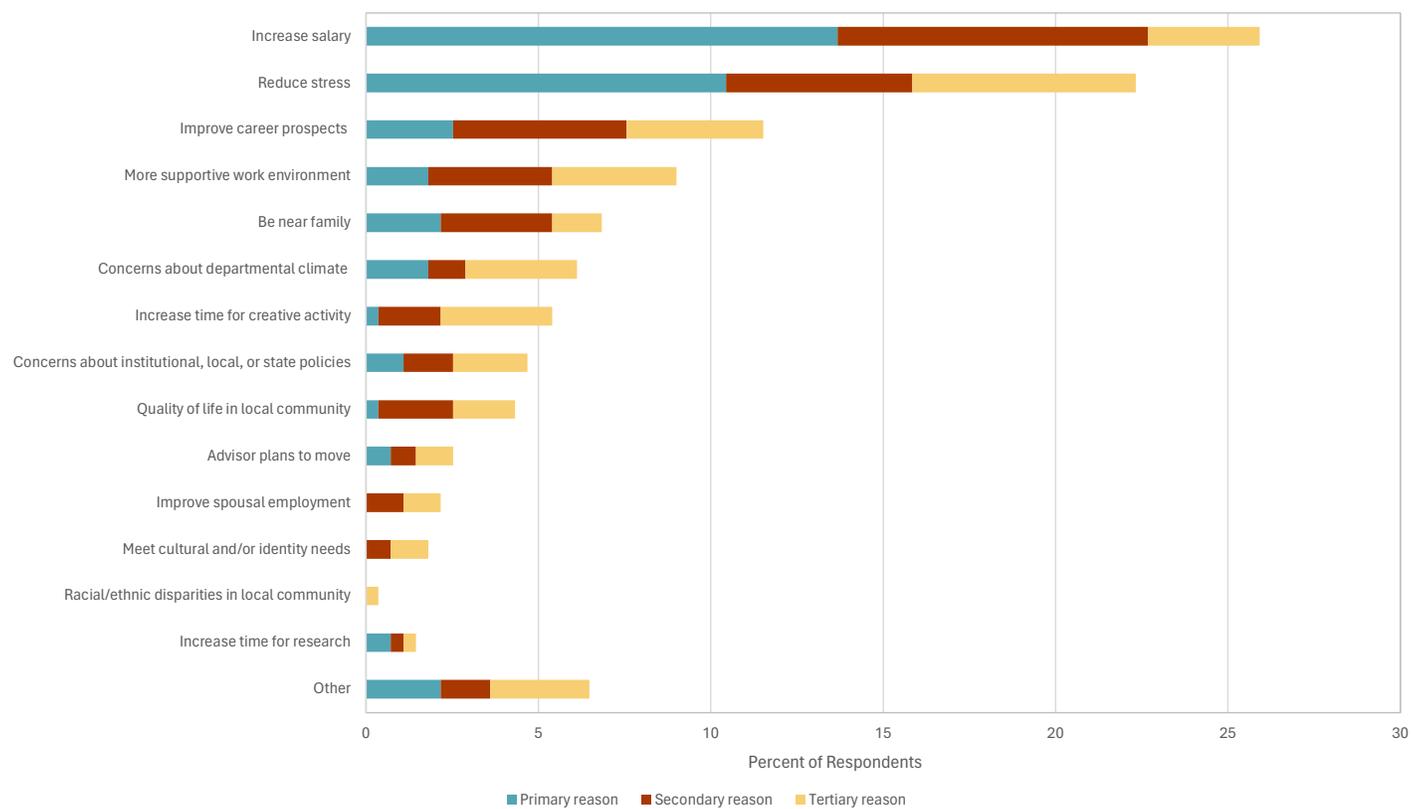
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Figure 10. Background and Reasons for Graduate Students to Leave Academia: a) Gender/Sexual Orientation, b) Race, c) Institution Type, d) Type of Student, and e) Ranked Reasons

## Summary

Students face many of the same pressures as faculty to balance research with employment and home life. They seek support from mentors and their department, and struggle or even depart from academia if these challenges are too great. Geography departments and the AAG can play a critical role in alleviating concerns of students in order to avoid losing the progress made by the discipline in achieving gender parity.

## Part IIb. Faculty Perspectives

### Overview

Faculty experience a range of challenges as they advance through their academic careers. This section examines the continuing barriers to women and other marginalized faculty that include maintaining work-life balance and navigating hostile and unwelcoming behavior in the workplace. Research shows that these barriers can lead to delayed advancement or decisions to leave academia altogether. Our findings suggest that these challenges can be addressed through institutional and departmental leadership and support, as well as mentoring and networking in the field of geography and beyond.

### Key Findings

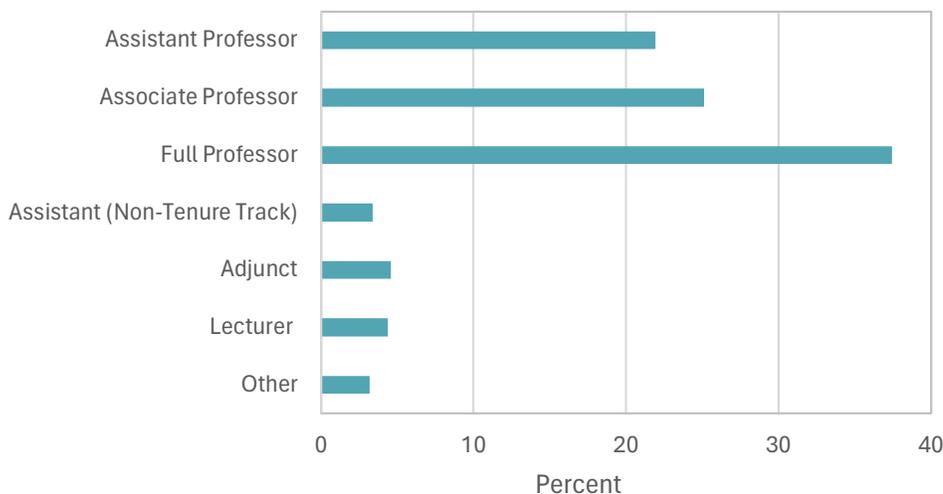
- Nearly half of all faculty surveyed found work-life balance difficult to achieve and more than two-thirds reported caregiving responsibilities that also varied by gender.
- Given these work-life balance challenges, women were more likely than men to face delays in promotion to full professor.
- Women and other marginalized faculty faced hostile climates linked to their sense of belonging and satisfaction. In general, BIPOC faculty felt less positive about departmental climate.
- Leadership roles are important in setting the tone for a welcoming environment. Most respondents reported general satisfaction with the role of leadership in their departmental climate, however, women, nonbinary, and BIPOC faculty had mixed responses.
- Many faculty experienced or witnessed hostile behavior, but may lack the knowledge about how to seek help.
- Many respondents said they had considered leaving their positions due to a desire to increase their salaries, reduce stress, and improve workplace climate.

### Characteristics of Faculty Respondents

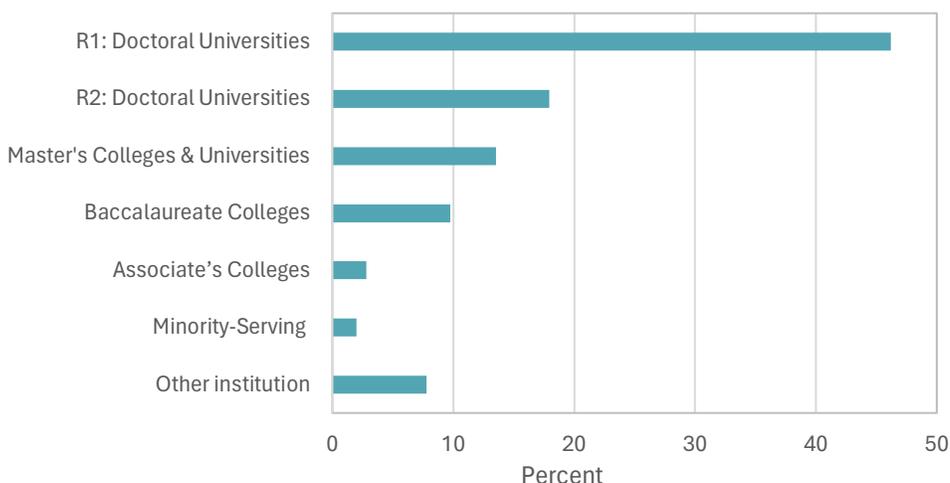
Respondents to our survey included faculty with various gender, racial, and ethnic identities and professional status who work within the U.S. (Figures 11a-f). Faculty respondents (n=502) included both non-tenure track (16%) and tenured or tenure-track (84%). 44% of the tenured or tenure-track faculty were full professors, 30% were associate professors, and 26% were assistant professors (Figure 11a). Nearly half of the respondents worked at R1 institutions (Figure 11b). While we received more than twice as many responses from women (n=316) than men (n=141), they showed similar distribution across all tenured or tenure-track positions. Of the non-tenure track faculty, 62% were women and 23% men. About 74% of the respondents identified themselves as white

(Figure 11c). 75% of respondents identified as U.S. citizens by birth, 9% as naturalized U.S. citizens, 5% as U.S. permanent residents (green card holders), and 2% as non-resident visa holders (J-1, H-1B, O-1 status, etc.), whereas 8% preferred not to disclose their status.

There was a broad range of salaries among faculty who responded to the survey.<sup>4</sup> Salary comparisons by gender and rank for tenure-track faculty (Figure 11e) show less variation than for non-tenure-track faculty (Figure 11f). While salaries were comparable between men and women faculty at the associate and full professor levels, there were slight differences at the assistant professor level, and even greater discrepancies for non-tenure track faculty. Overall, more non-tenure-track female faculty members reported having higher salaries than their male counterparts, with the exception of some male adjunct faculty (Figure 11f). This may be related to delays in advancement, as women may spend more time in non-tenure track positions than men. Nearly 29% of all tenure-track faculty indicated they have some type of administrative job, including department chairship. Of these people with departmental chairship responsibilities, 57% were women and 42% were male faculty. Most of these positions are held by associate and full professors (28% and 41%, respectively). Two assistant professors indicated having administrative duties other than chair, graduate director and center director.

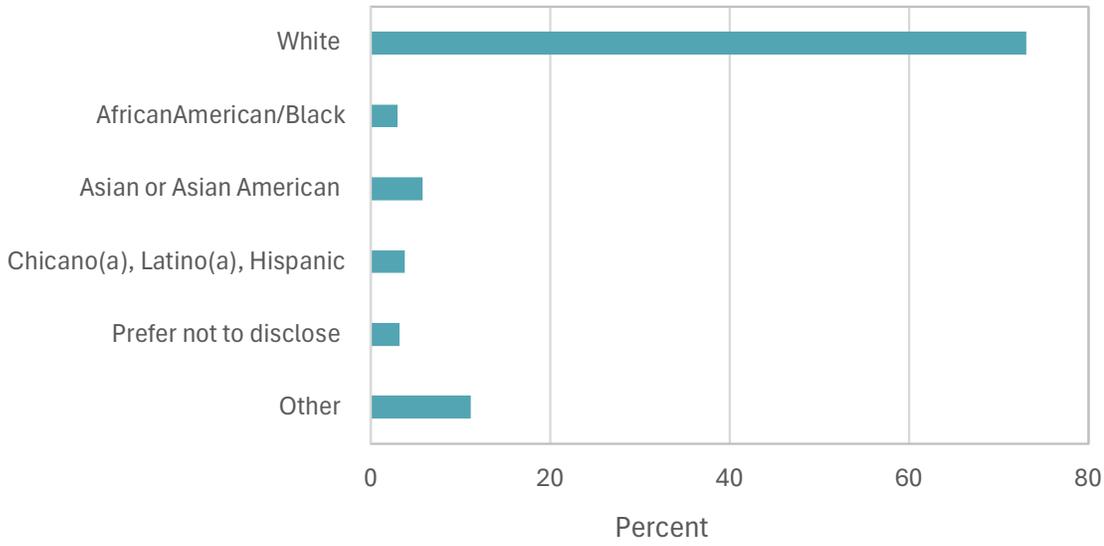


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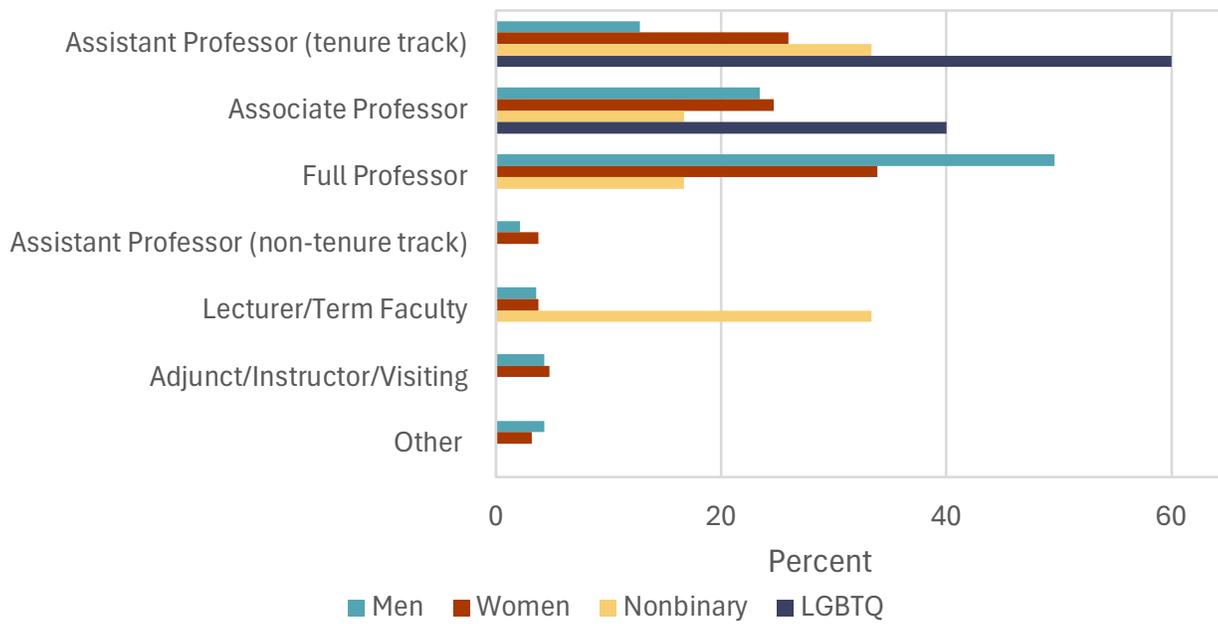


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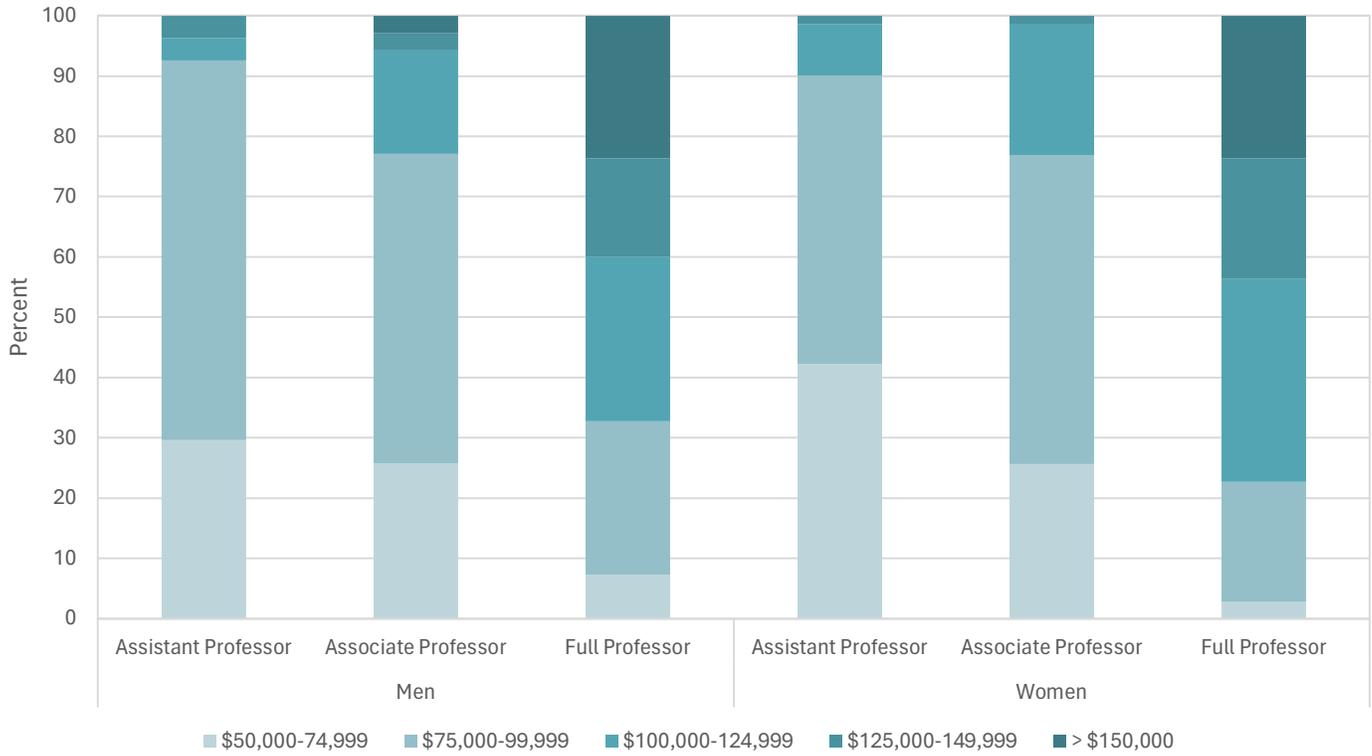
<sup>4</sup> Only 3% of faculty respondents earn less than \$50,000, mostly adjuncts and non-tenure-track faculty. 24% of respondents make between \$50,000 and \$ 74,999, with 35% being assistant professors and 27% associate professors. About 34% earn \$75,000 to \$ 99,999, including 33% assistant professors, 36% associate professors, and 23% full professors. Among full professors, 30% earn \$100,000 to \$ 124,999, 47% earn \$ 125,000 to \$ 149,000, and 22% earn over \$150,000.



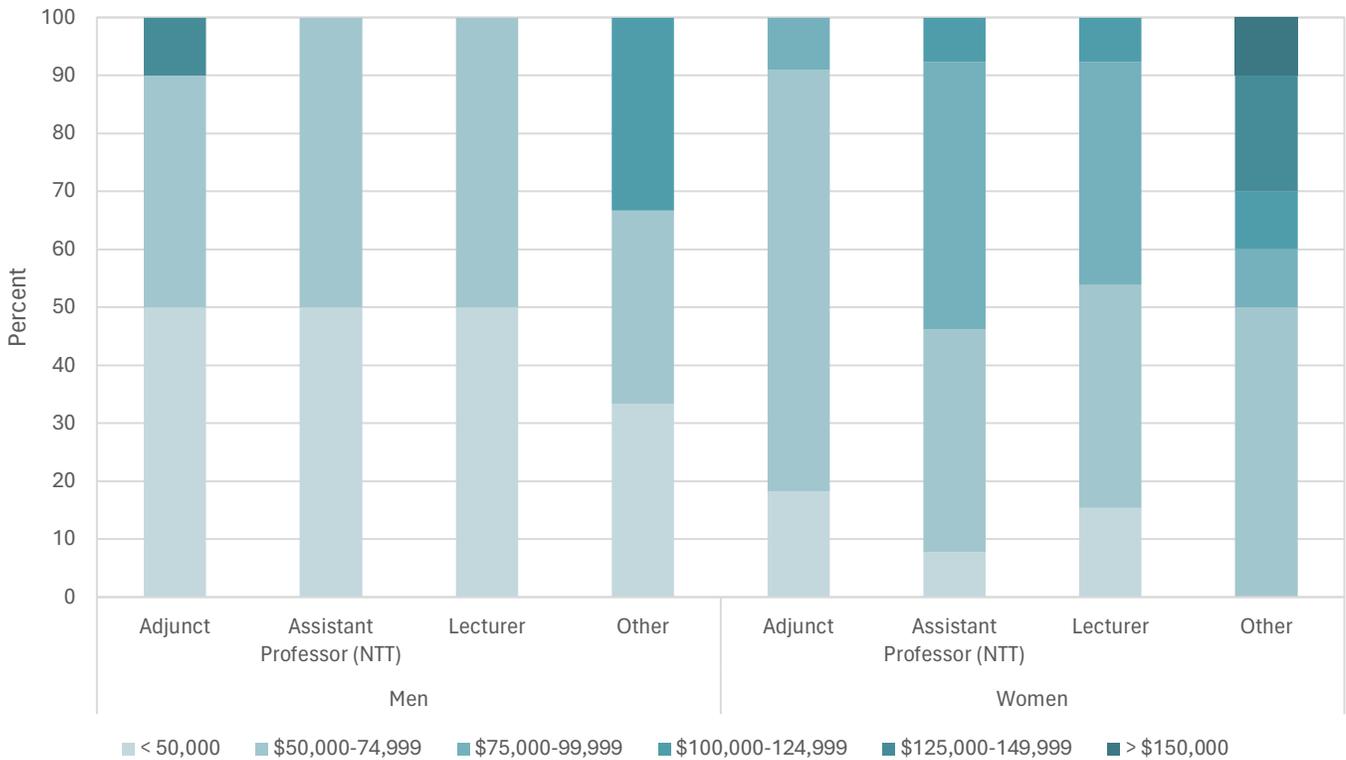
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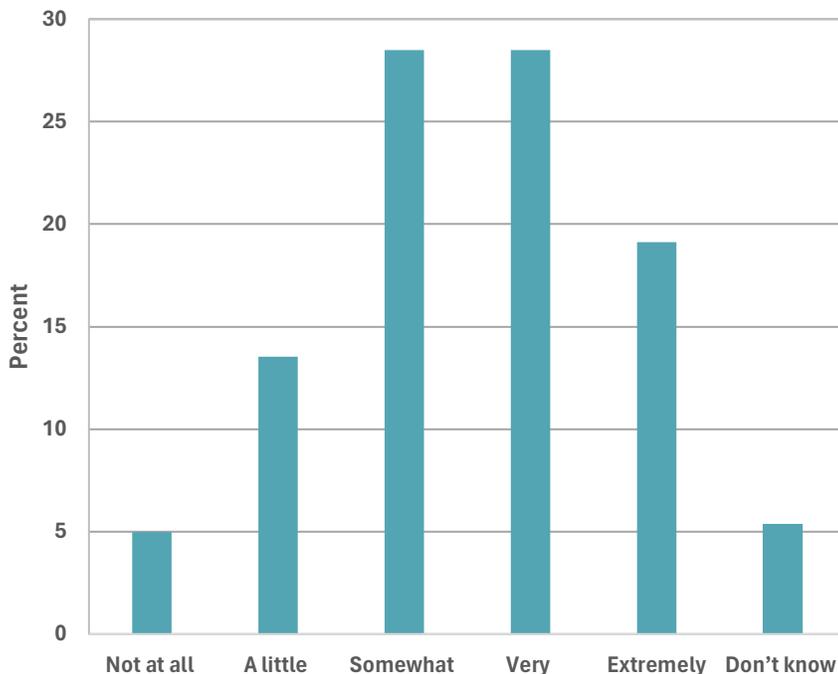
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Figure 11. Background of Faculty Survey Respondents : a) Rank/Academic Status, b) Institution Type, c) Race and Ethnicity, d) Rank by Gender/Sexual Orientation, e) Salary for Tenure-Track by Gender and Rank, and f) Salary for Non-Tenure Track by Gender

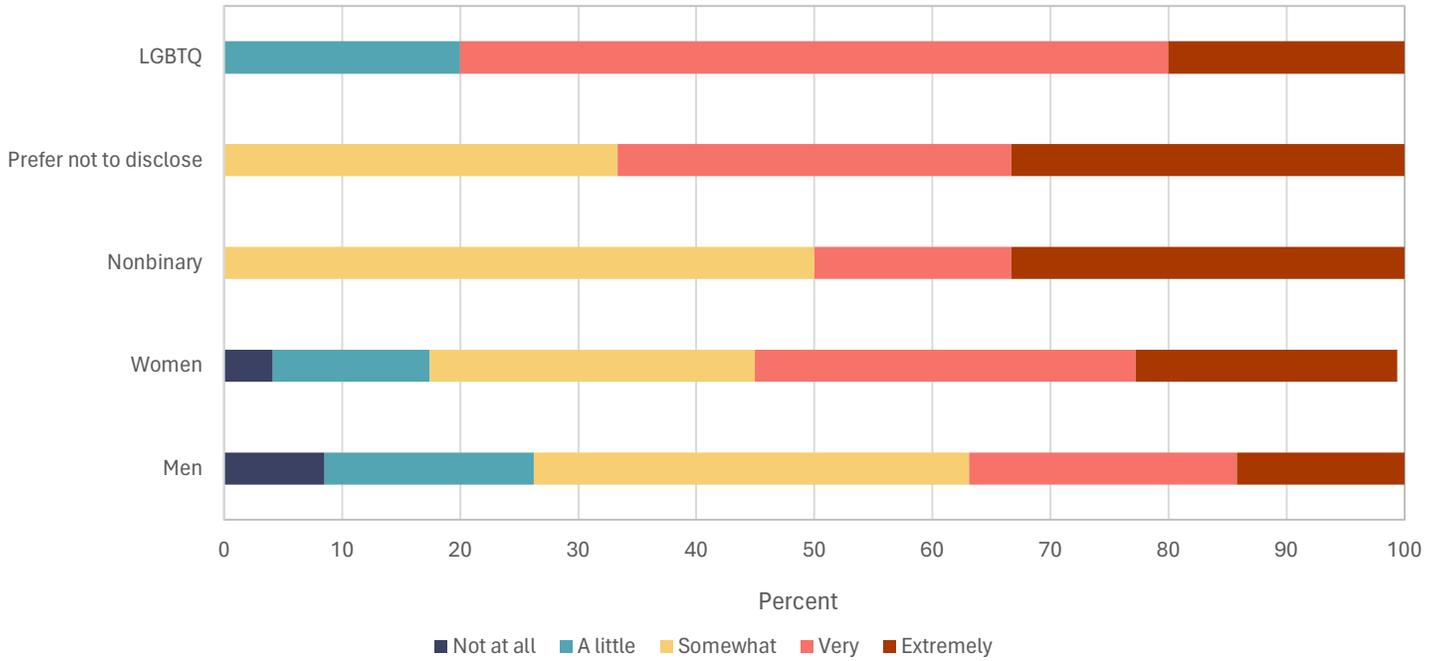
## Work-Life Balance Among Faculty

The often competing demands of work, family responsibilities, domestic labor, and self-care affect all faculty, especially women and underrepresented groups in academia (Bosanquet 2017; Mason, Wolfinger, and Goulden 2013). Efforts to achieve balance, and minimize work-life conflict, are related to societal gender roles surrounding care labor at home and in the workplace (Askins and Blazek 2016; Morgan et al. 2021). Furthermore, the rise of neoliberalism in academia is disproportionately felt by women and marginalized groups who are often in lower rank positions with less financial security (Berg, Huijbens and Larsen 2016; Mountz et al. 2015; Pulido 2002; Rosa 2021). Survey responses from faculty highlighted their struggles to find a balance among academic work, personal responsibilities, and health and wellbeing. This section addresses their challenges and strategies to navigate a demanding workload, lack of support for family and caregiving responsibilities, and thoughts of leaving academia altogether.

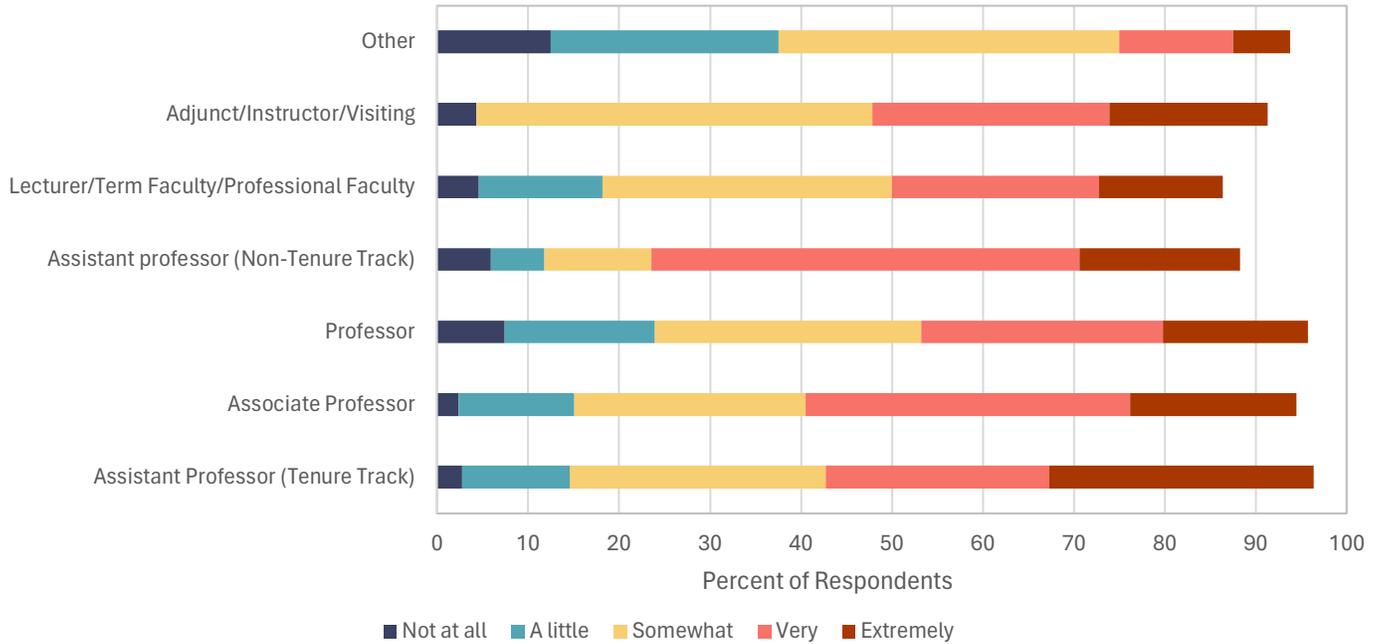
Approximately 47% of all respondents found it very or extremely difficult to achieve work-life balance, whereas 27% found it a little or somewhat difficult, and only 5% said they had no difficulties (Figure 12a). In general, women were more likely to find it very or extremely difficult to achieve work-life balance (54%, compared to 34% for men) (Figure 12b). When analyzed by rank, more assistant professors found it extremely difficult to achieve work-life balance (Figure 12c). BIPOC faculty found it extremely difficult to achieve work-life balance (36% of Asian or Asian American, 35% of Chicano(a), Latino(a) or Hispanic and 32% African American or Black) (Figure 12d). Faculty from all institutions had difficulty achieving work-life balance, with the highest difficulty reported by respondents from R1 institutions (Figure 12e). In regards to caregiving, 67% of the respondents indicated they have significant caregiving responsibilities, defined here as situations where the amount of time, or emotional or physical energy towards caregiving, caused them to cut back on employment-related responsibilities (Figure 12f).



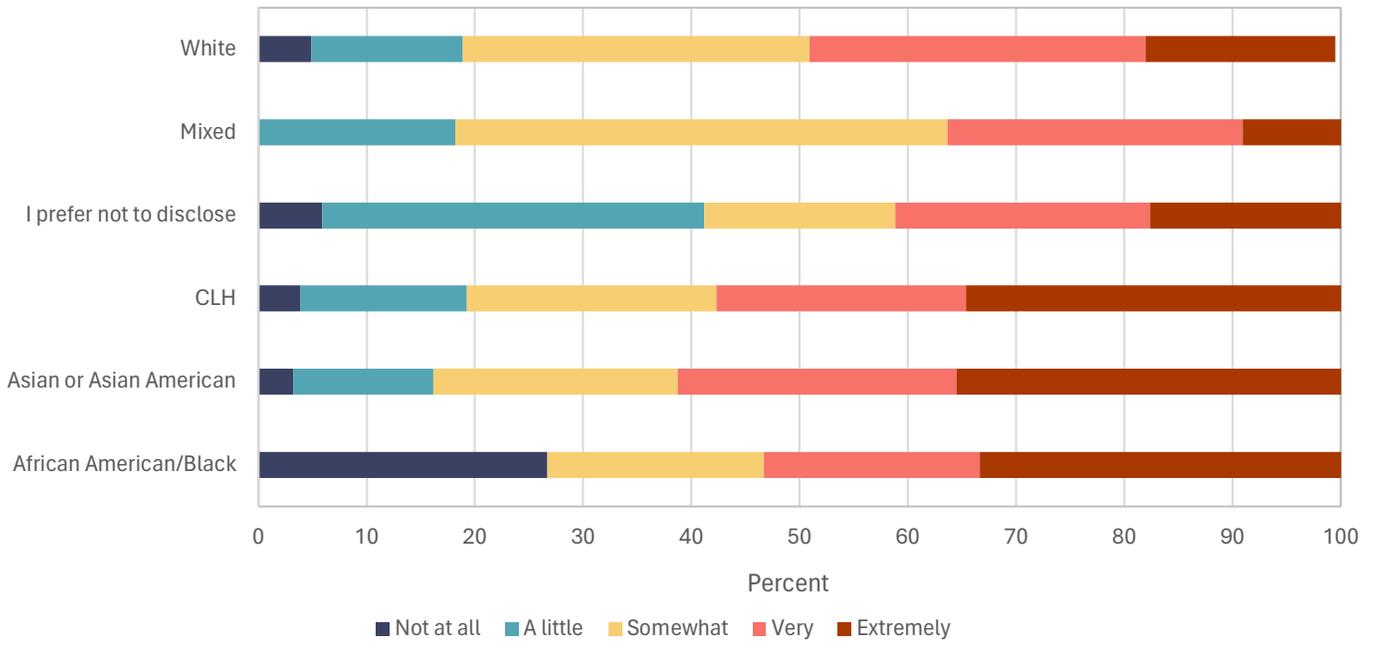
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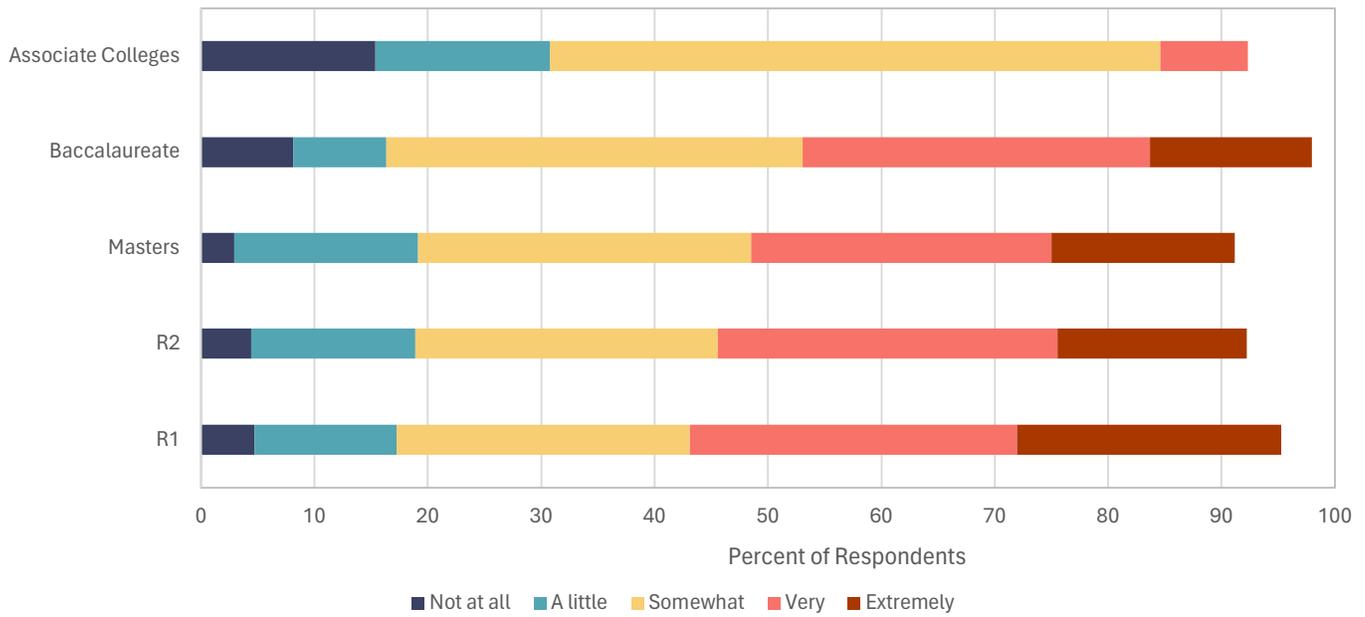
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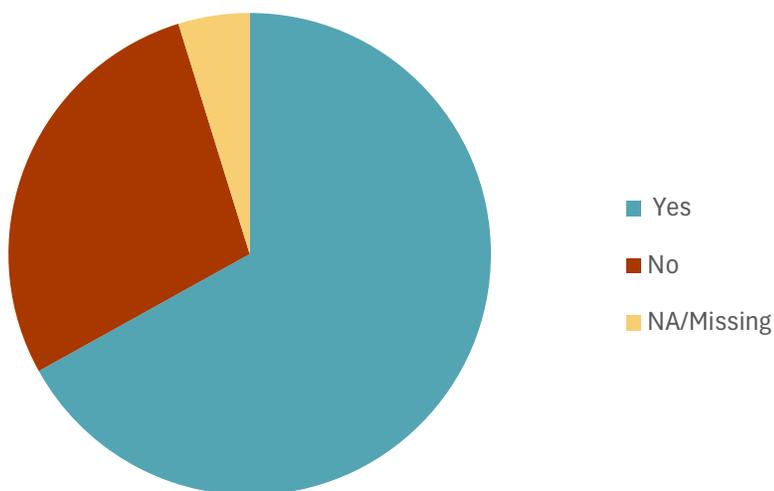
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Figure 12. Difficulty Achieving Work-Life Balance among Faculty: a) All Respondents, b) Gender/Sexual Orientation, c) Rank, d) Race, e) Institution, and f) Caregiving Responsibilities

Strategies to achieve work-life balance ranged from time management to leaving their academic jobs (Figure 13). Many respondents attempted to compartmentalize or find balance in their lives in ways that separated work from personal and home responsibilities. These efforts included setting boundaries for work and building in time for personal and household or family activities. Among the comments from female faculty regarding setting boundaries: “I set boundaries and carefully calendar my time to make sure that I can make family time a priority” and “Allocate time for breaks and social activities. Take one day per week off or mostly off.” Others have adopted, or attempted to adopt, ways to turn off their work-related electronic communication and work. For example, female faculty members stated,

*I did just take [G]mail off my phone but that lasted a week. I’m slammed,” “Turn off my laptop in [the] evenings and on weekends. Ignore emails,” and “I make a point to turn off my computer at 5pm M-F. I tell my students that I will meet with them and answer communication between the hours of 9:AM-5:00 PM M-F, but there is always something to be done on the weekends.”*

Part of these concerns about work-life balance related to health and wellbeing among many of our respondents. Several people focused on healthy physical (yoga and exercise), social (leisure time), and emotional (meditation and time with family) activities as ways of coping with work and other pressures (Figure 13).

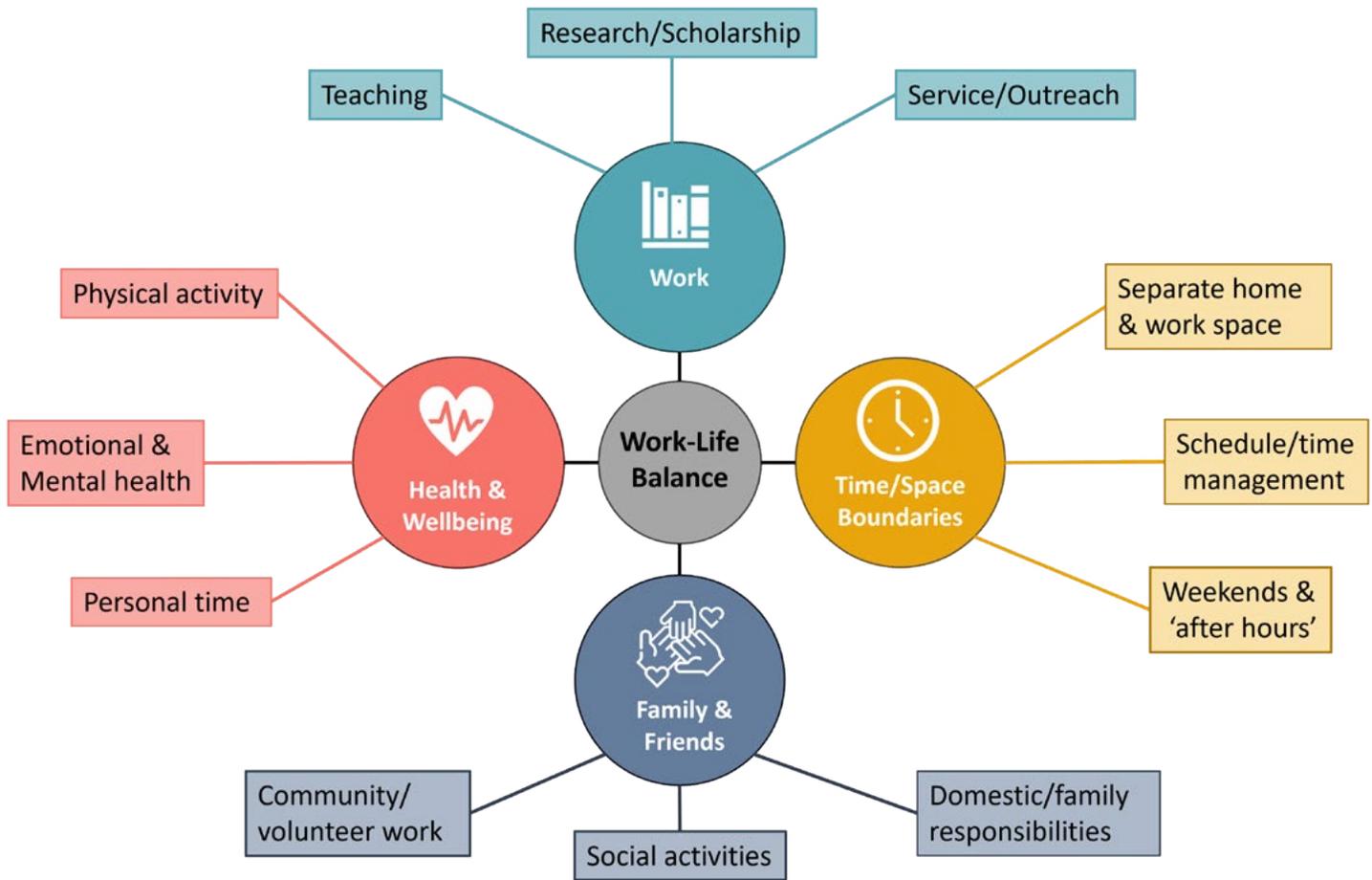
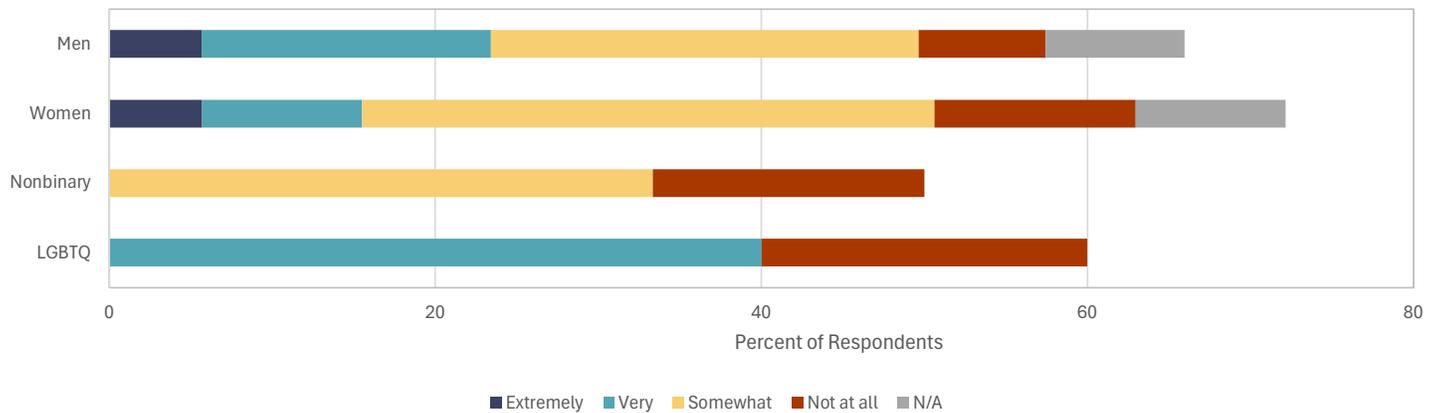
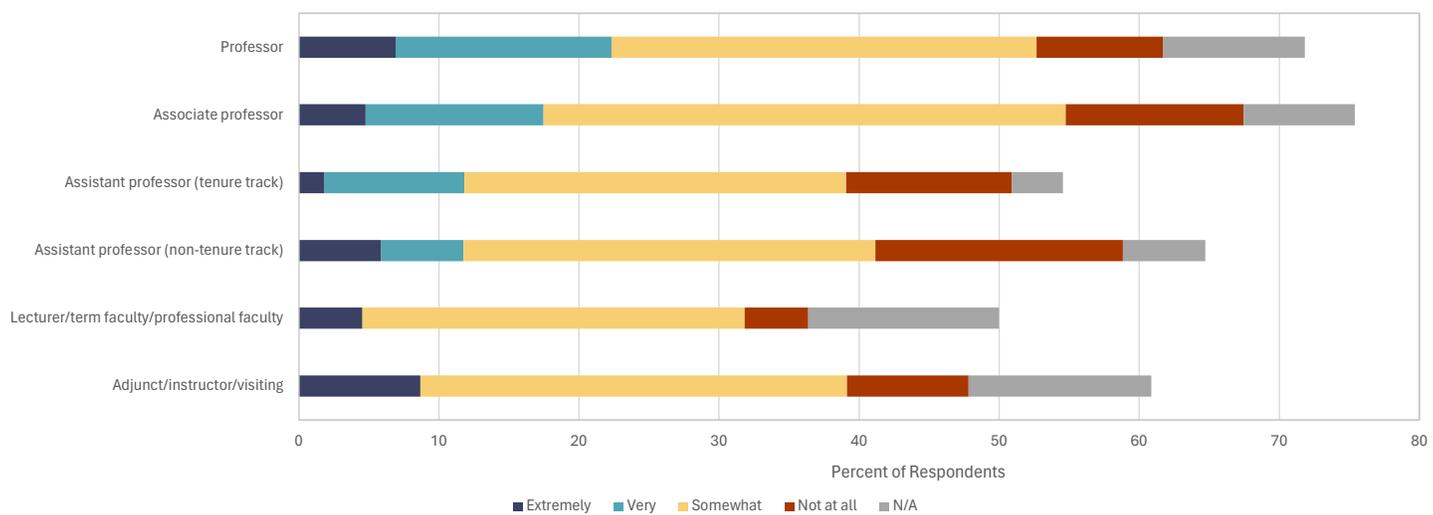


Figure 13. Issues Related to Work-Life Balance among Faculty

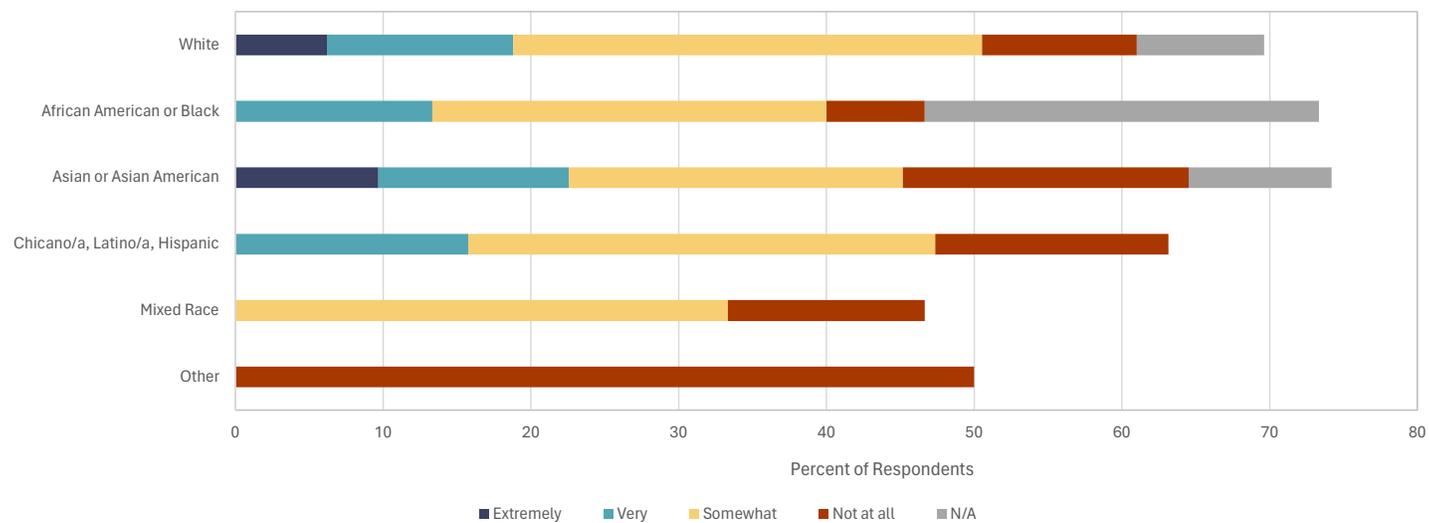
Departments and institutions can support faculty and student efforts to achieve work-life balance through policies regarding parental leave, flexible schedules, and other leaves of absence. Figures 14a-c show a majority of the respondents were at least somewhat satisfied with work flexibility and modified duties to help achieve work-life balance. Gender comparisons among faculty indicated that a higher percentage of men were very or extremely (24%) satisfied with this flexibility compared to women (16%) (Figure 14a). When analyzed by rank, full professors tended to be very or extremely (21%) satisfied compared to other ranks (Figure 14b). Racial comparisons show that white (6%) and Asian or Asian American (9%) respondents indicated extreme satisfaction with the flexibility to maintain work-life balance at a higher rate than others (Figure 14c).



a)



b)



c)

Figure 14. Faculty Satisfaction with Flexibility Available for Caregiving and other Types of Leave: a) Gender/Sexual Orientation, b) Rank, and c) Race

While both male and female assistant professors were concerned about time, female assistant professors mentioned balance, life, and tenure more often. Academic advancement through tenure and promotion is also impacted by caregiving responsibilities. Delays in promotion to associate and full professor after a standard probationary period varied by gender, rank, and type of institution (Figure 16). In general, women across all institutions were more likely to experience a delay in promotion to the full professor level.



Figure 15. Work-Life Balance Challenges Experienced by Assistant Professors: a) Male and b) Female

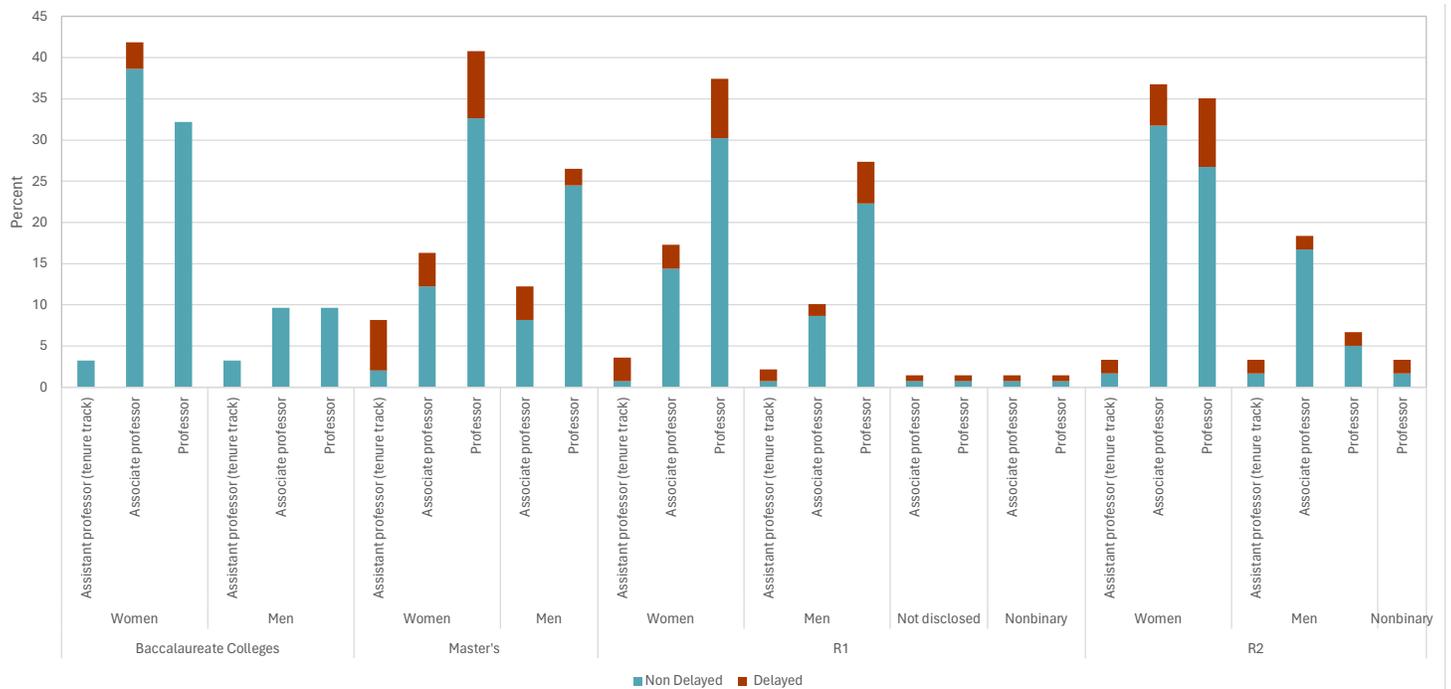
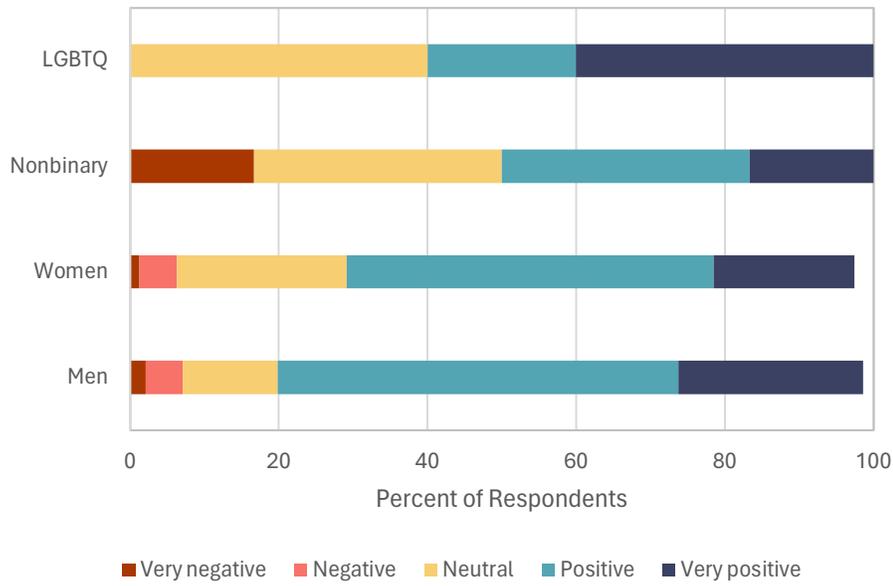


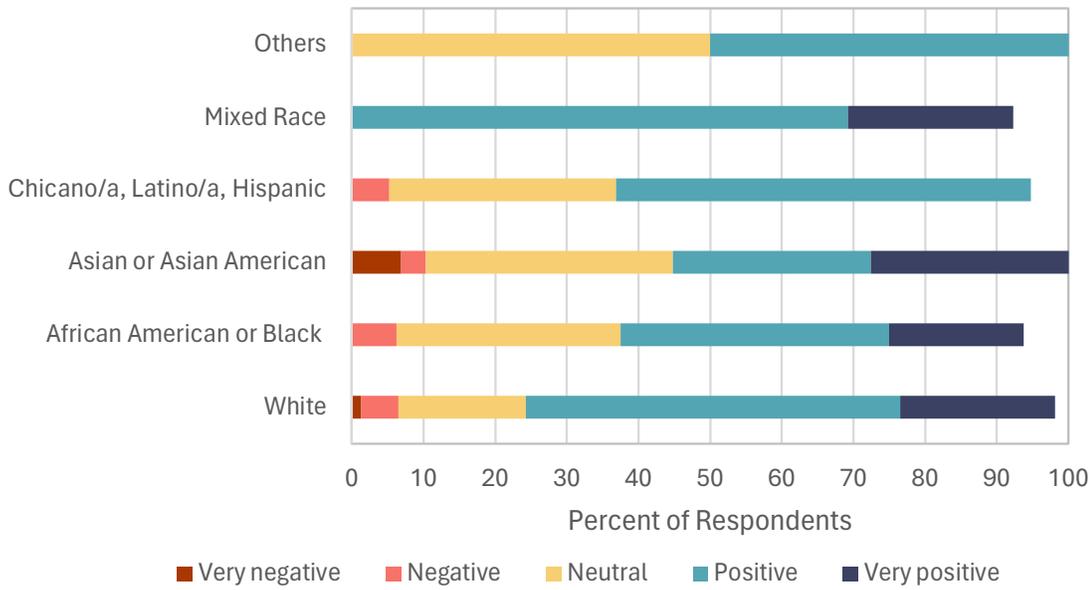
Figure 16. Delay to Promotion to Associate and Full Professor by Gender/Sexual Orientation and Rank

## Departmental and Institutional Climate and Hostile Behavior

The climate of departments and institutions can significantly impact the professional advancement of women and other marginalized faculty (Britton 2017; Palm 2024; Sheppard, Reades, and Freeman 2023). Improving the academic climate for geographers has been broadly addressed by the AAG through, for example, programs to encourage healthy departments and work undertaken by the Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI) Committee (Chen and Eaves 2024; Lawson 2004). Survey results indicate there is still work to be done related to overall climate, hostile or intimidating behavior, and resources for faculty to mitigate or intervene. The perception of departmental climate among faculty varies by gender, sexual orientation, race, and ethnicity (Figures 17 a-b). Because gender and sexual orientation overlap, it is unclear if LGBTQ respondents felt positively about climate related to their gender, sexual orientation, or both. In addition, 7% of Asians or Asian Americans felt most negatively about climate, however the majority of respondents of any race felt their department climate was generally positive, with many also feeling the climate was neutral.



a)



b)

Figure 17. Faculty Perception of Departmental Climate by: a) Gender/Sexual Orientation and, b) Race/ethnicity

Perception of workplace climate relates to feelings of belonging and being valued in one’s department and institution (Hawkins, Manzi, and Ojeda 2014; Palm 2024). At least half of respondents reported that they felt they belonged often or very often when analyzed by gender and orientation, but when analyzed by race, only white faculty had a majority reporting frequent belonging. BIPOC faculty reported much higher rates of rarely feeling a sense of belonging (Tables 2 and 3).

Table 2. Feelings of Belonging in Department by Gender/Sexual Orientation

	Never (%)	Rarely (%)	Sometimes (%)	Often (%)	Very often (%)
Men	1	7	16	37	40
Women	1	10	24	26	39
Nonbinary	0	0	50	17	33
LGBTQ	0	20	20	20	40

Table 3. Feelings of Belonging in Department by Race

Feelings of belonging in department	Never (%)	Rarely (%)	Sometimes (%)	Often (%)	Very often (%)
White	1	8	21	27	43
African American or Black	0	19	38	19	25
Asian or Asian American	6	10	39	23	23
Chicano(a), Latino(a) or Hispanic	0	5	26	53	16
Mixed	0	7	7	57	29
Other <sup>5</sup>	0	33	0	0	67
Did not Identify Race	3	18	36	30	12

Open-ended responses to questions of belonging and feeling valued in departments raised issues about the importance of collegiality, supportive environments, and leadership. This woman of color highlighted the various levels of operation that also make it difficult to create a welcoming environment, stating

*My department is trying to create a more collegial and supportive environment. I appreciate these efforts and that no one is openly hostile or disrespectful. I think operating in the structure of the university makes it difficult for people to take the time to slow down, check-in with each other and truly care about each other’s wellbeing. It still feels very competitive and individualistic.*

Others lamented the ongoing effects of COVID-19 in terms of isolating colleagues. “Post-pandemic, our department has become scattered (i.e. we don’t use the faculty center facilities as much as we did).”

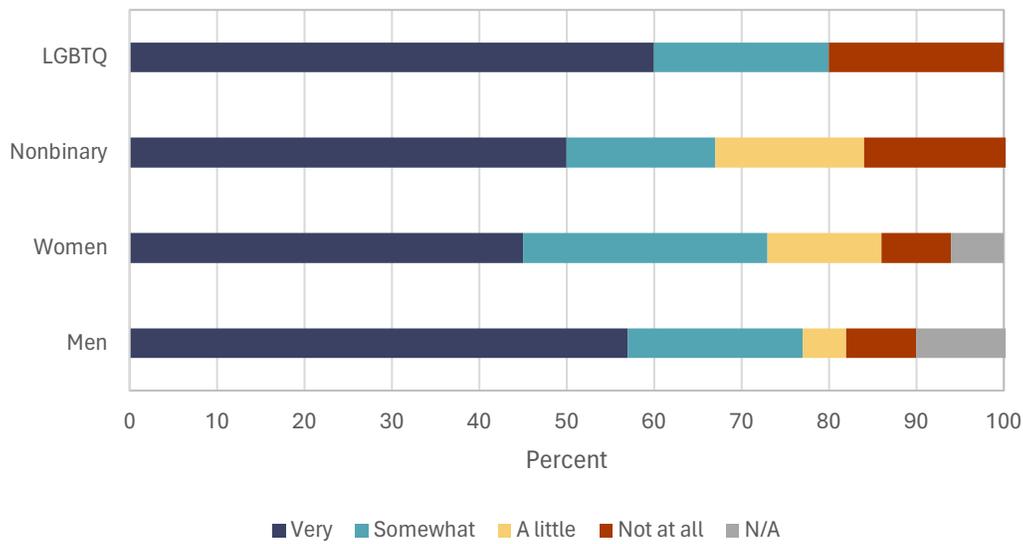
Several faculty members commented on how leadership and especially the chair affect their department climate in both positive and negative ways. As noted by this female faculty,

*The work environment can be strongly influenced by [the] chair and at times [the] dean. Previous chair’s actions led to (a) drop in morale and a generally unhealthy working environment. Current chair realized that and has been instrumental in raising morale and helping with life-work.*

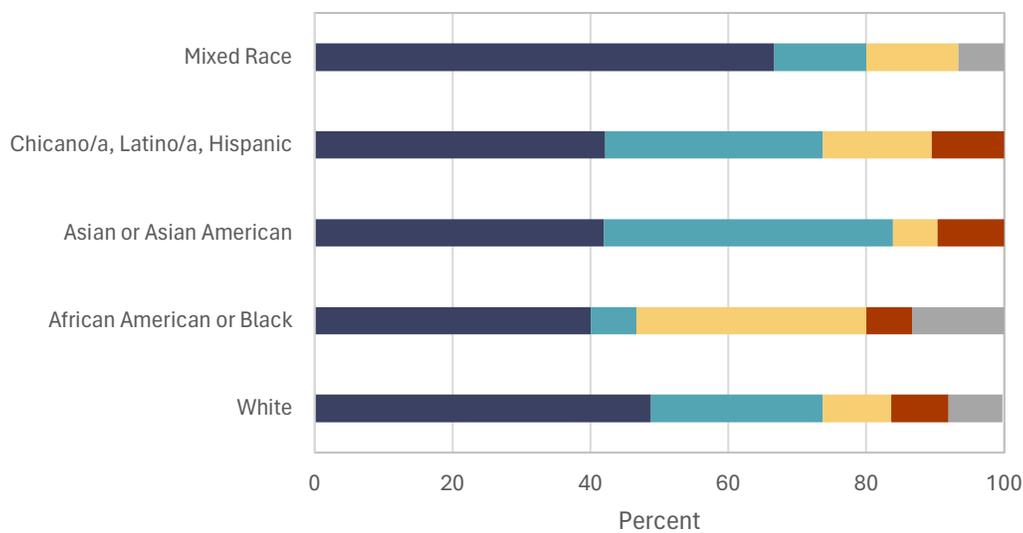
Another white female faculty member commented on the challenges in maintaining a healthy climate. “I think our department chair is doing a lot to try to create a collegial and supportive environment but the overall culture in the department is hard to change when everyone is looking out for themselves first and foremost and resistant to change.”

<sup>5</sup> Other – this is the category respondents indicated





a)



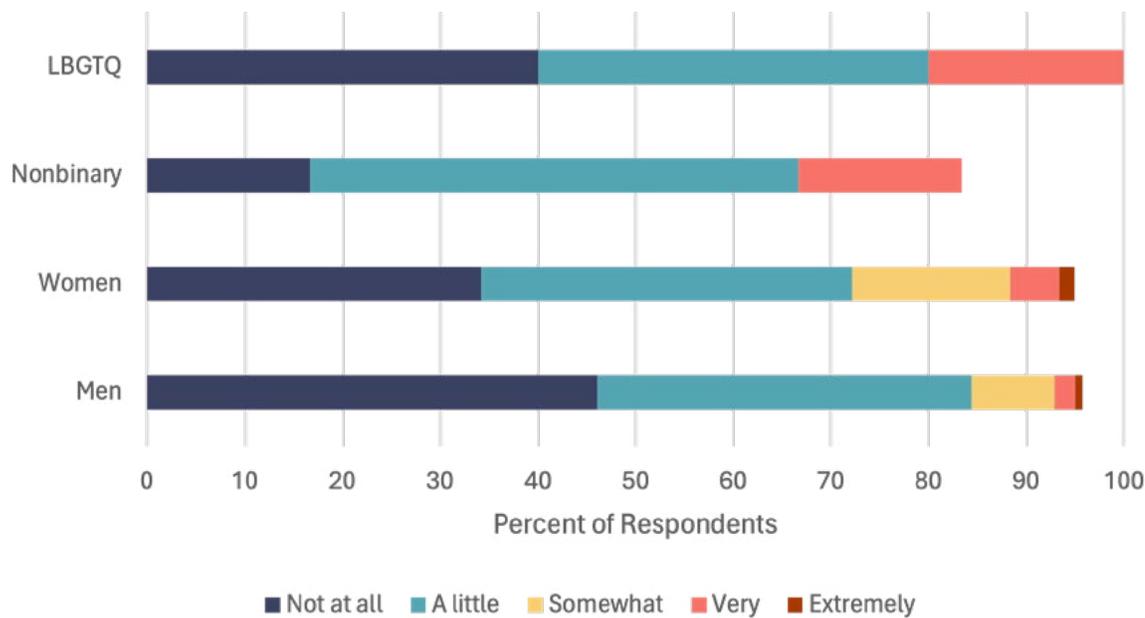
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Figure 19. Faculty Satisfaction with Efforts of Department Chair to Create Supportive Environments: a) Gender/Sexual Orientation and b) Race/Ethnicity

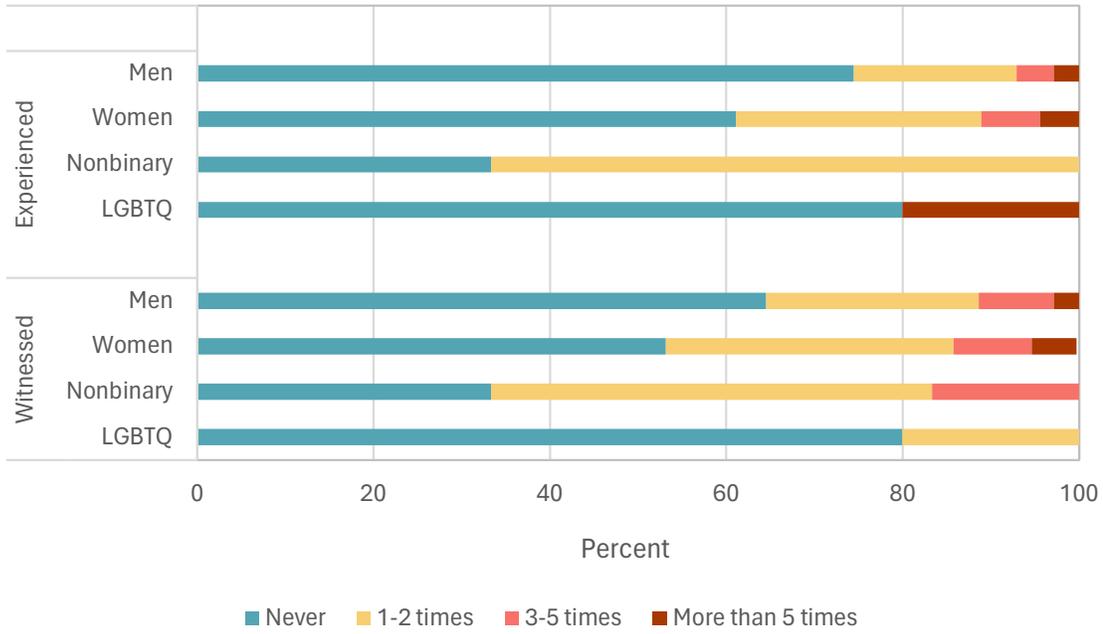
Climate is also linked to witnessing or experiencing hostile behavior in one’s department or institution and tends to differ by gender and sexual orientation (Kinkaid, Parikh, and Ranjbar 2022; Oswin 2020; Solem, Kollasch, and Lee 2009). Overall, 45% of men reported that hostile behavior is not at all common compared to 34% of women. 64% of male respondents compared to 52% of women indicated they never witnessed hostile behavior (Figure 20a). Among those who witnessed hostile behavior more than 5 times in the past 12 months, ~5% were women compared to ~2% of men. Of those who witnessed hostile behavior 3 to 5 times in the past 12 months, most (~16%) were nonbinary, followed by 9% of women and 8% of men (Figure 20a).

A key measure of hostile departmental climate is how often people actually experience unwelcoming behavior or hostility. A large number of faculty indicated they had never experienced hostile behavior in the past twelve months (240 out of all 502 respondents). While men reported having witnessed hostility at roughly the same rate as women (but less than LGBTQ), women and LGBTQ faculty experienced hostility more frequently (Figure 20b). Although a small sample size, two-thirds of nonbinary respondents reported witnessing experiencing hostile behavior at least once in the past twelve months. When analyzed by race and ethnicity, Asian or Asian Americans reported a higher frequency of experiencing and witnessing hostility than other groups (Figure 20b).

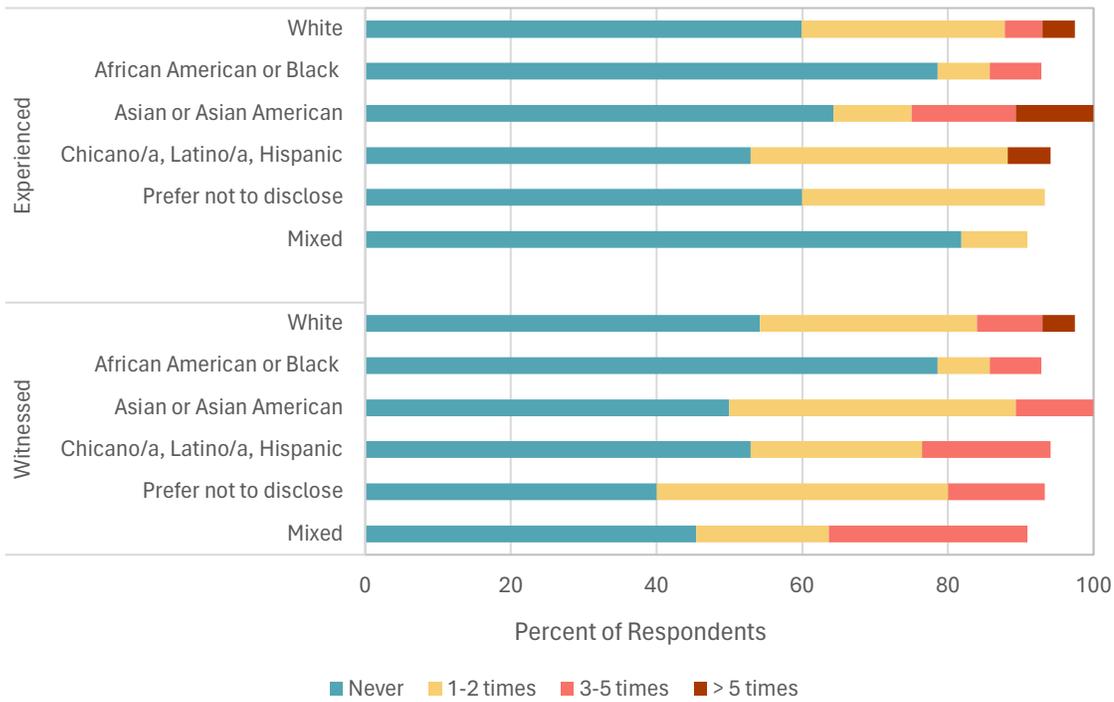
Figure 20c shows respondents’ experience with hostile climate and their knowledge of steps they need to take to get help. An alarming finding is that 25% of faculty who indicated they had experienced hostility more than three times in the past 12 months did not know how to get help. In contrast, 48% of respondents who never experienced hostility indicated they were very or extremely knowledgeable about the steps to get help. Gender also appears to affect one’s knowledge of steps to get help when experiencing hostility, with more men reporting they were very or extremely knowledgeable (Figure 20d). LGBTQ individuals indicated they were extremely knowledgeable at a higher rate than other groups (Figure 20e). Furthermore, more white faculty indicated that they are extremely knowledgeable about the steps compared to their BIPOC colleagues.



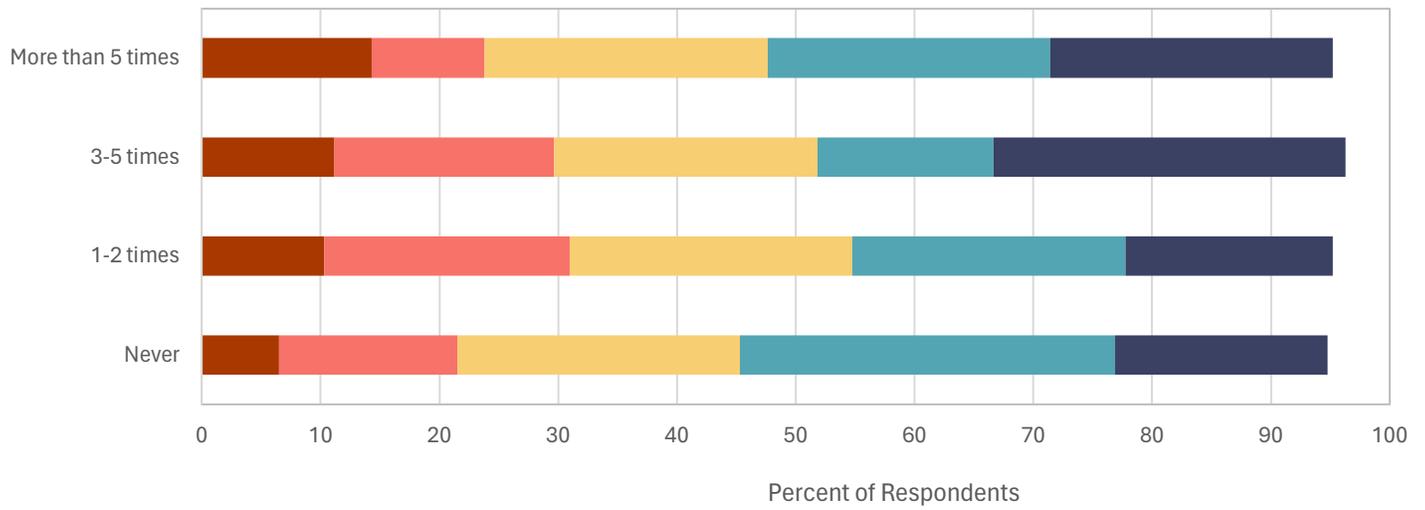
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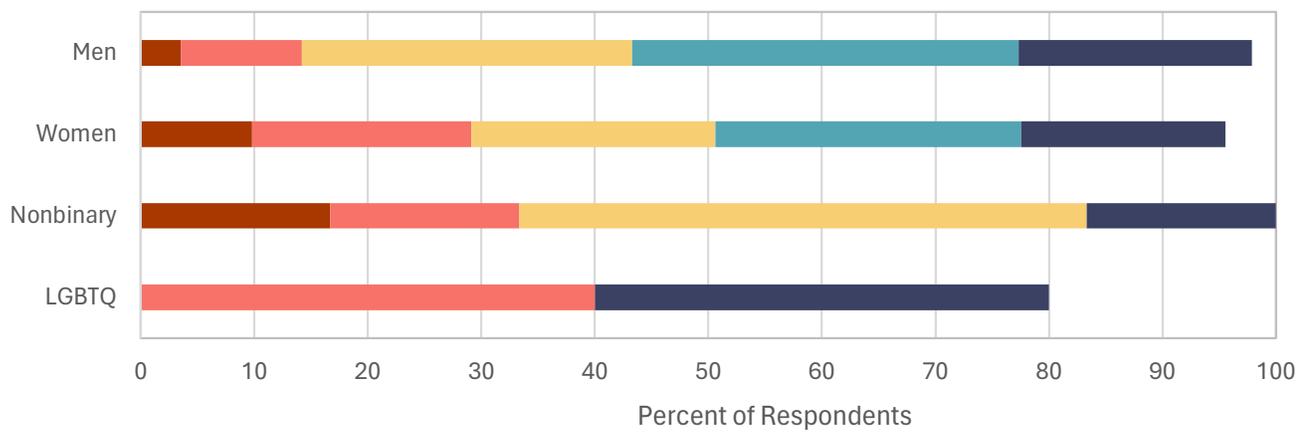


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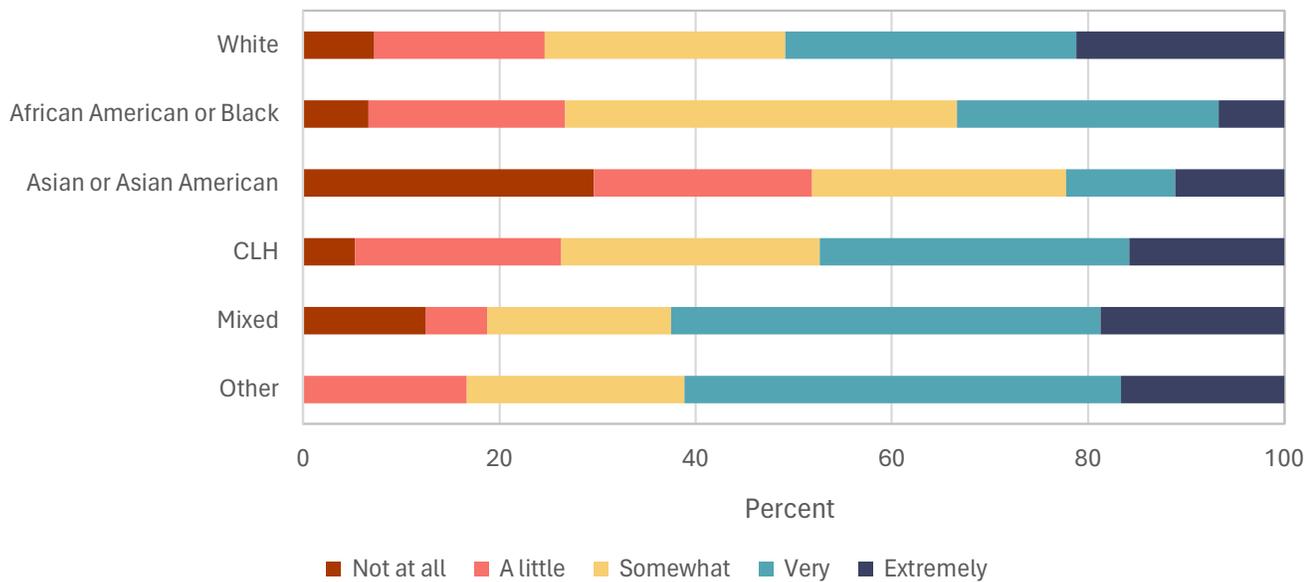
■ Not at all knowledgeable ■ A little knowledgeable ■ Somewhat knowledgeable ■ Very knowledgeable ■ Extremely knowledgeable

d)



■ Not at all knowledgeable ■ A little knowledgeable ■ Somewhat knowledgeable  
 ■ Very knowledgeable ■ Extremely knowledgeable

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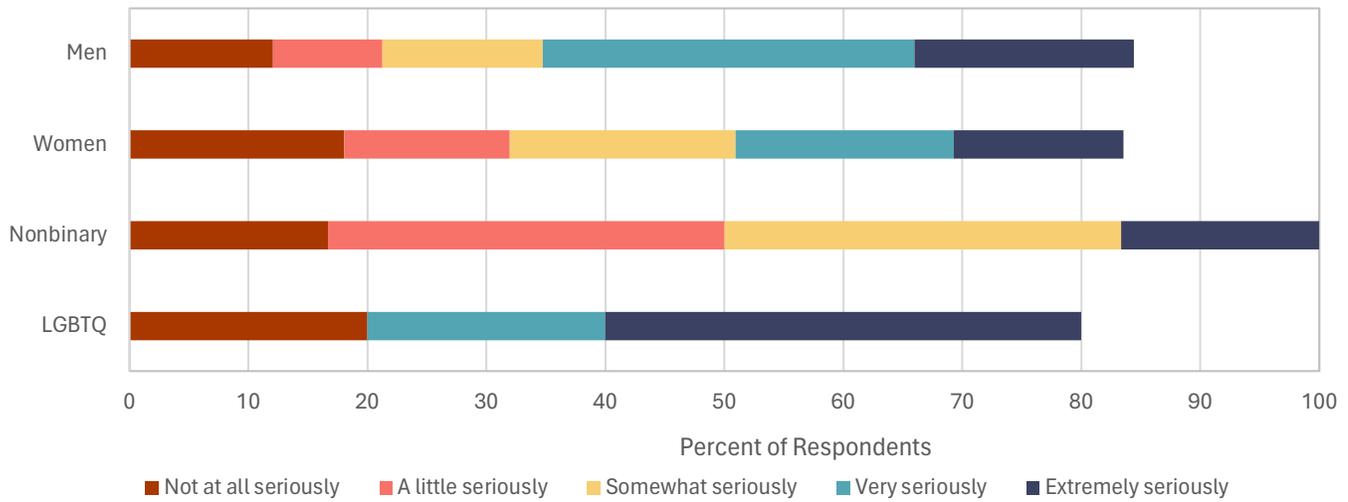


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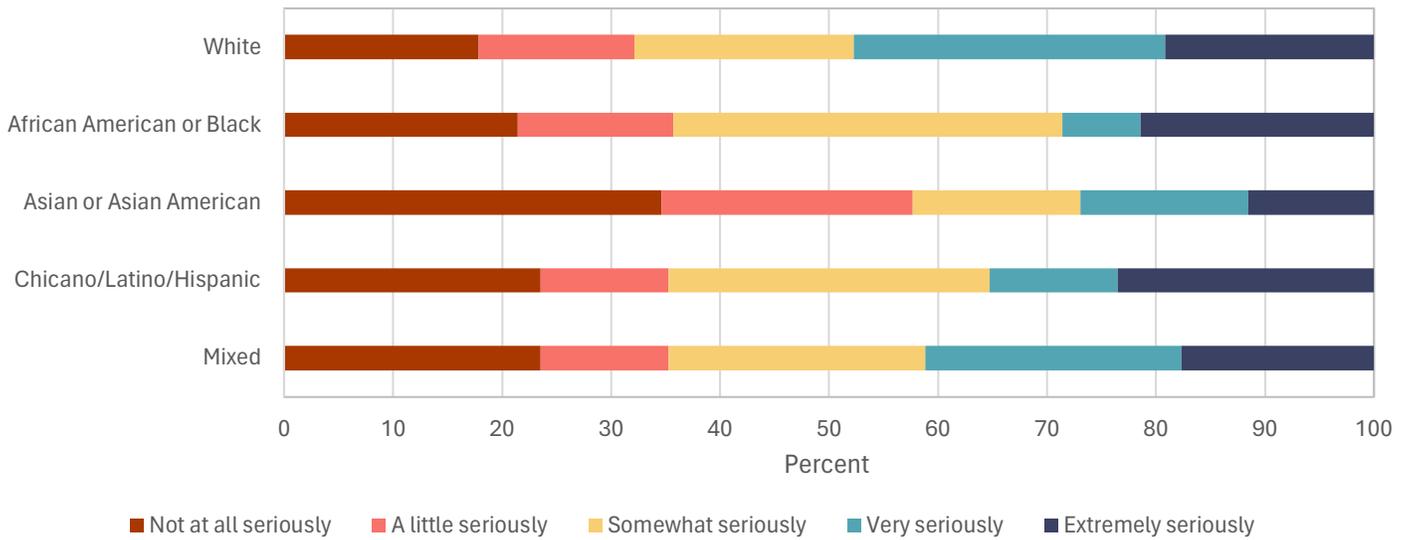
Figure 20. Faculty Experience with Hostile Department Climate: a) How common by Gender/Sexual Orientation, b) Times Experienced or Witnessed Hostility by Gender/Sexual Orientation, c) Times Experienced or Witnessed Hostility by Race/Ethnicity, d) Knowledgeable about the Steps in Seeking Help by Frequency of Experience, e) Knowledgeable about the Steps in Seeking Help by Gender/Sexual Orientation and f) Knowledgeable about the Steps in Seeking Help by Race/Ethnicity

Among our respondents, junior faculty felt intimidated more than tenured and senior faculty who are often the ones who are bullying. According to these male faculty members, “multiple junior faculty do feel intimidated and bullied” and “Tenured faculty are practically untouchable.” In contrast, some noted that once faculty are tenured they tend to feel more empowered and help out other more junior faculty. This was noted by a female faculty member who commented, “As a tenure-track person ..., the level of my personal discomfort was very high. Having moved into a senior role, my experience has changed.” Figures 21a-b show word clouds for responses to a question about hostile and intimidating behavior in the department where the word “hostile” is a high-frequency word for female as well as male faculty. Female faculty gave more lengthy responses to this question and included references to their department and chair more frequently than their male counterparts.



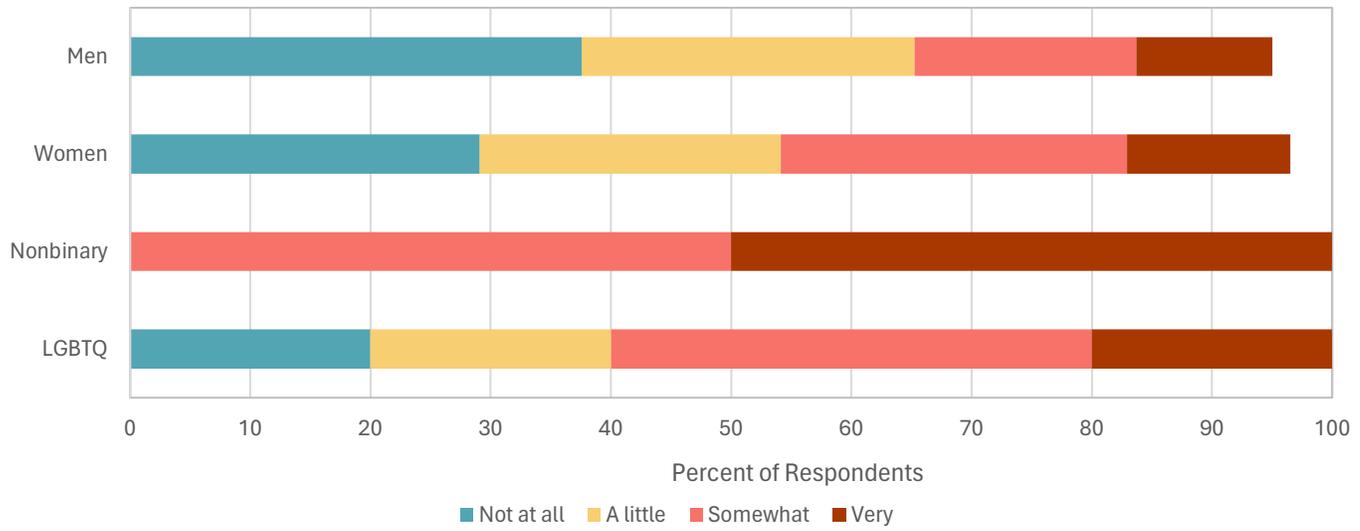


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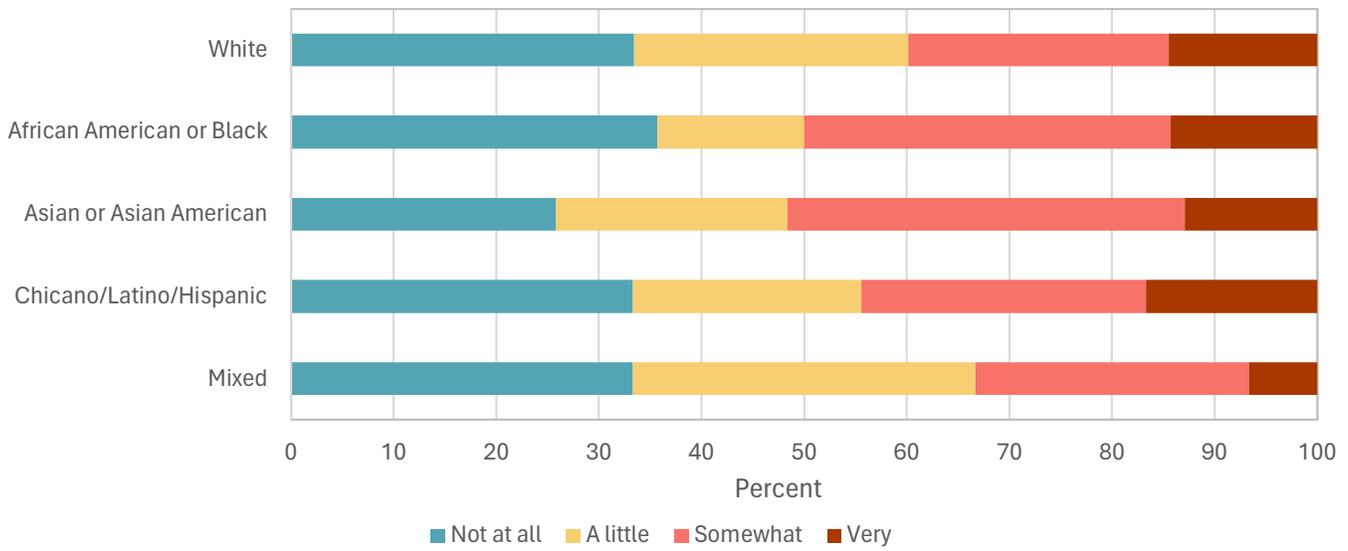


b)

Figure 22. Faculty Perspectives on How Seriously Hostile Behavior is Treated: a) Gender/Sexual Orientation and b) Race/Ethnicity



a)



b)

Figure 23. Faculty Reluctance to Voice Concerns about Hostile Behavior in Department: a) Gender and b) Race

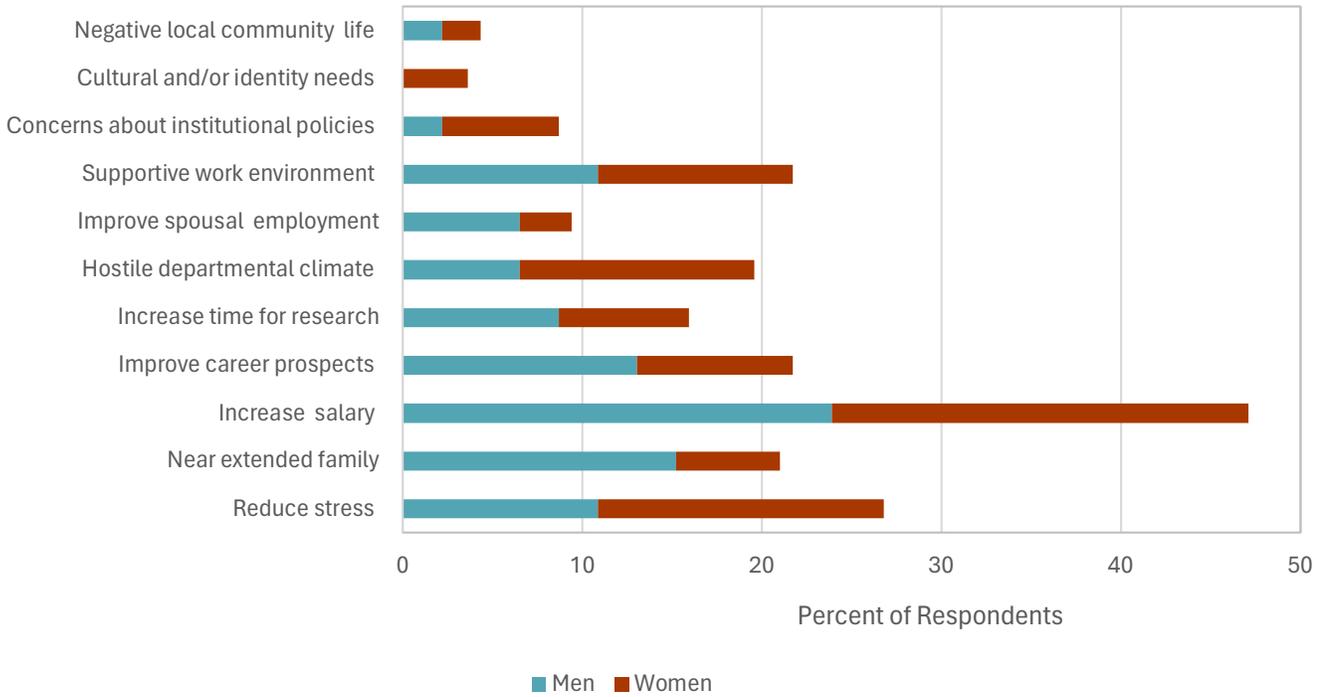
## Intentions to Leave Academia

Given these barriers and obstacles to succeeding in an academic career, some faculty consider leaving as a viable option (Sheppard, Reades, and Freeman 2023; Winkler 2000). When asked if and why they considered leaving academia in the last 12 months, faculty responses varied by gender (Figure 24a). Both genders indicated an increase in income as the key reason, however, more women indicated the reduction of stress and hostile work climate as the primary reasons, while more men indicated career prospects and needing to be near the extended family. When analyzed by race, all groups again cited increased salary as a reason. African American or Black faculty indicated increased time for research, cultural identity, and reduction of stress as key factors, while the Asian/Asian Americans indicated career prospects as a key factor. These two groups also indicated that a hostile workplace was an important factor in thinking about leaving academia (Figure 24b). In general, faculty who experienced or witnessed hostility at least once were more likely to consider leaving academia than those who did not experience or witness it (Table 4).

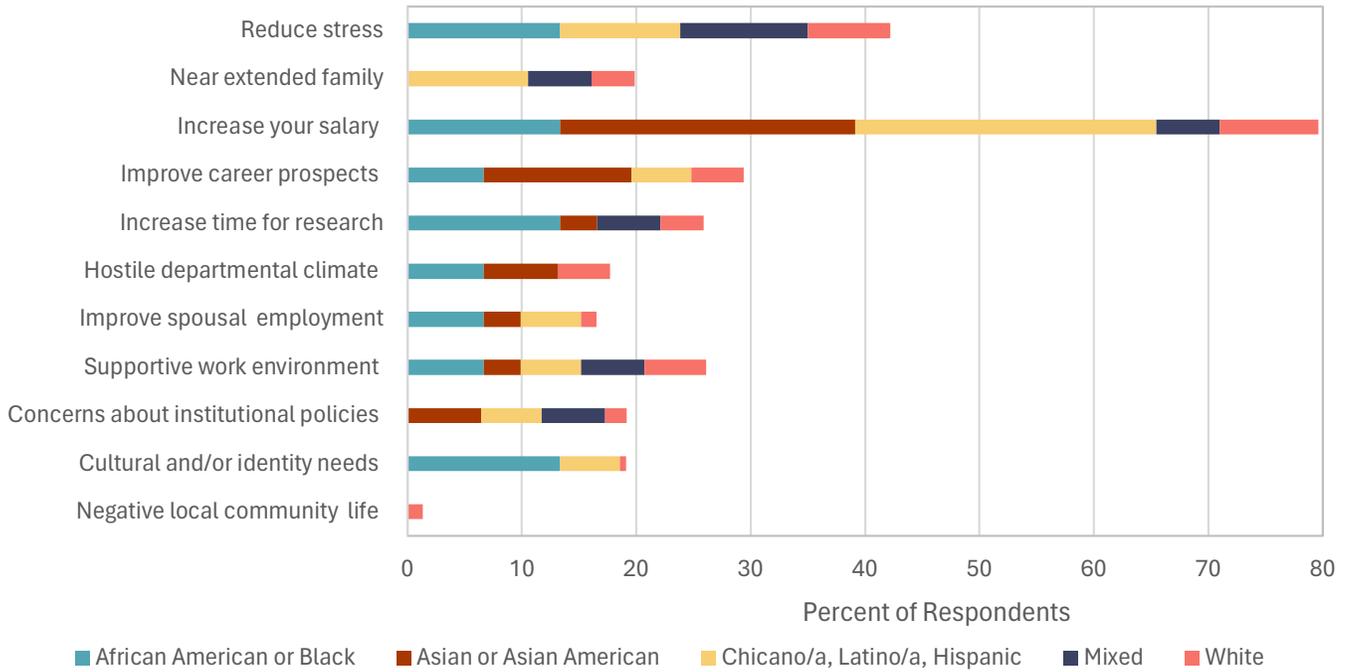
*Table 4. Crosstabulation Results for Faculty Experiencing or Witnessing Hostile and Intimidating Behavior and Considered Leaving Academia*

	Considered Leaving			
	Experienced		Witnessed	
	Yes (%)	No (%)	Yes (%)	No (%)
Never	57	73	51	63
1-2 times	30	21	32	28
3-5 times	7	4	11	7
More than 5 times	7	1	6	3

Among tenured and tenure-track faculty, thoughts of leaving academia also varied by type of institution (Figure 25). More women considered leaving academia at all institutional levels than their male counterparts. According to our survey, a higher percentage of assistant professors and full professors considered leaving R1 institutions, thus contributing to the leaky pipeline and parity issues for faculty advancement in academia. These R1 institutions play a crucial role in knowledge proliferation and gatekeeping, and the loss of faculty at any level has an impact. Reasons to consider leaving academia varied by academic status (tenured and tenure-track vs non-tenure track). Non-tenure track faculty indicated a higher preference for an increase in salary and career prospects as a reason to leave academia than tenure-track faculty, whereas tenure-track faculty indicated a reduction of stress or hostile climate as an important factor at a higher rate (Figure 26).



a)



b)

Figure 24. Primary Reason for Faculty to Consider Leaving Academic Institution: a) Gender and b) Race

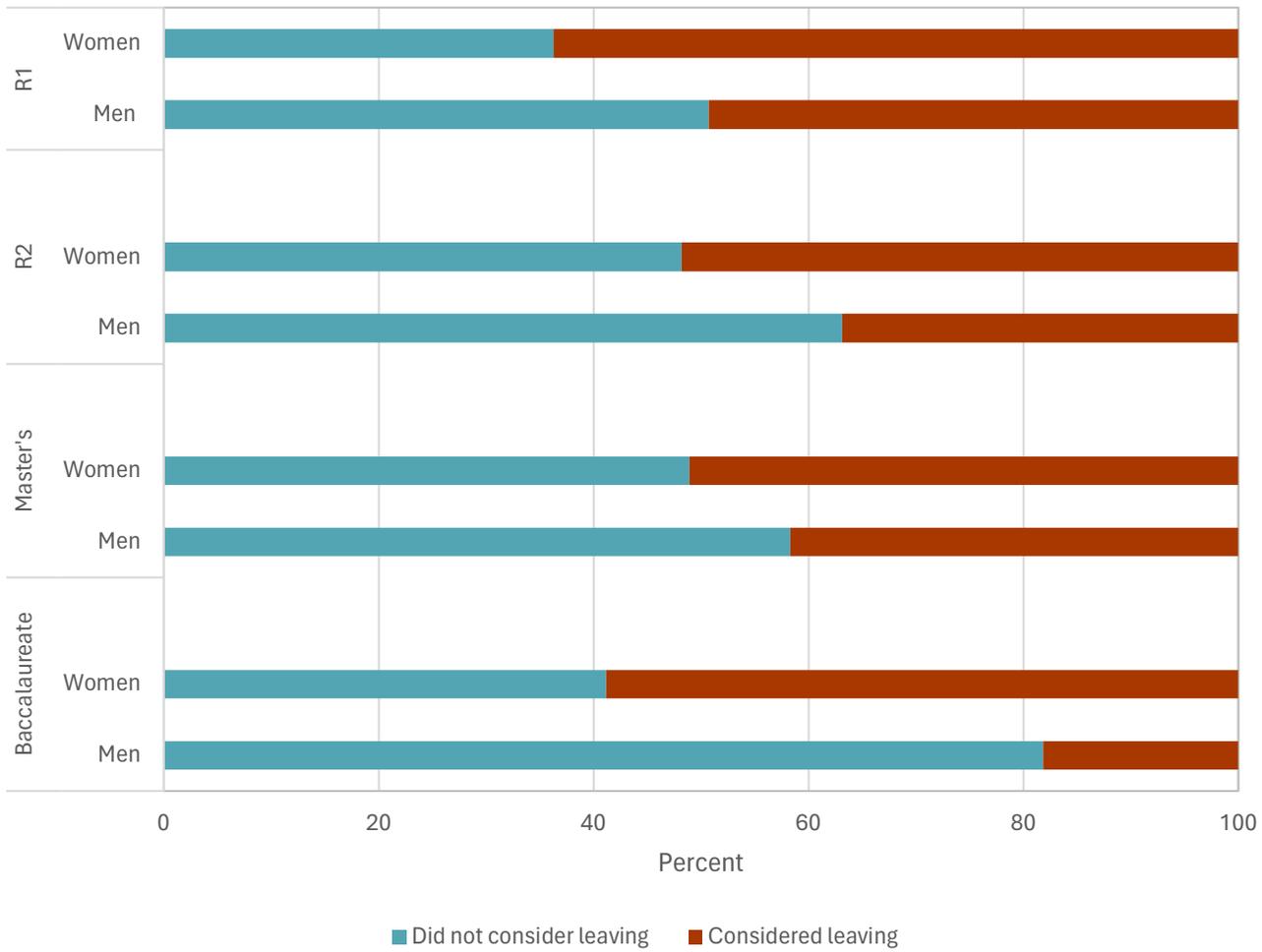


Figure 25. Faculty who Considered Leaving Academic Institutions by Gender and Institution

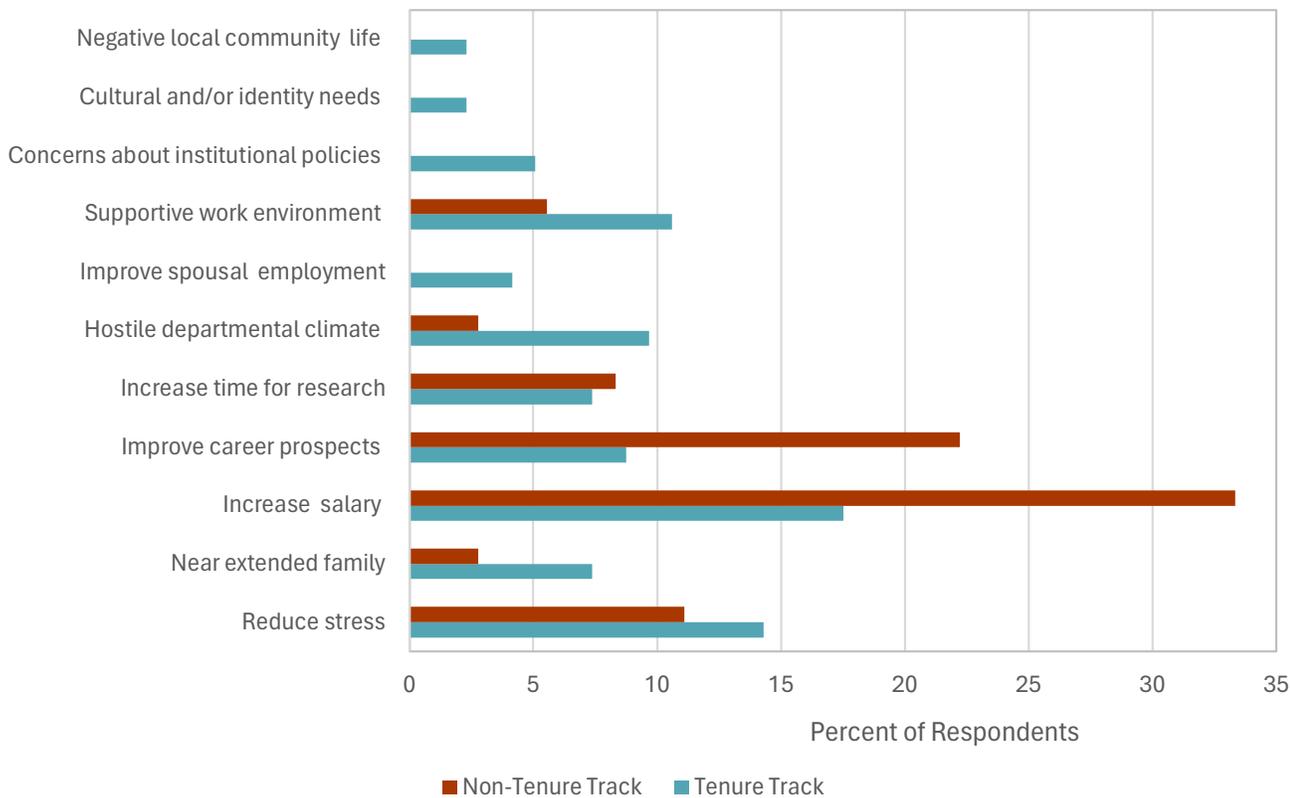


Figure 26. Primary Reasons to Consider Leaving Academic Institutions by Faculty Rank

## Summary

The lives of academics encompass both challenges and opportunities as they advance through their graduate programs and academic and other career paths. Continuing barriers to women and other marginalized faculty and students include work-life balance challenges and other hostile obstacles, as well as navigating hostile and unwelcoming behavior in the workplace. Our research demonstrates that these barriers can lead to delays in advancement and promotion, as well as decisions to leave academia altogether.

Departmental climate includes many elements that influence a person’s sense of belonging, interactions with colleagues, and the role of leadership in fostering a supportive environment and addressing hostility. Faculty should not hesitate to voice concerns about hostile or intimidating behaviors out of fear that it could harm their reputation or career advancement. These matters are most effectively addressed at both the department and institutional levels.

Overall, these challenges are most successfully addressed through institutional and departmental leadership and support, as well as mentoring and networking in the field of geography and academia as a whole. The AAG Healthy Departments Initiative has worked to help departments resolve some of these issues, but there is still much to be done.

## Part III. Gendered Gatekeeping in the AAG: Leadership and Journal Editing

### Overview

Gatekeepers are individuals in decision-making positions who influence the allocation of resources, opportunities, and access to important information or spaces. In academic settings, gatekeepers include individuals such as appointed or elected leaders, journal editors, and universities or professional organizations. Professional organizations promote disciplinary standards and celebrate exemplary members, journal editors determine which scholarly work is published and disseminated, universities create new knowledge and train future generations of scholars, and leaders set the direction of the organizations they lead. Gender and related factors such as stereotypes, norms, and representation play a significant role in these gatekeeping processes. Similarly, gender stereotypes often shape perceptions of leadership potential, limiting advancement opportunities for qualified candidates. These dynamics collectively influence decisions and outcomes within institutions and across diverse contexts. This section examines the trend of gendered gatekeeping in key entities of the AAG including its presidents, committees, and journal editors by collecting comprehensive data from AAG.

### Key Findings

- Women's leadership within the AAG is growing, yet this progress remains uneven across major committees of the AAG, especially Healthy Departments, Membership, and Archives and Association History committees which continue to be male-dominated.
- Women remain underrepresented in key knowledge gatekeeping positions within major AAG journals, particularly in editor roles, contributing to the gendered imbalance in who gets to produce and validate geographic knowledge.
- Both presidential and editorial leadership within the AAG reflect clear institutional patterns, with a pronounced preference for scholars from R1 research-intensive universities.
- AAG leadership exhibits a strong geographic pattern, with many presidents earning PhDs in the East and West Lakes divisions. The West Lakes Division has produced the most AAG presidents as their alma maters or places of employment.
- Increasing the visibility of women in gatekeeping roles is crucial not only for achieving gender equity but also for diversifying the knowledge that is produced and valued in geography, thereby contributing to the discipline's future.

### Gatekeeping and the Glass Ceiling

Gatekeepers are shaped by the social and professional contexts in which they operate (van den Brink and Benschop 2014; Brunn and Warf 2024), and their decisions may reflect gendered and racialized dynamics that reinforce existing inequalities (Corra and Willer 2002; Wyatt et al. 2023). Gatekeeping is often a two-fold barrier to advancement in academic disciplines, creating a glass ceiling not just in where and how the voices and scholarship of women are heard, but whether or not they advance in their careers (Montgomery 2020). Gatekeeping behaviors have served to limit who and what may be published and disseminated, or whose scholarship and knowledge production are respected and promoted (Westerheijden 2022). This behavior may exist informally, through networking (or restriction from key networks) (van den Brink and Benschop 2014) and through citation and reference of scholars, or more formally in ways that careers and knowledge production are advanced or left to stagnate (Kozlowski et al. 2022; Ray et al. 2024; Wyatt et al. 2023).

Gendered gatekeeping can also obstruct women and underrepresented scholars when it relates to service roles at the level of the professional organization (Helmer et al. 2017) and further limit the credentials they need for advancement. The gendered control of knowledge production is often hidden, buried in hiring or T&P committee discussions, or in the rejection of manuscripts based on personal bias rather than a lack of scientific rigor. As noted by Sheppard, Reades, and Freeman (2023), gatekeeping is often perpetuated when leadership of both an organization and its publications lacks diversity.

The discipline of geography continues to contend with a legacy of gender imbalance (e.g., Kaplan and Mapes 2016; Zelinsky 1973), particularly in senior academic ranks (Brinegar 2001; Mossa et al., 2026; Schurr, Müller, and Imhof 2020). This imbalance has likely contributed to the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles, including journal editors and editorial board members (Franklin et al. 2021). Women's representation in leadership and gatekeeping roles is vital to the health and advancement of any discipline or organization (Hughes et al. 2022). In geography, women may be more likely to recognize the importance of social justice, including gender and racial equity (Campbell et al. 2013; Monk 2004). While recent scholarship has begun to examine how gender and race shape gatekeeping in the production of geographical knowledge (e.g., Franklin et al. 2021; Schurr, Müller, and Imhof 2020), the role of professional organizations in this process remains relatively underexplored. This section investigates the presence and influence of women as gatekeepers within the discipline's primary professional organization, the AAG and its two flagship journals, *Annals* and *PG*, as well as in its most influential committees.

Since its founding in 1904, the AAG has served as a prominent professional association for geographers in the United States and has steadily expanded its reach to include a growing international membership (Sultana et al. 2025). Despite historically a white-male dominated organization, AAG's stated mission is to "bring[s] together members of the global geographic community... to create a space in which all geographers—wherever they come from—will know they are valued, heard, and welcomed" by "develop[ing] an inclusive and thoughtful leadership development strategy for involving members in service to the AAG" (AAG 2022). Such goals stress inclusivity and diverse perspectives that comprise the different components of and leaders in AAG. The representation of gender in the AAG leadership, committees and its journals' editorial roles matters for the health and growth of AAG. These leaders can help to advance gender equality and racial balance within the organization and discipline, and foster a positive environment for recognizing emerging scholarship that has high societal value and policy implications.

To analyze the evolving role of women within the leadership structures of the AAG, including its presidents, journal editorship, and AAG committees that play a major role in AAG governance, we used diverse sources of data. While we predominantly used the AAG Handbook (2019-2020) and AAG committee composition data (2007-2022), supplementary information was collected from AAG's official website and other publicly available sources to fill in gaps in the data for certain years. We explain this in the relevant sections below.

## AAG Presidents

The gender imbalance of leadership in the AAG is exemplified by the low numbers of women presidents until the early 2000s. A complete list of AAG presidents between 1984/85 and 2025 was compiled and included information about the institutions where they worked when they were elected to the AAG presidency and the universities where they earned their PhD degrees. As of 2025, 20 of the 122 individuals who have served as president of the AAG are women. Between 2000 and 2025, the AAG has made notable progress toward gender equity in its presidential leadership; women have held the role 57% of the time, including four women of color and five foreign-born women elected to the position (Figure 27).

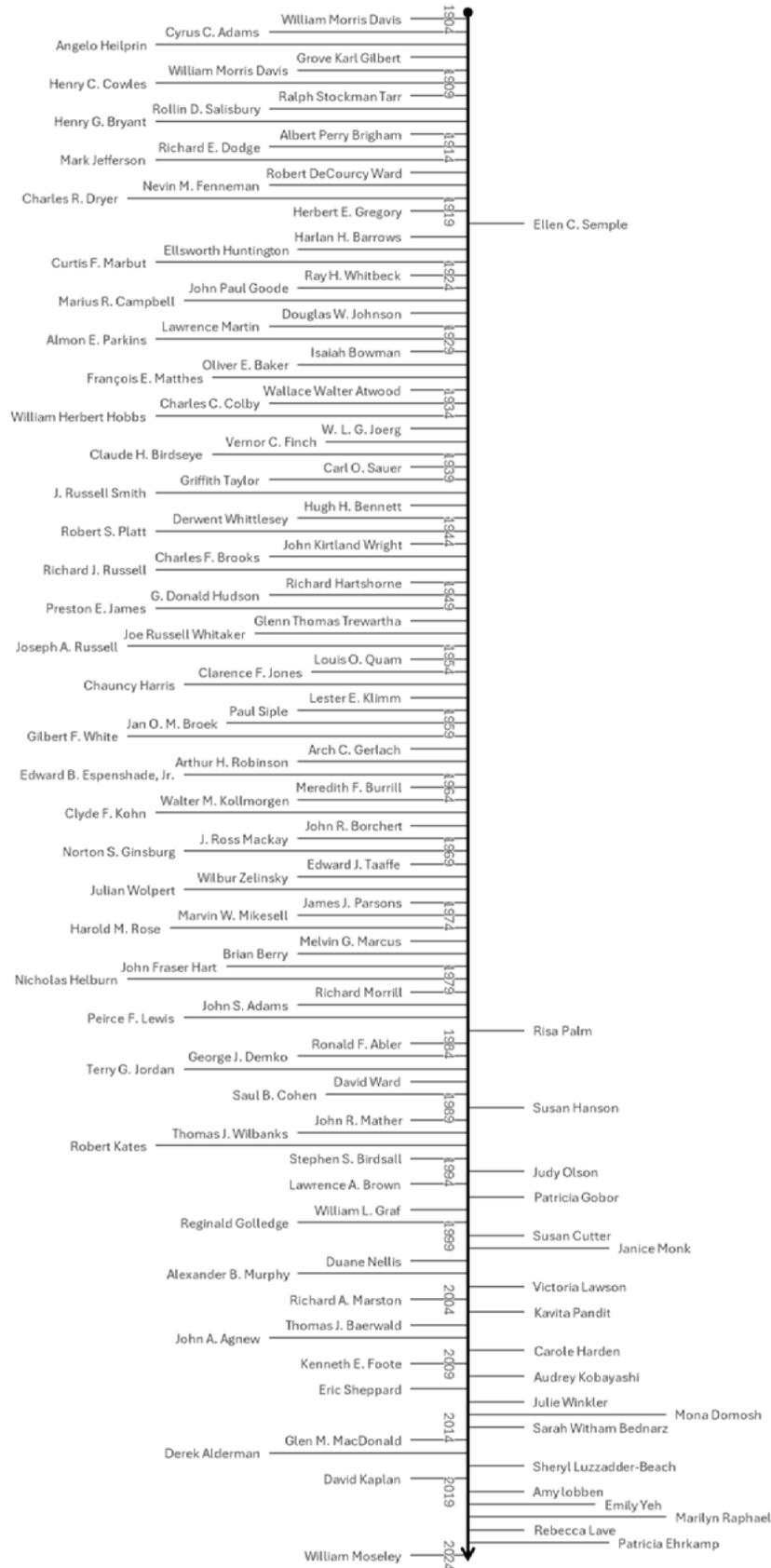


Figure 27. Timeline of AAG Presidents by Gender (Men's names are to the left of the center line and women's names are to the right.)

However, there is a clear institutional bias of AAG presidents in favor of top tier research-intensive institutions. Table 5 shows where the AAG presidents obtained their PhD degrees and universities where they worked when elected since 1984/85 (with the exception of Ellen Churchill Semple). The geographical locations of their institutions are concentrated in the East and West Coasts, and the Midwest in particular (Table 5). Figure 28 shows the distribution of AAG presidents by gender and region.

Table 5. AAG Presidents' Work and PhD-Earning Universities\*

<b>Women Presidents</b>	<b>Years of Presidency</b>	<b>Work University/Agency</b>	<b>PhD University</b>
Ellen Churchill Semple <sup>6</sup>	1921-22	Clark University	University of Leipzig <sup>6</sup>
Risa I. Palm	1984-85	University of Colorado Boulder	University of Minnesota
Susan E. Hanson	1990-91	Clark University	Northwestern University
Judy M. Olson	1995-96	Michigan State University	University of Wisconsin Madison
Patricia Gober	1997-98	Arizona State University	The Ohio State University
Susan L. Cutter	2000-01	University of South Carolina	University of Chicago
Janice J. Monk	2001-02	University of Arizona	University of Illinois
Victoria A. Lawson	2004-05	University of Washington	The Ohio State University
Kavita K. Pandit	2006-07	University of Georgia	The Ohio State University
Carol P. Harden	2009-10	University of Tennessee	University of Colorado Boulder
Audrey L. Kobayashi	2011-12	Queen's University	University of California Los Angeles
Julie A. Winkler	2013-14	Michigan State University	University of Minnesota
Mona Domosh	2014-15	Dartmouth College	Clark University
Sarah Bednarz	2015-16	Texas A&M University	Texas A&M University
Sheryl Luzzadder-Beach	2018-19	University of Texas Austin	University of Minnesota
Amy Lobben	2020-21	University of Oregon	Michigan State University
Emily Yeh	2021-22	University of Colorado Boulder	University of California Berkeley
Marilyn Raphael	2022-23	University of California Los Angeles	The Ohio State University
Rebecca Lave	2023-24	Indiana University Bloomington	University of California Berkeley
Patricia Ehrkamp	2024-25	University of Kentucky	University of Minnesota
<b>Men Presidents</b>	<b>Years of Presidency</b>	<b>Work University/Agency</b>	<b>PhD University</b>
Ronald F. Abler	1985-86	University of Minnesota	University of Minnesota
George J. Demko	1986-87	Dartmouth College	Pennsylvania State University
Terry G. Jordan	1987-88	University of Texas Austin	University of Wisconsin
David Ward	1988-89	University of Wisconsin Madison	University of Wisconsin Madison
Saul B. Cohen	1989-90	Hunter College	Harvard University
John R. Mather	1991-92	University of Delaware	John Hopkins University
Thomas J. Wilbanks	1992-93	Oak Ridge National Lab	Syracuse University
Robert W. Kates	1993-94	Clark University	University of Chicago
Stephen S. Birdsall	1994-95	University of North Carolina Chapel Hill	Michigan State University
Lawrence A. Brown	1996-97	Ohio State University	Northwestern University
William L. Graf	1998-99	Arizona State University	University of Wisconsin Madison
Reginald G. Golledge	1999-2000	University of California Santa Barbara	University of Iowa

<sup>6</sup> Degree never conferred; as a woman, she was not permitted to matriculate. Her B.A. and M.A. were earned at Vassar College. Semple was the first woman appointed to faculty rank at Clark. See <https://www.geocurrents.info/blog/2011/02/11/ellen-churchill-semple-and-paths-not-taken/>

M. Duane Nellis	2002-03	Kansas State University	Oregon State University
Alexander B. Murphy	2003-04	University of Oregon	University of Chicago
Richard A. Marston	2005-06	Kansas State University	University of California Los Angeles
Thomas Baerwald	2007-08	National Science Foundation	University of Minnesota
John A. Agnew	2008-09	University of California Los Angeles	The Ohio State University
Kenneth E. Foote	2010-11	University of Colorado Boulder	University of Chicago
Eric Sheppard	2012-13	University of Minnesota	University of Toronto
Glen MacDonald	2016-17	University of California Los Angeles	University of Toronto
Derek H. Alderman	2017-18	University of Tennessee	University of Georgia
David Kaplan	2019-20	Kent State University	Syracuse University
William G. Moseley	2025-06	Macalester College	University of Georgia

*\*Note: data are compiled from web search and publicly available information. Should you note any inaccuracy please let us know.*

There is a strong geographic pattern to the leadership, with many earning their PhDs in the East and West Lakes divisions, which encompass the Upper Midwest (Figure 28). Career homes vary more widely, but to date, the West Lakes division has produced the most AAG Presidents either as their workplace or alma mater. These represent only about half of PhD-granting geography programs in the U.S., and all of the institutions are R1, with the exception of the most recent president, William Moseley, from Macalester College in Minnesota. R1 institutions provide faculty with structural advantages, such as extensive professional networks, alumni voting blocs, ample resources, and reduced teaching loads, which increase the chances of success.

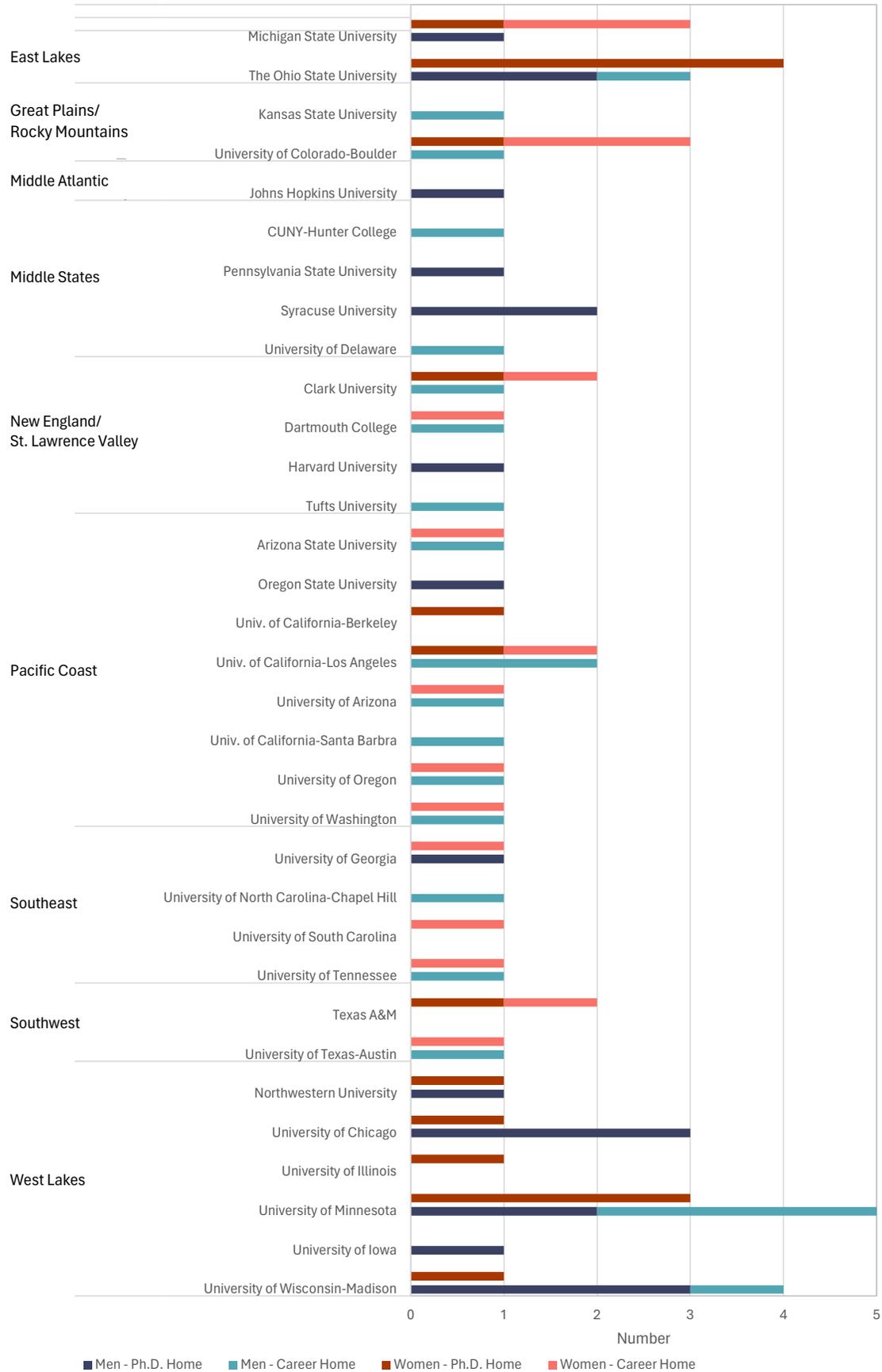


Figure 28. Home Institutions of AAG Presidents by Region

## AAG Committees

The available AAG datasets for 27 committees span from 2007 to 2022 and include elected and appointed committees, honorees, and elected officers. To further understand the relative importance of AAG’s committee structure, a Delphi survey was conducted during the month of July in 2023 among all living AAG presidents (28) that had email contact information available. The survey was open for three weeks with 16 participants. Drawing on their experiences in office, participants were asked to rank each of the 27 committees based on perceived significance, from “most important” to “least important”. This survey aimed to capture a collective assessment of committee influence within the organization’s governance framework.

Using the Delphi survey ratings (1=most important, 2=moderately important, and 3=least important), mean values were calculated to rank the committee priorities, as shown in Table 6. Nearly 94% of the 16 AAG presidents identified the Nominating Committee as the most influential, as a result of its role in the election process for AAG’s top leadership role (Table 6). In comparison, about 75% viewed the Honors, Finance, and Awards Committees as the next most significant (a three-way tie), while 64% considered the Publications Committee to be of third-tier importance within the discipline.

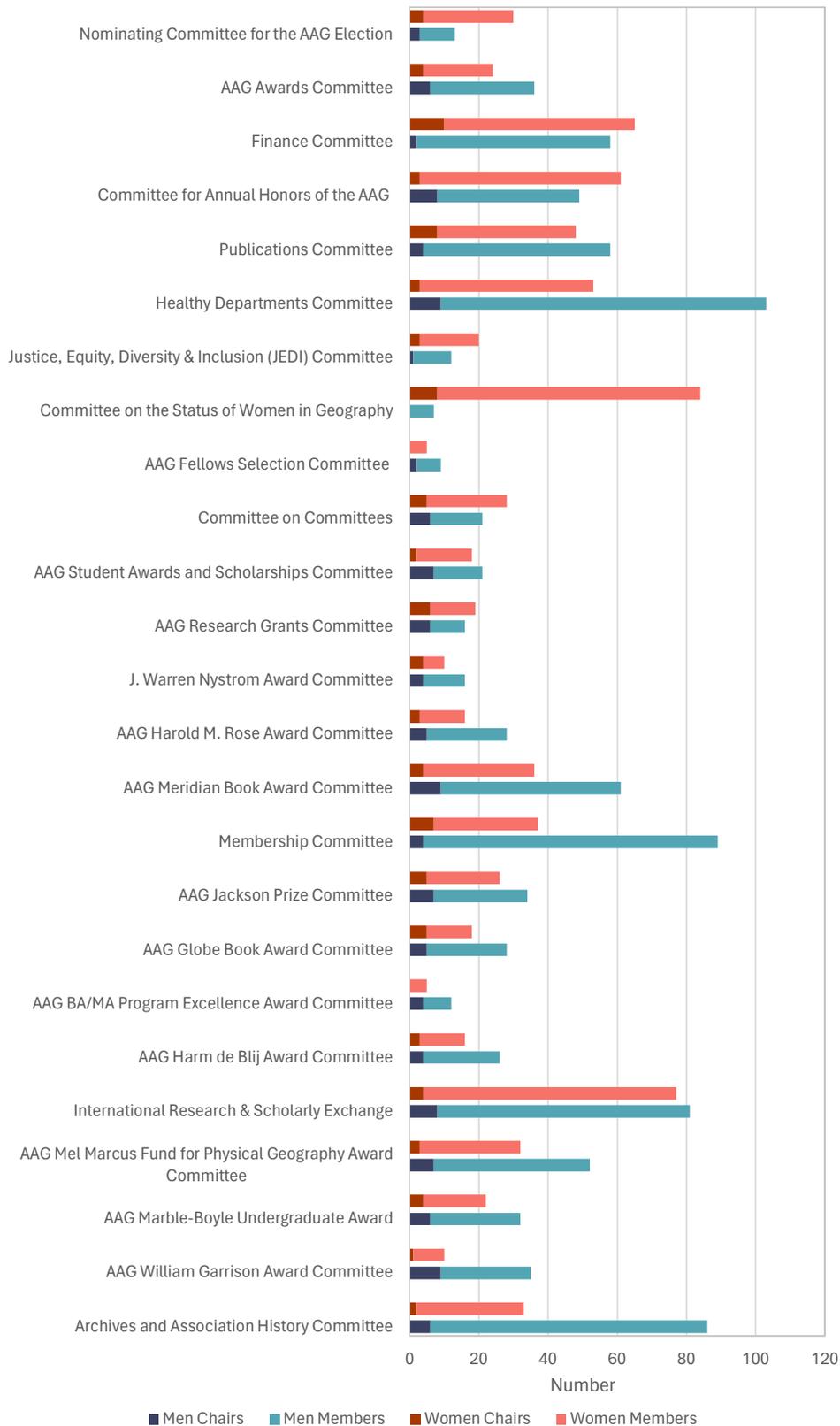
Table 6. Committee Ranking by Delphi Survey, 2023

Rank	AAG Committees	Index
1*	Nominating Committee for the Election (Nomination Committee)	1.06
2*	Committee for Annual Honors of the AAG (Honors Committee)	1.25
2	Finance Committee	1.25
2	Awards Committee	1.25
3	Publications Committee	1.38
4	Healthy Departments Committee	1.44
5	Committee on the Status of Women in Geography	1.50
5	Justice, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (JEDI) Committee	1.50
6	Fellows Selection Committee	1.63
7	Committee on Committees	1.71
8	Research Grants Committee	1.75
8	Student Awards and Scholarships Committee	1.75
9	J. Warren Nystrom Award Committee	1.81
10	Harold M. Rose Award Committee	1.93
11	Meridian Book Award Committee	1.94
12	Committee on Disciplinary and Eligibility Matters for AAG Members	2.00
12	Membership Committee	2.00
13	BA/MA Program Excellence Award Committee	2.06
13	Globe Book Award Committee	2.06
13	Jackson Prize Committee	2.06
14	International Research & Scholarly Exchange	2.13
14	Harm de Blij Award Committee	2.13
15	Mel Marcus Fund for Physical Geography Award Committee	2.19
16	Wilbanks Prize Committee	2.29
17	William Garrison Award Committee	2.31
17	Marble-Boyle Undergraduate Award	2.31
18	Archives and Association History Committee	2.38

\*shortened names of the committee in the parenthesis are used throughout the report.

Figure 29 displays the gender composition of both member and chair composition of 25 AAG committees during 2007-2022 (the other two committees had missing data, and data was missing or incomplete for 2009, 2019, and 2022), organized by the Delphi scores (highest to lowest). Among them, two of the top four committees (Honors and Finance) and the International Research and Scholarly Exchange (ranked 14th) are somewhat gender balanced (with the former two having slightly more women), while the Nominating Committee is strongly female. Given the Nominating and Honors committees' candidates are selected by AAG's Committee of Committees (composed by AAG Secretary, and chairs of the National and Regional Councilors respectively, all serve on the AAG Council), and then elected by AAG membership, it could denote both that committee and membership are conscientious of electing women to these important committees, or could reflect the prevalence of women presidents in recent years. The gender composition of the other 23 committees varies a great deal. The three most male-dominated committees are Healthy Departments, Membership, and Archives and Association History. Some of this gender imbalance reflects the male-dominant nature of geography historically. Only one committee, the Committee on the Status of Women in Geography, is female-dominated. Two other committees, JEDI and Committee on Committees, had a slight overrepresentation of women as well.

On average, the number of male committee members, as well as the number of men chairing committees, exceeds that of women (Figure 29). In general, the number of women chairing these committees is somewhat related to the number of women serving on these committees, given the chairs are elected by committee membership. The Honors Committee had more male chairs than the Finance Committee. The chair of the Finance Committee is the AAG Treasurer. Among all AAG entities, only the AAG President, Vice President, and National Councilors, and two out of the 27 committees (Honors and Nominating) are elected by the full AAG membership. The results of such elections tend to reflect who members believe should be the leaders and role models for AAG. Once elected, the individuals on the Council (including regional councilors) and these two committees have the power to advance the goals of AAG as gatekeepers with either positive or negative impacts on the organization and discipline. Details about these two committees as gatekeepers, as well as the gender composition of committee chairs/members and the honorees are highlighted below.



**Figure 29. AAG Committee Leadership and Membership by Gender (2007-2022). Delphi Ranking (R) for Relative Importance. No Data Available for 2010-2011, 2012-2013, 2018-2019, or 2020-2021. Data on Committee Composition and Leadership Missing for Committee on Disciplinary and Eligibility Matters for AAG and AAG Wilbanks Prize Committee. Source: Committee Data from AAG and R from survey conducted by authors**

## AAG Nominating Committee

This committee is composed of three members who are elected by AAG membership. Their charge is to nominate a slate of candidates for the election of the vice president and national councilors. The president of the AAG is by default the vice president from the current year, and appears on the ballot automatically. Therefore, who this committee nominates becomes critical for the election of AAG's top leadership. Between 2007 and 2023, only one year had a male-majority committee, while every other year (excluding those with missing data) had a female-majority (2:1) or all-female committees (2015-2017 and 2022-2023). Importantly, among the 14 AAG presidents nominated during this period, the majority were women, illustrating a pattern of female majority or exclusive committees that tended to nominate other women as AAG vice presidential candidates. Moreover, three out of the four women of color presidents ever elected in AAG history, Audrey Kobayashi (2011-2012), Emily Yeh (2020-2021), and Marilyn Raphael (2022-2023), were nominated during this period. Among the three committees nominating them, only the 2021-2022 committee had a female-majority and a female chair which nominated the first and so far only Black woman as president. This record illustrates the growing awareness of and advocacy for women and underrepresented groups as AAG leaders, and the Nominating Committee successfully recruited and nominated qualified minority and women candidates. In 2012-2013, for example, the committee deliberately consulted with some AAG leaders on diversity and mentoring in order to solicit most qualified women and minority candidates to be on the ballot the following year. This reveals that while individual gatekeepers (i.e. individual committee members) can play essential roles, organizational gatekeepers (committee's decision as a whole) can also profoundly impact an academic field.

## AAG Honors Committee

Once elected by AAG membership, members of this committee elect its chair to lead efforts to solicit nominations for the six honors categories. Once AAG staff compile the packet of candidates, the chair calls for and leads the meeting/s to deliberate on who should be honored during that year before reporting to AAG Council. During the period we analyzed (2007-2022), this committee was composed of six voting and three observing members who would become voting members the following year<sup>7</sup>. While the committee chair holds significant influence, all members collectively serve as gatekeepers—each contributing to the selection of individuals for AAG's highest honors. In doing so, they help shape who is recognized as a role model within the discipline of geography and AAG community. The extent of the chair's influence depends largely on the individual leadership style—ranging from a facilitative approach that encourages open dialogue to a directive role that actively steers decisions toward specific outcomes. Therefore, who is at the helm and what they do matter a great deal as gatekeepers.

While the increasing representation of women on AAG committees is a sign of progress, the over-representation of women in committee service roles can be concerning as well. For instance, the 2017-2018 Honors Committee was composed with two men and seven women. That year was when AAG inaugurated its new AAG Fellows program which more than doubled the workload of the Honors Committee on top of regular reviewing/deliberating AAG honors. The female-majority committee was clearly overtaxed, so the following year the incoming and outgoing Chairs jointly petitioned the AAG Council to establish a separate Fellows Committee, which was ranked sixth place in the Delphi scores.

Moreover, the presence of women or underrepresented groups on the Honors Committee does not guarantee that qualified faculty members in these groups are selected. Fairness and equity by committee leaders and members are important for open and just deliberations by these committees. The committee reviews the candidate packages, rather than nominates, but individual members or the chair may choose to take a more active role in encouraging nominations from members. For instance, the 2008-2009 Honors Committee under the leadership of Ken Foote, a leader in diversity and mentorship, honored two minority faculty members with the AAG Lifetime Achievement Award and Distinguished Service Award respectively. Rickie Sanders, the first Black

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<sup>7</sup> AAG council approved a change since the 2024-2025 cycle that all nine members are voting members.

female full professor of geography in the nation, chaired the Honors Committee in two consecutive years (2015-2017). She worked closely with the chair of the 2018-2019 committee (another woman of color) by recommending women and minority AAG members for consideration and leading the nominating package preparation for some. The outcome of that year was four of the seven honorees were women and minorities (Table 7). This example involved important networking and mentoring between the two Women of Color chairs. Their collaboration demonstrates that scholars, in particular those who belong to underrepresented groups, can become leaders through observing positive role models and helpful mentoring relationships.

Table 7. Honors Committee Composition and Awardees by Gender

Honors Committee					
Year	Male Honorees	Female Honorees	Committee Composition - # of Males	Committee Composition - # of Females	Chair
2007-2008	5	1	6	5	Male
2008-2009	5	1	6	3	Male
2009-2010	4	0	5	4	Male
2011-2012	6	0	5	4	Male
2013-2014	4	4	4	5	Male
2014-2015	5	3	4	5	Male
2015-2016	3	4	4	5	Male
2016-2017	5	2	3	6	Male
2017-2018	5	1	2	7	Female
2018-2019	3	4	2	7	Female
2019-2020	7	1	3	6	Female
2020-2021	4	4	1	5	Male
2021-2022	4	1	2	7	Female

## AAG Journal Editors

AAG prides itself on its flagship journal, *The Annals*, which is considered to be one of the world’s leading geography journals. The information about editors of AAG journals, *Annals* (1911-2025) and *The PG* (1949-2025), was collected from the AAG handbook 2019-2020 and was augmented with the data from journals’ websites to create a comprehensive list through 2025. For *Annals*, eight females (representing only 21% of all the editors) out of 37 editors served as editors, and three as co-editors<sup>8</sup> between 1911 and 2025, in its 110+ years (Figure 30). Before adopting an editor appointment system based on subject area subsections in 2000 for *the Annals*, the editors were predominantly male, with the exception of Susan Hanson (1985–1987), who served as a co-editor (1982-1984). Since then, several women have served as editors or co-editors in various sections: Susan Hanson (1985–1987, People, Place, and Region), Jeanne X. Kasperson (2001-2003, Nature and Society), Audrey Kobayashi (2002–2011, People, Place, and Region), Mei-Po Kwan (2006–2017, Methods, Models, and Geographic Information Sciences), Kendra Strauss (2016–2023, Human Geography), Ling Bian (2018–present, Geographic Methods), Kate Meehan (2019–2023, Nature and Society), Rachel Franklin (2024–present, General Geography/

8 Some of the editors for *Annals* also served as co-editor viz. Susan Hanson (1982-1984) and Kate Meehan. Jeanne X. Kasperson also served as co-editor (2001–2003), Nature and Society but never as editor.

Cross-Discipline), and Michaela Buenemann (2025–present, Physical Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences).

Figure 31 shows editorial data for *The PG*, which has been in publication since 1949. Only three females served as editors, Evelyn L. Pruitt (1958-1959), Sharmistha Bagchi-Sen (2005-2010), and Guo Chen (2024-current), while three females served as co-editors, Phyllis R. Griess (1960-1962), Jeanne Kay (1988-1991) and Janet Franklin (1998-2000). Compared to other top geography journals, however, *Annals* and *PG* have slightly better gender balance, especially in comparison to *GIScience* and physical geography journals (Schurr, Müller, and Imhof 2020; Sultana et al. 2025). Similar to the underrepresentation of women, individuals from non-R1 institutions have limited representation in the editor roles of the AAG journals. To date, most of the AAG journal editors have been appointed from R1 institutions.

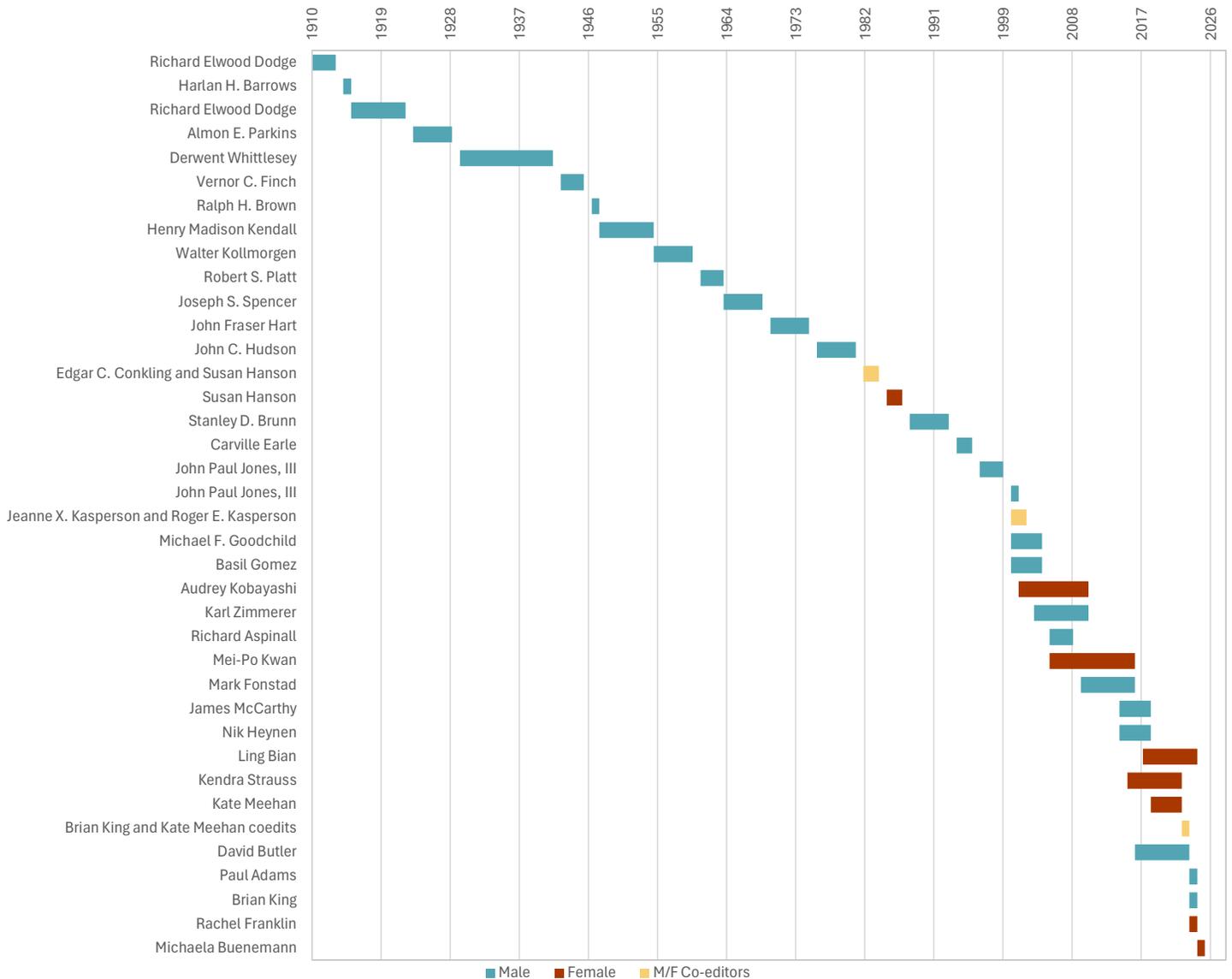


Figure 30. Editorship of the *Annals of the AAG* by Gender (1911-2025). Source: 2019 AAG Handbook; Journal (<https://www.aag.org/publications>)

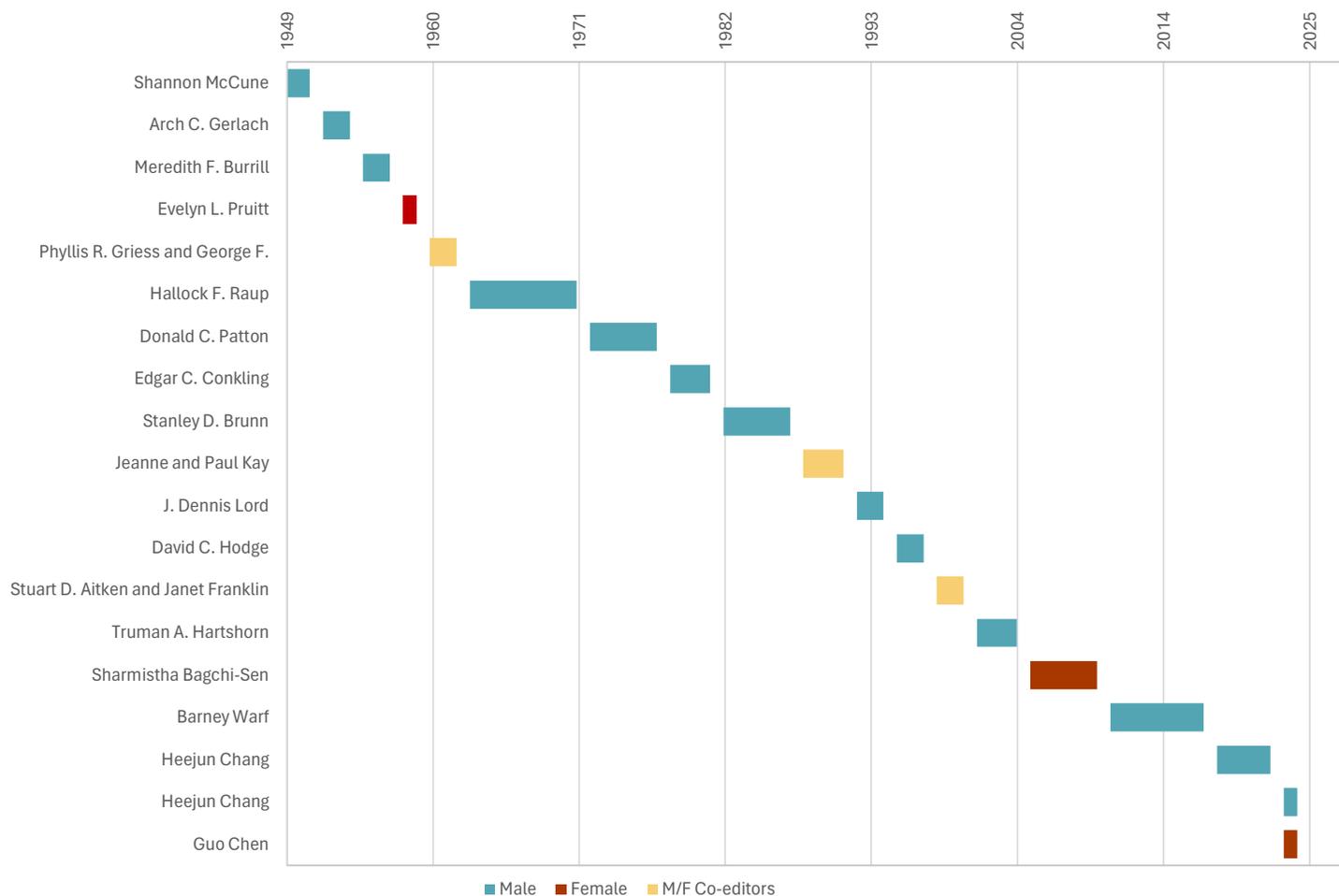


Figure 31. Editorship of *The Professional Geographer* by Gender (1949-2025) Source: 2019 AAG Handbook and Journal Websites: <https://www.aag.org/publications/>

## Summary

Women’s representation in knowledge gatekeeping roles such as editorial positions at AAG’s flagship journals have seen an upward trend over recent decades, particularly when contrasted with STEM-oriented geography journals that predominantly publish quantitatively driven research (e.g. Franklin et al. 2021; Sultana et al. 2025). Likewise, there is a growing trend toward sustained female leadership within the AAG. This increase reflects broader efforts within the discipline to promote diversity and inclusion in leadership and decision-making structures. However, the presence or absence of women and other underrepresented faculty as chairs of key committees—those responsible for recognizing scholarly contributions, granting awards, and nominating future organizational leaders—can have lasting impacts on their advancement and geography as a whole.

## Part IV. Women’s Leadership in the AAG: Perspectives of Women Presidents

In memory of Janice Monk (1937-2024), scholar, mentor, and friend. AAG President (2001-2002)

### Overview

Presidents of the American Association of Geographers (AAG) play crucial roles in the direction and health of the organization and geography as an academic discipline. Throughout its history (1904-2025), the gender imbalance in the AAG presidency is evident in the fact that there have been only 20 women among the 122 presidents of the Association. This section analyzes the career trajectories, presidential initiative and impacts on the AAG, and assessment of the status of women in geography of the 17 surviving women presidents through interviews and analysis of their professional accomplishments.

### Key Findings

- The *trajectory of rising through the ranks* varies, but most women presidents held leadership roles prior to their election to the AAG presidency. In a male-dominated discipline, they faced challenges in their scholarship, work-life balance, and hostile work environments, and sought allies and mentors for support. Some took an alternative career path.
- The most significant *contributions and initiatives* taken by these women AAG Presidents include those that directly benefited women and underrepresented geographers, advancing geography as a scientific field with internationalization, while making geography a socially just field.
- Their *assessment of the status of women in geography and future directions* for improvement include addressing the lack of women leadership in the field, various scholarship and directions of the field, the issue of care / social reproduction, differential challenges faced by women geographers and the need for mentoring and policies to combat harassment.

### Women Leading a Male-dominated Discipline

The literature consistently points out that geography remains a predominantly male discipline with a lower percentage of women ‘gatekeepers’ in journal editors and editorial boards (Franklin et al. 2021; Kaplan and Mapes 2016; Schurr et al. 2020; Sultana et al. 2025). The same is true for the leadership of the AAG. AAG Presidents, elected by the entire membership, wield considerable influence by shaping, highlighting, or ignoring particular aspects of the discipline. The gender imbalance of the AAG presidency has been severe, however, as male presidents overwhelmingly outnumber women presidents. From 1904 (when AAG was established) to 2025, there have been only 20 women presidents. Although Ellen Churchill Semple was an early trailblazer, serving from 1921-22, more than six decades before the AAG membership elected its second woman president, Risa Palm, in 1984, with three more women serving during the 1990s (Susan Hanson, Judy Olson, and Patricia Gober). In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, however, 15 out of the 25 recent AAG presidents were women, including four women of color: Kavita Pandit, Audrey Kobayashi, Emily Yeh, and Marilyn Raphael, the first and so far only Black woman AAG president; and five foreign-born women: Janice Monk, Victoria Lawson, Kavita Pandit, Audrey Kobayashi, and Marilyn Raphael (Table 8). They rose through the ranks to hold the highest elected position at AAG and serve as role models for women and younger generation geographers. Thus far, three of them have been elected to the National Academy of Sciences: Hanson (elected 2000), Cutter (2024) and Raphael (2025); and seven have been awarded AAG’s Lifetime Achievement Honors, Janice Monk (2000), Susan Hanson (2003), Audrey Kobayashi

(2009), Susan Cutter (2011), Carol Harden (2021), Rickie Sanders and Victoria Lawson (2025).<sup>9</sup> Their impacts on the AAG and geography as a whole are important for the organization and its collective history and future directions.

Table 8. AAG Women Presidents and Leadership Positions

Year as President	Name	Unit/college/ /university-level leader*	Member of AAG Council	AAG journal editor**
1921-22	Ellen Semple	No data but a founding member of AAG		
1984-85	Risa Palm	2	1	
1990-91	Susan Hanson	1		1
1995-96	Judy Olson	1	1	
1997-98	Patricia Gober	1	1	1
2000-01	Susan Cutter	2	1	
2001-02	Janice Monk	1	1	
2004-05	Victoria Lawson	1	1	
2006-07	Kavita Pandit	1	1	
2009-10	Carol Harden	1	1	
2011-12	Audrey Kobayashi		1	1
2013-14	Julie Winkler		1	
2014-15	Mona Domosh	1	1	
2015-16	Sarah Bednarz		1	
2018-19	Sheryl Luzzadder-Beach	3	1	
2020-21	Amy Lobben	1		
2021-22	Emily Yeh	1		
2022-23	Marilyn Raphael	1	1	
2023-24	Rebecca Lave <sup>10</sup>	1		
2024-25	Patricia Ehrkamp <sup>10</sup>	1		

Compiled from <https://www.aag.org/presidents-of-the-aag/>, individual CVs, and interviews; adopted and updated from Li et al. (2025) Table 1; \*includes any position at the university or college level, or unit-level chair/director/head, \*\* Annals or PG

9 Between 1983 and 1995, there was only one honors award called “AAG HONORS”, with 4 AAG women presidents as recipients: Risa Palm (1983), Judy Olson (1990), Janice Monk (1992), and Susan Hanson (1993). Prior to 1983, there was no woman geographer ever honored by AAG (although some received awards from other national geographic organizations), including the two categories of “Meritorious Contributions” and “Outstanding Achievement” during 1951-1975 ( <https://www.aag.org/award-grant/aag-honors/>)

10 by the time of our interview the last two women presidents had not started their term

In order to learn about the experiences and expertise of AAG's women leaders, we contacted all 17 surviving women AAG presidents with an invitation to interview<sup>11</sup> during the spring of 2023. Nine project team members (including seven SWG project interview subcommittee members and two contributors; six of whom are immigrants and women of color) conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with all 17 of them during spring and summer of 2023, including nine interviews in-person (eight during the 2023 Denver AAG annual meeting and one at home) and the rest remotely via zoom. Each lasted 45 minutes to 1.5 hours. All interviews were recorded and transcribed with permission using [Otter.ai](#), then reviewed by interviewers and interviewees for accuracy. In 16 interviews, a pair of team members participated, with one as the lead interviewer and another as backup.

Nine interview questions were grouped into four categories; 1) education and career trajectory, 2) initiatives while AAG president, 3) assessment of the status of women in geography (past and present) and 4) future directions for improvement (Appendix D). In some cases, follow-up questions were asked to obtain more insight or clarity. Below we summarize some common themes that emerged from the interviews. Analysis and coding were conducted both manually and via Nvivo 14 based on these main themes.

## **Trajectory of Rising through the Ranks**

All women presidents were full professors when elected by the membership to AAG presidency. They came through the ranks, took on service duties and leadership roles in their institutions before rising to leadership within AAG, but faced difficult challenges and implemented various strategies to overcome them.

## **Surviving in a Male-dominated Discipline**

Some interviewees were the only woman graduate student, then faculty member in their department for years, or served as the first woman chair of the department. Such prolonged isolation, lacking peers or role models and sometimes lacking support in their departments, created additional hurdles for navigating through the ranks or performing chair duties. Some of them actively sought peer support and allies beyond their own departments and institutions while building relationships with other women geographers within and beyond the U.S. During their tenure as department chair, a few women actively recruited early career women geographers to change the demography of their departments. The mentorship of these women presidents is impressive, resulting in one PhD student of an early woman president becoming AAG president herself.

## **Challenges in Scholarship**

Early on, particular types of scholarship such as gender analysis and community-based work, were not recognized and valued. In some cases, such scholarship was denounced as inappropriate or unvalued for tenure-track positions (one of the presidents had to have five consecutive one-year appointments as a result), and was used against them during the tenure review or promotion process (one never obtained tenured position after her feminist scholarship was not recognized as worthy of tenure). The interviewees proactively fought for their rights and/or sought allies for support. Moreover, geographers who conduct field-based work faced varied challenges including competing for limited research funds while impacted by scholarship bias.

## **Alternative Career Trajectory**

At least two interviewees (both are foreign-born but native English speakers) did not have their faculty line in geography at different stages of their career. Both had their faculty appointment in Women's Studies, and one chaired a regional consortium. Others had joint appointments. Such alternative career paths not only broad-

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<sup>11</sup> Approval granted by The University of Southern Florida Institutional Review Board, STUDY005598

ened job prospects, but the immersion with scholars from interdisciplinary fields strengthened their capabilities for collaboration and leadership potential.

## **Work-life Balance**

Several women presidents were faculty members when there was no maternity leave or other support for new mothers or parents. They consequently had to be productive at work while caring for their child/ren. One had to bring her newly born baby to the office. Additionally, the lack of partner hiring policies made it difficult for the career development of dual-career couples, especially when they were both in the same sub-discipline. In a number of cases, one became a trailing spouse in order to support the other's career, a role that is often fulfilled by women. This echoes the challenges identified in Part II.

## **Hostile Work Environment**

A few decades ago, some interviewees worked in environments with expectations of traditional gender roles, or faced sexist comments such as questioning why women needed a Ph.D. degree. Some were perceived as staff members and told by male colleagues to perform duties that were normally assigned to staff. Others experienced hostile work environments, even harassment after assuming leadership roles. When one woman president had to present an AAG award to a male geographer who had denied her tenure early during her career, he said to her *'you've done nicely in your career. I hope we can be good colleagues.'* Another one got a comment from her male colleague that she was elected as AAG president only because she is a woman. Such facts illustrate that even well-established women leaders are not immune to hostile language and/or behaviors. Further work is needed to see if there are differences between the types of harassment faced, and the reasons underneath such behaviors against women geographers by rank.

## **Leadership Roles Prior to AAG Presidency**

All interviewees took various leadership positions prior to their AAG presidency, either serving as unit/college/university-level leaders, as AAG national or regional councilor, or journal editor (Table 8). Susan Cutter started the newsletter of the committee on the Status of Women in Geography in 1979 at Rutgers where there were three women geographers. All but two served as department chair prior or in-conjunction with their AAG presidency. At least three led an AAG regional division. The majority of these women served as AAG National Councilors, and three were AAG journal editors (*Annals* or *PG*) before assuming the AAG presidency.

## **Significant Contributions and Initiatives as AAG President**

Most AAG presidents pursue initiatives that are personally meaningful, closely connected to their experiences and expertise, and significant both to them and to the discipline (Appendix E). We asked the past-presidents about their proudest achievement as AAG President, or their 'signature project'. Their answers reveal many of their priorities and areas of research. Risa Palm promoted diversity, especially for people of color, in geography before the subject matter became popular. Marilyn Raphael made EDIB (equity, diversity, inclusion and belonging) and worked toward a just geography as her central platform. Two immigrant presidents worked on internationalization of geography: Janice Monk, with other women geographers in different parts of the world, led the "Commission on Gender and Geography" of the International Geographical Union, which has since named both of their research and mentoring programs after her. Kavita Pandit's presidential initiative was the internationalization of geography discipline.

Audrey Kobayashi, a leading scholar and practitioner of anti-racism research and practice initiated the 'AAG Harold M. Rose Award for Anti-Racism Research and Practice' during her presidency, along with a number of

other anti-racism initiatives. Sheryl Luzzadder-Beach, a physical geographer by training and practice, has been at the forefront of human rights issues, which became her presidential initiative. She remains the AAG's liaison with the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) Science and Human Rights Coalition. Sarah Bednarz initiated the AAG Fellows program, which created an advisory body of recognized scholars. Emily Yeh provided crucial leadership for AAG's Climate Task Force. Amy Lobben, with a developmentally-disabled family member, established and led AAG's disability task force and played a crucial role in bringing this aspect to the front and center for AAG. Several others, Carol Harden, Julie Winkler, Patricia Gober, Risa Palm, Sheryl Luzzadder-Beach and Susan Cutter, worked to strengthen the roles of geography in academia within NSF and in the public policy realm.

The initiatives taken by other women AAG presidents strengthened AAG as a leading organization of geography in ways that would benefit women geographers. For example, the Healthy Departments Initiative, initiated by Victoria Lawson, addresses dysfunctionality and the failure of departmental leadership. In her presidential address, Lawson framed the issue of care in the context of criticizing neo-liberalization, providing a critical angle that continues as a talking point for demanding better childcare for women faculty, among other needs. During the mid-2010s, three consecutive AAG women presidents, Julie Winkler, Mona Domosh, and Sarah Bednarz, advocated for childcare during AAG annual meetings, which materialized in 2016. This initiative benefited many geographers with young children.

## Assessing the Current and Future Status of Women in Geography

Geography, and academia as a whole, has made significant progress in recent decades to support women and underrepresented groups. This progress includes an increase of women in leadership positions and recognition of scholarship in feminist, Black studies, and queer theory, as well as more equitable policies, such as parental leave, flex time, and spousal hiring. These advances, however, have not brought about gender and racial parity in the discipline of geography. The women AAG presidents pointed out the following issues and corresponding suggestions for improvement:

### Persistent Lack of Women in Leadership Roles

Despite notable progress, the continued underrepresentation of women in leadership roles such as key editorial and departmental chair positions remains a critical issue. *Annals* (1911–2025) and *The PG* (1949–2025), the two flagship journals of the AAG, have each had only nine and five women (co-)editors, respectively (Sultana et al. 2025). Part III of this report illustrates the gender imbalance of knowledge gatekeepers in these journals.

Interviewees emphasized that the one-year term of AAG presidents limits their ability to initiate and sustain major initiatives, whereas journal editorships—being longer-term positions—offer sustained influence over scholarship and publication directions as academic gatekeepers. One participant suggested the importance of “*build[ing] capacity so that women feel comfortable applying for and taking on active, intellectual roles, not just being a member of council ... being an editor of the Annals of the AAG would be very important*” (#7). Another interviewee stressed the need to “*grooming for the expectation of leadership ... at the departmental, dean, provost, and presidential levels of universities*” (#10).

Additionally, participants highlighted the importance of cultivating “*leadership that really welcomes and supports all voices and is brave enough to deal with the dynamics that resist change... it's not only about who occupies that chair, but how they lead and confront structural issues of power*” (#11).

Providing women geographers with opportunities to assume leadership roles at the departmental level is essential, as serving as department chair often serves as a stepping stone to higher positions within academic institutions. Being excluded from these roles—or being overlooked despite significant contributions—limits professional advancement. The AAG's annual department leadership training is an important step toward addressing

this issue. Expanding this program to the regional level, tailoring it for geographers at non-R1 institutions, and engaging more emerging and aspirational leaders could further strengthen women's leadership pipelines in the discipline.

## Scholarship and Direction of the Field

Related to the previous issue, what kind of scholarship is being valued is important to the direction of the field. For instance, some feel feminist and humanistic work within geography are still not fully appreciated, or the work is not yet intersectional. As #11 noted *“the leadership of the AAG has not fully taken on deep historical and structural racism and sexism that is in the discipline. And for women to have a different experience and have a different status, we have to take on these questions around race and racism and whiteness, and I don't think we've done it adequately”*. In the meantime, many physical geographers do not consider their work as being valued inside geography, instead seeking publication outside the discipline, and women are still underrepresented in science fields. These issues remain challenges without any easy solutions.

## Issues of Care and Social Reproduction

Despite societal progress, changing gender roles, and policy advances, the heavy duties of caregiving continue to disproportionately fall on women's shoulders. Geographers are no exception (Dixon et al. 2026; Naylor 2025). The SWG survey revealed that women still disproportionately face heavy caregiving duties. This issue was mentioned by multiple interviewees, some ranking it as the top challenge women geographers are facing, particularly as the timing of childbearing and tenure clocks often conflict. They also mentioned pay inequity and tenure and promotion. These issues are still unresolved and require attention at all levels, from the department to the association level.

## Differential Challenges Faced by Women Geographers

The interviewees clearly note that not all women geographers face the same challenges to the same degree, and pointed out the importance of mentoring, ally-ship, and protection. According to several of these women presidents (#1, 5, 8, and 16), *“we have to really think intersectionally, all the different ways that women and different types of women (nonwhite) deal with issues about child care [and] have demands from student”, “foreign-born faculty members who have different cultural issues” and “I was struck when I saw how excited the Black students were to have a Black woman as president. It drove the point home to me how important it was for people to see themselves represented in leadership roles”*

Their solutions include *“more professional development and mentoring of women [as they] have a few more obstacles in their career trajectory than a male counterpart would have”* and the importance of *“mentoring and having good mentors, good role models. It becomes less institutionalized and more human in its perspective”* (#10). Also, there is the need for *“personal support, certainly unofficial mentoring, where we all play a part in supporting one another; we can all just try to be good citizens and uphold the values that we want to promote”* (#8) in order to *“protect[ing], putting in place institutionally and organizationally, supports that women need in order to do their job as freely as men do”* (#2).

## Combating Harassment

Harassment at one's workplace or AAG annual meetings remains a serious issue. In responding to the survey findings, our interviewees talked about consequences for sexual harassment during AAG meetings and other AAG activities (#12) and the need to *“continue to hold the line on violent and bullying behavior”* (#16). One suggested solution is to *“do a real serious climate survey in your department to find out how people actually are feeling supported, feeling hostile happening, [a] hostile thing to me is very alarming”* (#6).

## Summary

Our interviews of the 17 AAG women presidents revealed challenges in career trajectories, key initiatives as AAG presidents, and their assessments of the field and future directions. These insights are likely to positively impact the field of geography, benefiting women while advancing scholarship in the discipline. Li et al. (2025) explore these interviews in more detail. Part V discusses recommendations from these women presidents, along with other aspects of this research, and includes resources to support scholars and the discipline at all levels.

# Part V. Summary, Recommendations, and Resources

## Summary of Report

This report demonstrates that while we have made progress toward gender parity in awarding PhD degrees and hiring assistant professors, substantial disparity persists at the full professor level. Factors contributing to this lack of parity include both personal and professional factors, such as department climate, work-life balance, and criteria used for tenure and promotion evaluations. The percentage of female full professors in geography departments is 25% (Mossa et al., 2026), which is lower than the national average of 29% at doctoral institutions and 32% at all institutions reported by AAUP (2020). We also found evidence of progress in gender parity in department chairship, AAG presidents, and editorship of AAG's flagship journals. However, there is still room for improvement in key AAG committee compositions and leadership, which influence AAG governance as well as the broader impacts of knowledge gatekeeping.

Interviews with recent AAG women presidents reveal that the challenges identified in our survey are not unique; many of these presidents often had similar experiences. By sharing their experiences, this report aims to convey to women and minority faculty not to be discouraged, but to seek advancement through the academic ladder ranks. Geography departments can benefit from AAG's proactive involvement in promoting the well-being of the department and fostering an environment that encourages inclusive and creative policies and elevates underrepresented voices.

In addition, more graduate students at R2 institutions considered leaving the program than those at R1 institutions. The AAG's Healthy Departments Initiative and Enhancing Departments and Graduate Education in Geography (EDGE) can play a crucial role. This, in the long run, will ensure that R2 and other institutions play a critical role in AAG leadership and knowledge gatekeeping.

Both faculty and students indicated that department chairs have the power to create a departmental climate that is positive or negative. Therefore, there is a need to empower department chairs so they can foster a positive and supportive climate. While efforts should be put forward at department-level and at the AAG to disband exclusionary 'old-boys club' dynamics, we encourage everyone to be cautious about forming a similarly exclusive 'girls club' that mirrors those patterns. Rather, we should work to create an inclusive space that counters underlying assumptions of 'presumed incompetence' of women and minority faculty (Muhs et al. 2012, Niemann et al. 2020). We need to develop an inclusivity plan at the department and AAG in which the experiences of marginalized members (faculty and students) are included, and not rely on a framework where only privileged members' (including white women's) concerns are addressed. A systematic and routine survey could help, but it needs to be conducted at the AAG level (in addition to the department level), and the aggregated data shared back with the department to protect respondents' anonymity.

Based on the SWG project findings from historical analysis, national survey, gatekeeping analysis and summary of AAG women president interviews, we provide the following four sets of recommendations as well as a list of resources to advance the status of women and underrepresented groups in geography, as well as academia as a

whole: 1. department culture, 2. graduate student support, 3. faculty resources and 4. AAG initiatives. The list of resources is organized thematically to benefit readers. Furthermore, we hope that these resources will assist in addressing the issues identified in the report.

## Recommendations

### Department Culture

Develop and share department/program-level best practices on anti-harassment, and promote a sense of belonging and a welcoming environment. Ensure open and transparent leadership so that all individuals have a voice within the unit and beyond. Create a mechanism to address concerns from various groups of people with different needs. Department chairs should implement policies and practices that ensure the work-life balance and well-being of faculty and students, as well as their familial responsibilities, which are often perceived as women's responsibilities, while guarding against penalties during the evaluation process. Studies have shown that gender-neutral parental leave, while appearing family-friendly on the surface, can have a negative impact on women, as T&P evaluations may not effectively account for the stopped clock effect when calculating the publication rate for six versus seven years (Antecol, Bedard, and Stearns et al. 2018). Educating faculty about these issues and policies, particularly when a department chair constitutes an evaluation committee, can be beneficial, and formal documentation in T&P guidelines can help ensure equitable treatment of these cases.

Additionally, women and minority faculty disproportionately experience bias in student evaluations of teaching (SETs) when compared to their male colleagues, which can have negative consequences toward advancement (Dixon et al. 2026), therefore departments should develop policies and procedures to solicit feedback from students without penalizing faculty as explicit bias and structural discrimination are major obstacles in the advancement of women and minority faculty (Berhe et al. 2022; Settles, Buchanan, and Dotson 2019). Further, studies have shown female associate professors are overrepresented in chairship (Domingo et al. 2020; Mossa et al. 2026). This may impact their ability to move through the academic ladder to become full professors. The department should provide support to associate professors moving to higher ranks. While full professorship is often awarded based on scholarship, associate professors should not be over-burdened by service, including chairship, as this may impact the time they can devote to their scholarship. Departments should establish a robust mentoring and support program to ensure that associate professors, particularly women and minority faculty, are successfully advancing through academia.

For graduate students, the department should develop a comprehensive program that combines professional and personal development. Examples of professional programs include academic and non-academic job search, grant writing series, time management, project management, publication strategies, public speaking, conflict management, effective communication, and cultural competency education, whereas examples of personal programs include stress and time management, financial management, fitness and wellness, and cultivation of a hobby (Nguyen and Yao 2023). Further, departments that wish to attract and retain nontraditional female and minority graduate students or students with already full lives with competing demands beyond academia need to create action plans and policies that support these students, including self-measurements of the efficacy of programs and identifying and eliminating policies that create barriers (Nguyen and Yao 2023). Finally, departments should strive to create a sense of community for these students.

### Graduate Student Support

The AAG EDGE initiative, the Advancing Geography Through Diversity Program (AGTDP), and other initiatives examine and work to enhance graduate student success through a variety of interventions and support systems. Many of these projects demonstrate that faculty mentors and networking in the field influence their ability to

achieve their goals (Chen and Eaves 2024; Foote 2010; Jordan, Shortridge, and Darden 2022; Solem, Kollasch, and Lee 2013).

Collier and Blanchard (2023) identified factors that contribute to the support or inhibit graduate students' success. Positive factors include a sense of belonging, access and opportunity for career advancement, financial aid including tuition support, and mentorships and professors' interest in the academic success of their students. Negative factors include lack of social capital, suffering from impostor syndrome, microaggressions, and a lack of financial support in the form of assistantships and fellowships. Evans et al. (2018) noted that initiatives that focus on improving the work-life balance and mentor/mentee relationships will help graduate students succeed. Further, the inability to achieve work-life balance can lead to depression and anxiety among students (Sprung and Rogers 2021). Initiatives aimed at helping graduate students succeed can benefit from integrating mental health measures into their evaluation processes, as well as the development of new interventions aiming to foster graduate students' well-being.

Any program promoting graduate student success at the departmental or other levels need to provide an environment where it is easy to achieve work-life balance, especially since many graduate students work outside of their RA/TA positions to make ends meet. While additional funding for students is often an unrealistic goal, recognition that supplemental sources of income are needed, and the time commitment that entails, should be considered when framing expectations for students. To ensure student and advisor interactions are proactive and supportive, institute mechanisms to identify friction points early on that support students and stakeholders with empathy. The graduate coordinator should work with the advisor and committee members for a student who is experiencing distress to build a more coordinated response across traditionally solid teams (for example, the graduate dean and student welfare services).

The discipline and academia as a whole are acutely aware of the need for mentors and role models of diverse backgrounds and identities. While models for mentoring in academia are varied and complex, they generally yield success for junior faculty and graduate students, especially among women and minoritized groups. This could be an expansion to AAG's longstanding initiative of Geography Faculty Development Alliance (GFDA), to incorporate student support and well-being as a goal in its own right. Some self-evaluation of this program's efficacy and redirection, if needed, could support changes that directly benefit students.

## Faculty Support

Faculty face diverse challenges in their career advancement, departmental climate, and ability to juggle demands of both home and work. Some of the challenges, however, are more pronounced among women and minority faculty, including BIPOC faculty and WOC. Therefore, the discipline as a whole needs to create an environment that decreases gender and racial disparities. Vertical segregation of faculty ranks can be addressed by developing a cohesive horizontal network that is supportive. AAG and the department should offer ample opportunities for women and minority faculty to develop a strong network for professional and personal support throughout their academic careers. For smaller departments, regional networking may help fill the gaps. In addition, early career mentoring of faculty is extremely beneficial, especially by someone who has had similar experiences.

In addition, effective T& P evaluations should use tracking systems and a dashboard that reports and analyzes factors used in performance reviews such as the number of publications, grant dollars, impact factors, citations, number of committees served, hours spent on services, and number of students taught. This tracking system includes both qualitative and quantitative evaluation data, with an appropriate level of anonymity that protects individuals while allowing for the identification of patterns in aggregated data by race, gender, or both. The evaluation of service loads should be weighted by the demands of the role, with consideration given to informal service by women and minoritized faculty who are more likely to be burdened with this type of work (Guarino and Borden 2017; Norander and Zenk 2023).

Departments should foster a climate that supports work-life balance while not penalizing delays during the evaluation process. In particular, caregiving responsibilities remain highly gendered. Studies show that gender-neutral parental leave, while appearing family-friendly on the surface, can negatively affect women, as T&P evaluations may not effectively discount the stopped clock when calculating the publication rate for six versus seven years (Antecol, Bedard, and Stearns 2018). Education of faculty about these issues and policies by the department chair and evaluation committee can be useful, and formal documentation in T&P guidelines can serve to provide equitable treatment of these cases.

Acknowledging and providing flexibility in the career advancement of faculty and student progress is also necessary to achieve work-life balance. As universities shift course schedules to accommodate full-time work of students, faculty are often required to offer classes on evenings and weekends. This will impact faculty with young children and single parents the most, irrespective of their gender and race. As a result, faculty will have to carry additional burdens of childcare costs. Childcare often is limited to 8-5 on weekdays, which disadvantages both faculty and students in evening and weekend courses. Faculty should advocate for their own interests. For example, universities should expand childcare availability, and department chairs should offer flexibility in course delivery format, such as virtual synchronous and asynchronous, as well as hybrid methods.

To create an environment where faculty can thrive, institutions need to (1) build infrastructure, (2) secure funding, (3) engage institutional leadership, (4) establish and leverage trusted relationships, and (5) conduct rigorous evaluations (Fettes et al. 2025). A key goal of the AAG Healthy Department Initiative is to promote a strong culture and collegiality, alongside more structural elements, and this could easily be expanded to collaborate with the GFDA (which focuses on individual faculty support) to broaden to the departmental level guidance for mentorship, work-life balance challenges, especially where they impact the tenure clock, and addressing inequitable service loads for marginalized faculty.

## **Role of the AAG**

The gender gap, as well as the plight of marginalized faculty, is no secret. Indeed, Monroe et al. (2014) identified nine strategies that, when fully implemented, can impact equity issues. The fact that they are not fully implemented widely across all academic institutions in the US indicates inertia for change and a lack of political will in some state universities that are rooted in gender and racial stereotypes. Professional organizations like AAG can play a critical role by developing guidelines and a ‘best practices’ model after other professional organizations’ initiatives (when applicable) to share with the membership on how to advance the causes for women and underrepresented groups in the discipline. Expanding existing AAG initiatives such as the JEDI committee and the Healthy Departments Initiative will address the challenges faced by and concerns of traditionally underrepresented groups in geography, including but not limited to first generation students, LGBTQ, BIPOC, and faculty working in non-R1 institutions such as Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), other Minority Serving Institutions, Community and Tribal Colleges.

The AAG can also offer guidance to departments to engage in shared governance to develop policies to promote inclusivity and supportive climate and T&P criteria to aid moving faculty through the ladder ranks. AAG and its Healthy Departments Initiative can also support the development of guidelines and best practices that faculty and department chairs use to promote changes at their universities. The AAG can expand efforts to develop and implement anti-racism and harassment policies that encompass all professional conduct associated with AAG. For example, journal publication is an area that could benefit from clearly defined best practices for both reviewers and authors. The AAG should also provide training and networking opportunities to cultivate future leadership at both the departmental and organizational levels, for both faculty and students, and to institute accountability and transparency in reporting for all AAG committees created under AAG bylaws and ad hoc committees. Developing policies and procedures to promote inclusivity and minimize cronyism in the awards and AAG-fellow selection process are recommended. Also, expanding the presence of women and minority leaders in all committees associated with AAG governance would facilitate meaningful participation in decision-mak-

ing and avoid ‘tokenism’. It is crucial that diverse voices are included at all levels in order to broaden the pool of future AAG presidents in terms of different experiences and expertise beyond R1 institutions. AAG should develop and implement an Advocates & Allies Program (see Anicha et al 2020), where male faculty members are involved in a peer-to-peer professional development program designed to address gender inequities in academia. Some of this could be achieved by systematically collecting stories from women presidents, as well as male advocates and allies, much like an oral history project, to gain insight into the equity challenges and progress women have made in these arenas.

Finally, faculty and students will benefit from the AAG’s collection of anonymized data from geography department chairs on hiring, retention, and T&P. This includes conducting regular surveys to gain insights into the state of the department and the dynamics of interactions. These data will also provide a baseline and aid longitudinal studies. AAG’s Healthy Departments Initiatives should include JEDI principles. Department leaders should undergo professional training and certifications developed by AAG, which can be modeled after [Institute for Academic Leadership](#) (IAL) that serves as a resource for academic chairs and administrators of the Florida State University System. One of the key benefits of such efforts is the opportunity for interaction among chairs. Cultivation of these peer networks can help chair recruitment and retention of diverse faculty and maintain morale in the department.

Chairs should be trained how to include diverse voices in the discussions without overwhelming a few minority faculty with service load, moving away from ‘tokenism’ to actual decision-making tasks. Department chairs are often elected or given a position without prior experience and training that could lead to inadvertent mistakes that impact the success of the program, faculty, and students. AAG’s Healthy Department Initiatives could also collect performance data on chairs and create a rewards program for those who effectively lead their departments, serving as mentors to other chairs. AAG should work with department chairs to usher in changes by extending the longstanding Healthy Departments Initiative and reimagining it to combine with the JEDI Initiative. This report will aid the development of actionable strategies in fostering a more inclusive, equitable and transformative discipline.

## Resources

### Department

- **A list of resources and initiatives for department chairs.** Giving small prizes to engage students, bringing prominent speakers to campus, getting grants through the organization, awards for social media and public communication, mission and goals, getting faculty research in the public eye, and describing how outstanding departments can be recognized. [More Information](#)
- **Healthy Departments Initiative.** Implemented by the AAG Healthy Departments Committee, this initiative helps to provide guidance and support to geography departments/programs nationwide. Its [website](#) lists a number of resources for this purpose.
- **Preventing Harassment and Other Abuses of Power in Your Department.** This is a guide to help department leaders strategize about how they can best prevent and respond to harassment in their departments. The proposed practices can create limits to the use of power in department structures and may reduce some problems that emerge in contexts with asymmetrical relationships. [More Information](#)
- **Stopping Harassment in Your Department: A Resource for Department Chairs.** Explains responsibilities of chairs in stopping harassment in departments, discusses organizational climate, suggests training programs for departments and related resources and strategies to prevent harassment, gives advice on what to do if informed about an incident, provides a variety of links from ASA, National organizations, and other professional organizations. [More Information](#)

## Graduate Students

- **Barriers to success (Sloan Foundation) [Master's Completion Project - CGS](#).** The report titled *Completion and Attrition in STEM Master's Program: Pilot Study Findings (2013)* and *The Role and Status of the Master's Degree in STEM (2010)* highlighted a list of barriers and strategies to overcome them, including a higher success rate for female graduate students in STEM. It also provides information on success and attrition rate, and survey results from graduate students.
- **Creating Inclusive Virtual Spaces.** Virtual places of learning and work bring new challenges to maintain inclusive and safe classrooms and workspaces. Includes links to other websites about creating inclusive classrooms and tips for teaching online. [More Information](#)
- **Cultivating Community, Facilitating Access to Mentors and Financial Support.** Student success and completion rate are impacted by the sense of community among members who had common backgrounds and experiences and shared scholarly pursuits. It also helps access a system of support that is multidimensional, which helps ease cultural shock and isolation. Effective mentoring ensures they are inspired to serve in this capacity and are intentional in their efforts to “pull as they climb”. Financial support promotes empowerment, agency, and opportunity that contributes to the success of graduate students and transforms their lives. [More Information](#)
- **Enhancing Departments and Graduate Education in Geography (EDGE )** An NSF-funded AAG program that prepares geography graduate students for future job prospects. This project produced 8 articles, 3 books, and online resources as of 2023. [More Information](#)
- **Handbook for supporting today's graduate students. 2023.** Eds. David J. Nguyen and Christina W. Yao eds. London and New York: Routledge. Discusses diverse strategies to support graduate students, as studies have estimated that only 40 to 50 percent of students who begin PhD programs complete their degrees. This attrition impacts the pipeline of diverse students who will join the academy.
- **Student resources (AAG).** Covers the benefits of joining as a member, participating in the annual AAG meetings, various types of awards for students, professional development and educational resources. [More Information](#)
- **Thriving Outside Academia.** Students can benefit from alternative pathways other than academia. Mentors and department chairs can point the students to these resources. One such resource includes a playlist of seven videos on YouTube called “[Careers Outside Academia Webinars](#)” produced by the Earth Science Women's Network.

## Faculty

- **Faculty Workload and Rewards** - Gives instructions for a program self-study including what type of information to include to evaluate workload. The document describes the need for workload data tables that are evaluated by race and gender. The goal is to prevent work being shouldered by a few department members. Recommendations regarding how to share workload data that credit differential effort. [More Information](#)
- **GFDA (Geography Faculty Development Alliance) and Department Leadership Workshop (2025)** - GFDA is an AAG sponsored and NSF funded summer workshop series with more than two decades history. It gathers late-stage graduate students and early career faculty to be trained by seasoned geographers and peer mentoring with career development, curriculum and teaching skills, among other important issues for early career geographers. In recent years it is scheduled in conjunction with the department leadership workshop that gathers current and aspirational leaders to strategize and exchange best practices. The link below provides a snapshot of the 2025 workshops: [More Information](#)

- **Thriving in academia: A model of faculty development for successful, diverse, engaged faculty across career stages** by Fettes et al. (2025). This article discusses a comprehensive model of faculty development across the academic career with multiple components: professional development, multifaceted mentorship, institutional commitment and commitment community building.

## Supportive and Collegial Environment

- **An actionable anti-racism plan for geoscience organizations.** Ali et al. (2021) Communications noted that there are six essential constructs for effective antiracism including identity, values, access, inclusion, equity, and justice. This paper lists and describes twenty action steps within these constructs to build a robust anti-racist organization. [More Information](#)
- **Anti-Racism Resources.** Scholarship on the history of the construction of race, racism, and racial identity. Introduces important concepts and points the reader to additional resources. [More Information](#)
- **Building partnership to transform climate.** The AdvanceGEO Partnership enables geoscientists to transform workplace climate. Some of the Workshop Topics include Bystander Intervention, Tackling Implicit Bias and Microaggressions in the Workplace, Developing Effective Codes of Conduct, Implicit Biases: Why we have them and how they impact STEM, and Safety in the Field. Departments and individuals can sign up on their website. [More Information](#)
- **Care as Leadership.** Sustaining and Strengthening Our Programs in a Time of Stress and Change (AAG) - a commentary by former AAG president Ken Foote stresses caring is to strengthen the geography community, while providing resources such as *Thriving in an Academic Career*, *Practicing Geography* and *GFDA*. [More Information](#)
- **Diversity & Inclusion Strategic Plan (AGU).** Identifies five priority goals that broadly address the culture of the Earth and space sciences; the climate of AGU operations for its members; AGU members as agents of change; AGU's leadership role within the larger Earth and space science community; and AGU as a model organization for promoting diversity in science. For each goal, three objectives that relate to resources and/or information, incentives, and accountability have been identified. [More Information](#)
- **Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (AAG)** An AAG standing committee that contributed to the AAG 2023-2025 Strategic plan. It provides various resources and updated information regarding the changing and challenging environment, including but not limited to defending immigrants, JEDI, academic and scientific inquiry, LGBTQ people; federal agency data; digital security, and legal defense and liability insurance. [More Information](#)
- **Mental Health and Well-being in Geography.** Report of the AAG Task Force on Mental Health. Addresses broad issues related to mental health among AAG practitioners, scholars, students, and educators. The report provides information on mental health in academia, promotes advocacy and awareness, and offers guidance to AAG for mental health protocols and ethics. [More Information](#)
- **Microaggressions.** Defines what these are and includes many examples of them for potential learning and discussion, including microinsults (comments or actions that convey rudeness and insensitivity, often unintentional), microinvalidations (comments made to invalidate or undermine someone's experience, thoughts, or feelings related to their identity) and microassaults (most likely deliberate explicit derogations characterized primarily by a verbal or nonverbal attack with intention to hurt through name-calling, exclusion, or purposeful discriminatory actions). Includes links to many publications and videos. [More Information](#)
- **Responding to Hostile Behaviors.** Discusses strategies to address incidents when they happen through bystander intervention as well as resources for changing the culture so that these behaviors do not continue to be tolerated. Lists types of wellness support resources and strategies for direct and indirect interventions. [More Information](#)

- **Responsibility as a Bystander to a Colleague (*Chronicle of Higher Ed*).** Remaining silent in response to dangerous, unethical, or disrespectful behavior makes faculty complicit in allowing bad behavior to continue. The article shares five scenarios for discussion. Potential solutions are to be direct, attempt a distraction, or delegate the concern to someone else. The take-home message is that being a good academic citizen requires that we actively participate in keeping members of our community as safe as possible. [More Information](#)
- **Scientific society defines sexual harassment as scientific misconduct.** The American Geophysical Union places harassment, bullying, and discrimination on par with falsification, fabrication, and plagiarism. Leaders updated society’s ethics code, recognizing that harassment, discrimination, and bullying affect people directly involved and research, institutions, students, faculty, or colleagues surrounding the misconduct. New policy applies not only to the society’s members and staff, but also to nonmembers participating in the society’s activities. [More Information](#)

## Additional Resources and Outputs from the SWG Project

### Journal Publications

- Mossa, J., Dixon, B., Sultana, S., Rock, A., and Kar, B. 2026. Minding the Gender Gap: Working Toward Parity for Women in U.S. Academic Geography. *The Professional Geographer*. 1-19, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00330124.2026.2621345>.
- Dixon, B., Mossa, J., Sultana, S., Oberhauser, A.M., Li, W., Rock, A., and Mukherjee, F. 2026. Barriers to Academic Advancement in Geography: Do Gender, Race, and Ethnicity Matter? *The Professional Geographer*. Accepted.
- Oberhauser, A.M., Dixon, B. and Mossa, J., 2025. Complicating Work–Life Balance in Higher Education: Perspectives from Geography. *The Professional Geographer*, 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00330124.2025.2510968>.
- Oberhauser, A.M., Dixon, B., Mossa, J. and Sultana, S. 2025. Enhancing the Climate in Geography Through Diversity and Inclusion. *The Professional Geographer*, 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00330124.2025.2528720>.
- Oberhauser, A. M., B. Dixon, W. Li, J. Mossa, A. E. Rock, and S. Sultana. (Forthcoming). “In Their Own Voices: The Stories and Status of Women in Geography in the United States.” *The Professional Geographer*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00330124.2026.2633341>.
- Sultana, S., Dixon, B., Li, W. and Mossa, J. 2025. Gender and Knowledge Gatekeepers in Geography. *The Professional Geographer*, 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00330124.2025.2506195>.
- Li, W., Mossa, J., Dixon, B., Oberhauser, A.M., Rock, A.E., Sultana, S. and Mukherjee, F. 2025. Experiences of Women AAG Presidents: Leading Through Diverse Voices. *The Professional Geographer*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00330124.2025.2500588>.

### Conference Presentations

1. Status of Women in Geography Project Overview. Panel. American Association of Geographers Annual Meeting. Denver, Colorado. March 22 - 27, 2023. (Panelists: Ann Oberhauser, Barnali Dixon, Joann Mossa, Selima Sultana and Aila Bandagi Kandlakunta)
2. Closing the Gap: Overcoming Social Inequalities in Geography. Panel. Race Ethnicity and Place Conference, Washington DC. Oct 11 - 14, 2023 (Panelists: Wei Li, Ann Oberhauser, Alyssa Ramirez, and Selima Sultana)

3. Moving the Needle on Gender Equity in Academia: Tracking the Status of Women and Marginalized Groups in Geography. Panel. American Association of Geographers Honolulu, HI. April 16 - 20, 2024. (Panelists: Ann Oberhauser, Barnali Dixon, Wei Li, Joann Mossa, Amy Rock, and Selima Sultana)
4. The Status of Women in Geography: Future Directions for Early Career Faculty and Graduate Students. American Association of Geographers Annual Meeting. March 24 - 28, 2025. Detroit, MI (Panelists: Ann Oberhauser, Barnali Dixon, Joann Mossa, and Selima Sultana)
5. The Stories and Status of Women in Geography, organized paper session, Race Ethnicity and Place Conference, Albuquerque, NM. Nov 5 - 7, 2025.
  - a. Minding the Gender Gap: Working toward parity for women in U.S. academic geography. Joann Mossa, Barnali Dixon, Selima Sultana, Amy Rock\*, Bandana Kar. \* Presenter
  - b. The Balancing Act: Wellbeing and Work-life Conflict among Women in Geography. Ann Oberhauser\*, Barnali Dixon, Joann Mossa, Selima Sultana, Amy Rock, and Wei Li. \* Presenter
  - c. Women's Leadership in the AAG: Perspectives of Women Presidents. Wei Li\*, Joann Mossa, Barnali Dixon, Ann M. Oberhauser, Amy E. Rock, Selima Sultana, and Falguni Mukherjee. \* Presenter
6. SEDAAG Presidential Panel: The Status of Women in Geography. Southeastern Division of American Association of Geographers Annual Meeting. Lexington, KY Nov 23 - 24. (Panelists: Barnali Dixon, Joann Mossa, Selima Sultana\*) \* Moderator
7. Expanding on the Stories and Status of Women and Underrepresented Groups in Geography. American Association of Geographers Annual Meeting. March 17 - 21, 2026. San Francisco, CA (Panelists: Barnali Dixon, Wei Li, Joann Mossa, Amy Rock, and Selima Sultana)

## Part VI. Project Members and Affiliated Universities

The Status of Women in Geography Project was initiated by a SWG committee member and approved by members of SWG, a standing committee of the AAG, in the Fall of 2021. This project was further developed by select members of the SWG committee in collaboration with diverse women scholars and a student representative. This project was made possible by the *Core Team* and *Contributing Members*. Table 9 summarizes contributions of these individuals to various parts of this project.

### **Core Team Members (continued and sustained efforts in all aspects of the project including write up since its inception)**

- [Barnali Dixon](#), University of South Florida
- [Wei Li](#), Arizona State University
- [Joann Mossa](#), University of Florida
- [Ann M. Oberhauser](#), Iowa State University
- [Amy E. Rock](#), Cal Poly Humboldt
- [Selima Sultana](#), University of North Carolina Greensboro

### **Contributing Members (early contribution to specific aspects of the project)**

- [Rina Ghose](#), University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
- [Aila Bandagi Kandlakunta](#), University of Nevada, Reno
- [Bandana Kar](#), National Laboratory of the Rockies
- [Falguni Mukerjee](#), Sam Houston State University
- [Yining Tan](#), University of Arizona

Table 9. Contributions of Core Team Members

Faculty Names for Team Members, unless otherwise noted (Alphabetical Order)	Historical Data Collection and Analysis	Survey Development	Survey Analysis	Presidential Data Collection Analysis	Report Write Up
Barnali Dixon (University of South Florida)*	x	x	x	x	x
Rina Ghose (Univ. of Wisconsin Milwaukee)		x			
Aila Bandagi Kandlakunta (University of Nevada Reno)		x			
Bandana Kar (US Department of Energy)	x			x	
Joann Mossa (University of Florida)*	x	x	x	x	x
Wei Li (Arizona State University) *	x	x	x	x	x
Falguni Mukherjee (Sam Houston State)			x	x	
Ann M. Oberhauser (Iowa State University)*	x	x	x	x	x
Amy E. Rock (Cal Poly Humboldt)*	x	x	x	x	x
Selima Sultana (University of North Carolina Greensboro)*	x	x	x	x	x
Yining Tan (University of Arizona)				x	

\*Core team members

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Theresa Burress of USF conducted library research for the historical data, Bimita Thapa and Kora Klinger were instrumental in collecting and processing the institutional data. Aila Bandagi Kandlakunta helped develop the graduate student survey and research assistant Alyssa Ramirez was involved in analyzing qualitative data. Michael Licea assisted with finalizing figures and proof reading. Jill Trepanier, SWG com-

mittee chair (2021-2023), supported the inception of the project. Nancy Obermeyer and LaToya Eaves were helpful during the initial phase of the project. Finally, the AAG team, Mikelle Benfield and Mark Revell, assisted with survey distribution, the late Candida Mannozi provided historical data from 2007-2022, Elin Thorlund provided relevant information on the committee, including AAG rules, and Becky Pendergast assisted with formatting the report. Any potential errors or oversights are entirely ours.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A. Summary of Data Used in the Analysis

Table 10. Summary of Data Used in the Project

Data Type	Data Source	Method of Collection
Historical: Departmental data on faculty composition in PhD granting programs (number of faculty by gender and rank)	AAG Guidebook 1969, 1989, 2005, 2011 and 2019	PhD programs in Geography. Photos, news accounts, and varied sources identified gender of faculty
Historical: Department leadership (Gender identity of Chairs)	AAG Guidebook 1969, 1989, 2005, 2011 and 2019	PhD programs in Geography. Photos, news accounts, and varied sources identified gender of faculty
Current: Community Colleges with Geography Programs	AAG current institutional data	AAG list of community colleges with Geography Programs (not included in this report; see Mossa et al. 2026, <i>The Professional Geographer</i> , for more information)
Faculty and Graduate student experiences, status, and concerns via survey	Open and closed-ended survey responses from faculty and graduate students	Online survey via SurveyMonkey using AAG listserv of US academic members. Coding and graphing in spreadsheets, analysis of open-ended questions with NVivo14
Historical: AAG committee leadership (Elected, Standing, Awards, Ad Hoc, Task-forces) <u>Governance - AAG</u>	AAG historical and current institutional data 2007 - 2022; participant observation	AAG data and additional web search, Delphi survey; participant observation
Historical: Journal editorship of AAG journals: Historical and contemporary data	AAG Guide 2019 for historical data and Journal websites since 2019-2025	Compiling Data from the AAG Guide and Website and front page of journal issue searches for the respective journals
AAG Leadership (Women Presidents up to Spring of 2023)	Interview transcripts, CVs, websites, and publications	Interviews (in-person and virtual) with women presidents by SWG team using Otter.AI. Manual and NVivo14 coding and analysis

## Appendix B. Graduate Student and Faculty Survey

[Link to the Survey:](#)

## Appendix C. Academic and Professional Status of Survey Respondents

Responding Groups	Number
<b>Academic Positions</b>	
Faculty	536
Graduate Students	277
Post Doctoral Researchers	49
<b>Total surveyed</b>	<b>862</b>
<b>Non-Academic Positions</b>	
Government agency	24
Independent Research Institute	7
Industry	18
NGOs	7
Others	79
Undergraduate Students	43
<b>Total not included in analysis</b>	<b>178</b>
Blank responses	9
<b>Total Returns</b>	<b>1049</b>

## Appendix D. AAG Women Presidents Interview Guide

1. You were the AAG president in (year). Can you briefly recount your own challenges coming through ranks and strategies you used to overcome them?
2. Prior to serving as the AAG president, had you served other AAG leadership roles (e.g. national or regional councilor, or AAG committee chair?)
3. What was your proudest achievement as the AAG president? What were your (other) initiatives as the AAG president back then, and do you think they were effective?
4. Can you please reflect on the status of women in AAG and the field of Geography in general when you were the AAG president? What do you consider as the main challenges back then and do you feel any of them have been addressed to any degree since?
5. The SWG project team collected some institutional data overtime and found out
  - Women full professor increased from 8 in 1989 to 139 in 2019
  - women department chair/head in PhD granting institutions increased from 8% to 27% in the same years,
  - but *Annals* (1911-2019) and *PG* (1949-2019) only had 3 and 4 each as co/editors.

What do you think of today's status of women in AAG and the field of Geography?

6. As you may be aware that the SWG project team recently conducted a survey on women geographers in US academia, circulated by AAG. Some of the key findings [based on preliminary analysis of 862 respondents] include
  - >1/3 (34.2%) faculty respondents stated they faced hostile behavior at least once in recent 12 month; and 35% and 50% grad students experienced or witnessed hostile behavior in the same time period;
  - >50% women Assistant prof, and >30% women associate and full prof have heavy childcare duties (>40 hr/wk)

Are you surprised by such findings? How do you think to improve such a situation?

7. Based on your reflections, the institutional data, and the preliminary survey result assessment, what do you consider are the three most urgent issues for women geographers?
8. What strategies do you think AAG or individual departments/programs should adopt to address these issues in order to improve the status of women in the field?
9. Are there any other thoughts or suggestions that you have to improve this project?

## Appendix E. Important Initiatives of AAG Women Presidents

(Adapted from Li et al. (2025))

Name	Year of Presidency	AAG Presidential Initiatives
Risa Palm	1984-1985	Advocate for Geography to be placed in a more appropriate directorate within NSF
Susan E. Hanson	1990-1991	Develop curriculum initiative with an emphasis on active learning for large courses funded by NSF
Judy Olson	1995-1996	Expand diversity and work to provide childcare
Patricia Gober	1997-1998	Promote synthesizing the natural, social sciences, and humanities
Susan Cutter	2000-2001	Work to bring Geography back to Harvard and other Ivy League schools
Janice Monk	2001-2002	Promote women in geography; AAG participation at IGU Commission on Gender and Geography
Victoria Lawson	2004-2005	Develop Healthy Department Initiatives to address internal dysfunctional dynamics
		Promote feminist care ethics and understand the neoliberalization of care through this lens
Kavita K. Pandit	2006-2007	Internationalize the discipline of Geography
Carol Harden	2009-2010	Promote Physical Geography
Audrey L. Kobayashi	2011-2012	Establish anti-racism initiatives and the Harold M. Rose Award for Anti-Racism Research and Practice
Julie A. Winkler	2013-2014	Promote Physical Geography through special physical geography day
Mona Domosh	2014-2015	Subsidize child care at AAG meetings
Sarah Bednarz	2015-2016	Develop the AAG Fellows Program
Sheryl Luzzadder-Beach	2018-2019	Establish AAG representation to the Council of the AAAS Science and Human Rights Coalition
		Promote inclusivity in terms of broadness of the field, including more physical geography
Amy Lobben	2020-2021	Establish disability task force to promote accessibility
Emily Yeh	2021-2022	Support greater visibility to the existing Climate Action Task Force
		Implement committee to re-write the AAG Code of Ethics
Marilyn Raphael	2022-2023	Develop Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging (EDIB) to promote voices of BIPOC and non-binary communities, including early career voices