

Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in the Economics Profession

The Committee on the Status of Women in the Economics Profession (CSWEP) has been charged by the American Economic Association with monitoring the position of women in the profession and undertaking activities to improve it. This Report examines the advancement of women economists in academia, compares this progress with what might be expected, and describes the Committee's activities during the past year.

Are Women Economists as Likely as Men to be Hired and Promoted?

The proportion of assistant professors who are women has been rising as one would expect based on the growing proportion of Ph.D.s in economics awarded to women, but their progress into the ranks of associate and full professor appears to be lagging somewhat. This conclusion is based primarily on data about graduate economics departments (defined as those that award Ph.D.s) that responded to the AEA's Universal Academic Questionnaire (UAQ) between 1974 and 1989.¹

Two parallel analyses of full-time faculty were conducted for this Report: One used data from 150 graduate economics departments that responded to the questionnaire in any year, while the other examined the 43 departments that responded in almost every year.² Because of the similarity in results, only the analysis for the larger sample of departments is reported here.

The proportion of assistant professors and of associate professors who were women approximately tripled between 1974 and 1989—rising from 8 to 20 percent and from

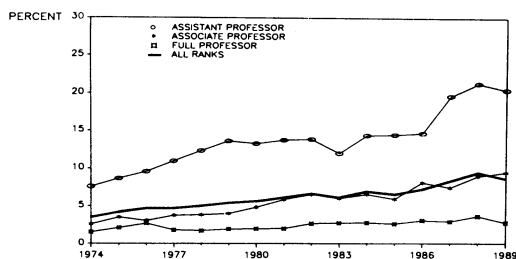


FIGURE 1. PROPORTION OF FACULTY IN GRADUATE DEPARTMENTS WHO ARE WOMEN BY RANK, 1974-89

3 to 9 percent, respectively (see Figure 1).³ In contrast, the proportion of full professors who were women grew from about 2 percent in the late 1970's to about 3 percent in the late 1980's. Because about one-half of all tenure-track and tenured economics faculty at departments in the sample were full professors, the proportion of all faculty who were women was about 9 percent in 1989. This represented a doubling of the proportion from 1970's.

Differences in the employment of women faculty by different types of institutions have not been dramatic. Women assistant professors of economics were somewhat more likely to be employed by public institutions in the 1980's than men, while there was little difference between public and private institutions for associate or full professors (see Figure 2). When departments are ranked by the scholarly quality of their faculty, it appears that women assistant professors might have been employed by lower-quality schools relatively more often than men during the 1980's; whereas, there was

¹The Committee thanks Eric Guille, Jodi Korb, Charles Scott, Arantza Ugidos, Jackie Vander Brug, and Bruce Vavrichek for their contributions to this Report.

²In both cases, departments of agricultural economics were excluded. The 43 departments are those that did not respond in at most two consecutive years.

³In this analysis, the proportion who are women is always of the comparable group of faculty—in this case, it is the percent of faculty with the same rank who are women. (The source for all figures herein is the UAQ.)

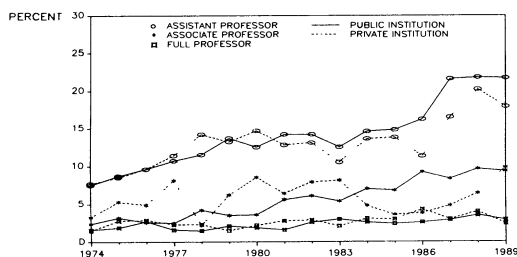


FIGURE 2. PROPORTION OF FACULTY IN GRADUATE DEPARTMENTS WHO ARE WOMEN BY RANK AND TYPE OF INSTITUTION, 1974-89

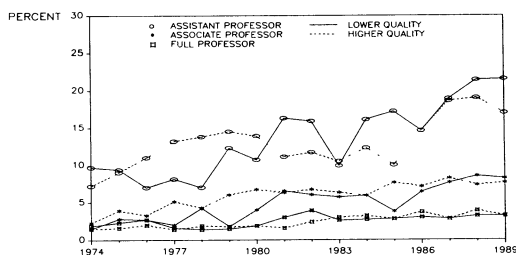


FIGURE 3. PROPORTION OF FACULTY IN GRADUATE DEPARTMENTS WHO ARE WOMEN BY RANK AND QUALITY OF DEPARTMENT, 1974-89

little difference for associate or full professors, as shown in Figure 3.⁴

How does the progress of women through the academic ranks compare with what would be expected if hiring and promotion decisions were unaffected by gender? Figure 4 shows that the proportion of newly hired assistant professors who were women has risen as expected—it resembled the proportion of new recipients of Ph.D.s in economics who were women, at least until late in the 1980's.⁵

⁴The scholarly quality of economics departments was based on data for 93 graduate economics departments reported in National Research Council, *An Assessment of Research-Doctorate Programs in the United States: Social and Behavioral Sciences* (Washington: National Academy Press, 1982). The data examined here included 88 of those departments; the remaining 62 departments (of the 150 on which this report is based) that were not included in the NRC's study were excluded from the calculations for Figure 3.

⁵Data on newly awarded Ph.D.s in economics are reported in National Science Foundation, *Science and*

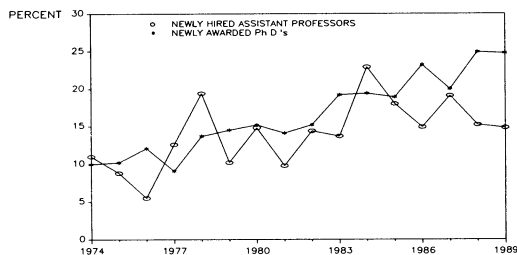


FIGURE 4. PROPORTION OF NEWLY HIRED ASSISTANT PROFESSORS IN GRADUATE DEPARTMENTS, AND PROPORTION OF NEWLY AWARDED PH.D.'S IN ECONOMICS WHO ARE WOMEN, 1974-89

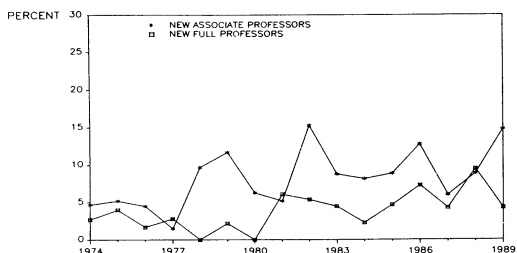


FIGURE 5. PROPORTION OF NEW ASSOCIATE AND FULL PROFESSORS IN GRADUATE DEPARTMENTS WHO ARE WOMEN, 1974-89

The proportion of newly hired or newly promoted associate (and full) professors who were women has also been rising, as shown in Figure 5, but assessing this growth is more difficult because, a priori, it is not clear what the standard of comparison should be. To deal with this problem, actual data were compared with the results of a simple model that simulates the promotion process in academia. The assumptions underlying the model were determined by data about the flow of faculty into each rank (i.e., newly hired individuals and those promoted from the lower rank), and about the flow

Engineering Doctorates: 1960-1989. They are based on all graduate departments on the United States. In Figure 4, data on newly awarded Ph.D.s are for U.S. citizens and noncitizens who are permanent residents. Temporary residents are excluded.

out of each rank (i.e., faculty who left the department and those who were promoted into the next rank).⁶ In particular, the model assumes that, on average, full professors remain in a department for 20 years; that promotion to full professor is decided, on average, 7 years after promotion to associate professor; that promotion to associate professor is decided, on average, 5 years after being hired as an assistant professor; and that women are hired as assistant professors in the same proportion as they receive newly awarded Ph.D.s in economics.⁷ In addition, the model assumes that the distribution of talent and motivation is the same for female economists as for male economists and, hence, that the probability of an individual being promoted is not related to gender.

Figure 6 compares the implications of the model with what actually happened. The proportion of assistant professors who were women increased as the model projects over the 1974–89 period, with the actual proportion exceeding the projected one in the first half of the period and falling below for much of the second half. In contrast, the actual proportions of associate professors and full professors who were women have been below the levels projected by the model in most years and consistently below since 1982.

⁶For each year, the percentage of faculty in each of these categories was averaged over the departments that responded in that year. Because these percentages were reasonably stable over the 1974–89 period, the 16-year averages were used in the simulation model.

⁷In 1975, for example, the model assumes that the proportion of faculty leaving the rank of full professor who were women depended on the proportion of doctoral recipients who were women in 1943 (i.e., 32 years earlier because these faculty, on average, spent 20 years as full professors and took 12 years to reach that rank after being hired as assistant professors). Because actual data on doctoral reciprocity were not available for years prior to 1960, the model assumes that the proportion awarded to women was 4 percent in each earlier year—about the same as in the early 1960's. This assumption is conservative (i.e., it tends to lower the projected proportion of full professors who are women) because doctoral reciprocity in the early years affects only the simulated outflow of women full professors.

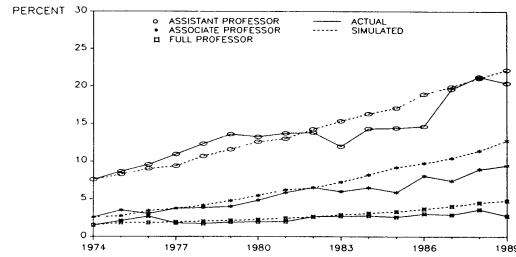


FIGURE 6. ACTUAL AND SIMULATED PROPORTION OF FACULTY IN GRADUATE DEPARTMENTS WHO ARE WOMEN, BY RANK, 1974–89

These results can be seen as both discouraging and encouraging. Unfortunately, they support the belief that women's progress to the ranks of associate and full professor has been slower than it should have been. More positively, though, they indicate that any shortfall (especially in the proportion of full professors who are women) is considerably less than might be assumed based on the much faster growth in the proportion of assistant professors who are women. In other words, that simple comparison neglects the fact that, on average, it takes more than a decade to advance from assistant to full professor.

What might we conclude about the future? On the one hand, the rising proportion of assistant professors of economics who are women indicates that there is a growing pool of women to be promoted to associate and full professor. On the other hand, if women assistant professors are disproportionately located at lower-quality departments, growth in the proportion of associate and full professors who are women may be limited at the better schools. Moreover, the actual increase in the proportion of full professors who are women over the next decade will be largely constrained by what has already happened for associate professors. Yet, the actual proportion of associate professors who are women has been noticeably below the simulated proportion since 1982. Thus, the gap between the actual and the simulated proportion of full professors who are women is likely to grow in coming years. While future research

may be able to shed some light on why these patterns persist, expanding women's participation in the economics profession may also require examining the interpersonal dynamics within graduate programs and departments.

The Committee's Recent Activities

CSWEP pursued several activities in 1990 designed to help women advance in the economics profession. As part of its ongoing efforts to expand the participation of women economists on the program of the AEA's annual meetings, the Board organized six sessions for 1990—three on gender-related topics and three on technology and productivity. In addition, each person asked by the President-elect to organize an invited-paper session was sent a list of experienced women economists who specialize in the same fields as the organizer. These reminders of possible participants have been associated with greater participation of women.⁸ As well, to facilitate networking at the annual meeting among economists who support CSWEP's goals, CSWEP sponsored a hospitality suite and a reception followed its business meeting.

Another major activity was publishing three issues of the *CSWEP Newsletter*, the contents of which are designed primarily to help young economists advance. Each issue contains information about sources of research funding and calls for papers, as well as articles on topics such as the annual job market and tips on writing publishable articles. In response to many requests for copies of articles from earlier issues, the Board also reprinted selected articles in a fourth

issue of the *Newsletter* that is available free to dues-paying members, or for \$8.

Updating and expanding the entries in the *Roster of Women Economists* absorbed a considerable amount of the Board's resources. The *Roster* contains information about women economists, including their employers, educational backgrounds, fields of specialization, and publications. It is used by employers searching for job candidates and by organizations seeking members of advisory committees and the like. The entire *Roster*, or selected portions of it, are available in computer-readable form or as mailing labels. In addition, the *Roster* appears in a printed volume every other year. The Board also continued its recent practice of informing advertisers in *Job Openings for Economists* and the *CSWEP Newsletter* about the *Roster* and how to use it.

Finally, the Board thanks Joan Haworth, the Committee's Membership Secretary, and her staff for their many contributions—maintaining the *Roster*, updating it using the AEA's membership directory, preparing special mailings, and creating customized listings from the *Roster*, to name just a few. The Board is also grateful to three members whose terms expire this year. Shulamit Kahn organized many sessions and coordinated information about the availability of child care for several annual meetings of the AEA. She has also agreed to continue participating in an ongoing CSWEP-sponsored research project comparing the career paths of female and male economists. Kathryn Morrison and Barbara Newell each co-edited an issue of the *Newsletter* and helped with projects to expand use of the *Roster*. The Board also thanks Jill Bury, who continues to contribute a great deal, including doing an outstanding job producing the *Newsletter*.

⁸See Cecilia A. Conrad, "Women Economists at the AEA Annual Meeting," Barnard College, Columbia University, October 1990.

NANCY M. GORDON, *Chair*