

The Impacts of Exclusion and Disproportionate Service on Women and Faculty of Color in Political Science

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This article summarizes the literature on exclusion and disproportionate service faced by women academics and faculty of color in political science. Recommendations based on this scholarship will inform provosts, deans, directors, and other institutional actors who recognize the need for documenting structural inequities and investing in high-impact, long-term solutions. If the discipline wants to diversify its membership, knowing the experiences of exclusion and disproportionate service that result in negative outcomes for women academics and faculty of color is essential to achieve that goal (Alexander-Floyd 2008, 2015; Sinclair-Chapman 2015).

EXCLUSION

We proceed with the understanding that exclusion is pervasive and impedes the recruitment, advancement, and retention of women and people of color with an academic career in political science. “Exclusion” is defined as an experience whereby women academics and faculty of color are deemed illegitimate members of the academy and therefore their scholarship and service are devalued by colleagues and other institutional actors through formal hierarchies and informal processes (Gutierrez y Muhs et al. 2012; Settles et al. 2022). Exclusion occurs at the interpersonal and institutional levels through lack of recognition—accomplishments are overlooked or downplayed—and it is compounded by the fact that women academics and faculty of color are *not* asked to perform high-prestige service. Moreover, they often are unaware of the “ways of doing” academic practice, or what is called the “hidden curriculum” (Barham and Wood 2022, 324). Lacking access to mentors and opportunities to build professionalization skills hinders their advancement. They are more likely to perform less prestigious, time-consuming “token” service that slows their research productivity due to the number of activities and amount of time spent on them. As a result, with fewer total career articles in print and fewer years of administrative experience, women academics and faculty of color subsequently are disadvantaged when it is time for tenure and promotion (Alter et al. 2020; Flaherty 2017; Guarino and

Borden 2017; Mitchell and Hesli 2013; Settles et al. 2022; Sinclair-Chapman 2015; Teele and Thelen 2017).

The low number of women academics and faculty of color within higher ranks—especially at the rank of full professor—makes it less possible for many to serve as department head, program director, or committee chair. The supply–demand mismatch is compounded by institutional norms and unconscious bias that decrease the likelihood of serving in administrative roles (Carson et al. 2019). Serving in high-prestige roles comes with tremendous power and impacts career trajectories. These individuals determine what scholarship and types of service are deemed valuable and merit recognition, establish the disciplinary norms for evaluation, and set standards for publication in terms of quantity and quality. Additionally, they decide who should be invited for talks, webinars, and mini-conferences and symposia. These invitations add to faculty members’ curriculum vitae and provide an opportunity to network with other scholars and receive feedback on their own scholarship. Being overlooked for these opportunities limits their ability to wield similar influence and acquire experience necessary to assume administrative roles outside of their department, resulting in inequitable systems of institutional power at all levels of the university (Alter et al. 2020). Studies show that improving equitable access to norms, soft skills, and informal knowledge is an effective way to improve parity in career trajectories (Alexander-Floyd 2015; Barham and Wood 2022; Hesli and Burrell 1995; Lavariega Monforti and Michelson 2020).

Another less discussed form of exclusion that can affect a scholar’s research productivity—and one most relevant for R1 faculty—exists in grant attainment and collaboration. Grant-writing skills are seldom taught but often learned while working with a more senior principal investigator. Most faculty—especially women academics and faculty of color—lack this type of mentoring relationship and often are on their own to learn the process. The submission of twice as many grant applications from men as from women signals this mentorship gap (Windsor and Kronsted 2022). Although grant attainment appears to be gender and race neutral, it has a systemic effect that produces structural inequalities in

the realm of teaching, advising, and mentoring. The grant advantage creates another supply–demand mismatch, resulting in a faculty shortage.

There is a transfer of service to faculty who lack seniority and are less free to “just say no” when required courses must be taught and other needs of the department must be met, which makes this type of service essential and *not* optional or under faculty control (Pyke 2011). It creates a powerfully coercive dynamic whereby junior faculty who are disproportionately women and people of color are less able to decline service requests when asked by a higher-ranked, senior colleague or administrator to fulfill essential needs of the department. For women academics and faculty of color, this double-bind situation has profound effects and contributes to their slower advancement. The division of labor reproduces power hierarchies. Senior and mostly male colleagues who write and obtain grants with course buyouts and other fringe benefits are viewed as active researchers, whereas those who have assumed service roles on their behalf are viewed as “workhorses” for the department. Other conditions also create service differentials and overburden women academics and faculty of color.

DISPROPORTIONATE SERVICE

Claims of disproportionate service are not new; however, the problem requires explicit acknowledgment to remedy disparities that exist in many forms. The data show that women academics and faculty of color are overrepresented on committees that involve more service than prestige and that advance neither their salary nor their academic career (Alter et al. 2020; American Political Science Association 2011; Anonymous and Anonymous 1999; Mitchell and Hesli 2013; Nair 2018). Consider, for example, ad hoc committees on institutional diversity that involve intense labor and specialized work, especially in the wake of George Floyd’s death. Carefully researching and synthesizing—as well as compiling data of considerable length—to advance a strategic plan for equity and inclusion requires significant time and is less highly regarded than a university press book, peer-reviewed journal article, or even a book chapter—that is, a valued publication comprised of original research that counts toward tenure and promotion and for which faculty are rewarded with merit pay. Yet, this type of work typically is taken up by many women academics and faculty of color.

Disproportionate service results from the small pool of eligible and qualified candidates and the desire on the part of administrators and professional associations to organize panels, events, and committees that are representative of different constituent groups. In seeking to fulfill service roles, a steady stream of requests disproportionately impacts faculty members who are women and people of color (Carson et al. 2019). Being personally invested and viewing themselves as change agents increases their sense of obligation and constrains their ability to “say no” when they are mindful of the pervasive underrepresentation of women academics and faculty of color like themselves. Although their voices bring critical perspectives, it also is essential for them to not be overburdened with such requests; other faculty members must share the load (Simien and Wallace 2022). Thus, we cannot stress enough the importance of ally training.

Correspondingly, the low number of women academics and faculty of color at the ranks of associate and full professors increases the service burden for those who have advanced successfully in academic rank (Rockquemore and Laszloffy 2008). Consider the labor-intensive task of writing promotion letters for junior faculty who are eligible for tenure, for which only the most senior faculty can write them. Being asked more often increases feelings of guilt such that women academics and faculty of color are reluctant to refuse requests—even when they know they are saddled with a high service load. Given that research expectations dominate the tenure process at R1 institutions, with the prestige of a candidate’s publication outlets playing a prominent role when files are examined, senior faculty of color and women academics are aware of the importance of their participation in the process. They often view their participation as possibly remedying certain patterns of inequalities marked by floating standards, and having an institutionalized voice in determining the decision as essential. Those who have been chosen are perhaps the most qualified to evaluate the case put before them as specialists in the chosen field and members of an underrepresented group.

Another area of service that involves significant emotional labor is the time spent on mentorship (Bellas 1999). Women academics and faculty of color are more likely to provide support for undergraduate and graduate students whether it is educational, professional, or emotional support (Mitchell and Hesli 2013). They also are more likely to be sought out by students of color and women seeking mentors like themselves with whom they share similar experiences of institutional dynamics and interpersonal relations that deem them a perpetual “outsider-within” academe (Collins 2000; Hawkesworth 2003; Lorde 1984). This mentorship process is not limited to their own department but rather extends to the college, institution, and discipline through sustained mentoring of graduate students who are persistently less likely to complete graduate degrees, obtain doctorates, and find faculty positions. This includes non-tenure-track and junior faculty who also are less likely to successfully advance through reappointment and promotion and tenure (Lavariega Monforti and Michelson 2020).

Rather than blame women academics and faculty of color for spending too much time with students, there must be a shift in how we think about this caretaking of the “academic family.” We must amend current mechanisms that render these contributions less visible or valued by rewarding those faculty members who perform this intensive labor. The role of women academics and faculty of color is not limited to the classroom; it involves apprenticing many first-generation college students (Anonymous and Anonymous 1999; Pyke 2011). As life-transformative educators, it also is important the way they help undergraduate and graduate students from underrepresented groups to visualize their own professional goals and obtain purposeful employment, competitive merit-based fellowships, legislative internships, and travel grants while developing their social networks and producing prize-recognized scholarship that advance their career.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is necessary to consider several strategies that might equalize access to the skills needed for advancement in the profession, from grant-writing instruction and peer-led mentoring workshops to wellness retreats. Although the academy can disincentivize radical self-care, it is incumbent on higher-education institutions to recognize the competitive nature of our work and the culture of exhaustion embedded within the Ivory Tower. The intense pressure to publish or perish can exact a physical

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and mental toll, with “weathering” effects. Women academics and faculty of color must have resources at their disposal to achieve their goals without experiencing long-term suffering and chronic stress. Navigating the pitfalls of reappointment, tenure and promotion, grant writing, and publishing requires networks and mentors—for example, the Women of Color Workshops (Smooth 2016); #PSSistahScholar Zoom Meet-Up; Symposium on the Politics of Immigration, Race, and Ethnicity; and Mentoring Conference for New Research on Gender in Political Psychology. These opportunities provide vitally important information and offer influential professional networks and mentoring relationships that are crucial to scholars. It is labor intensive to plan and organize these workshops. Although they can result in segregated social and professional networks, women academics and faculty of color who are invited speakers and panelists as well as participants attest to the fact that women and people of color belong in academe. These mentorship initiatives are critical to illuminating the unwritten rules and norms in academia (Crawford and Windsor 2021; Windsor, Crawford, and Breuning 2021). Institutions should provide budgets and personnel to support these efforts as well as travel funds for attendees and active participants. Outsourcing is another option. The National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity works with more than 300 colleges and universities with institutional memberships. Ink Well academic writing retreats and WellAcademic LLC offer similar advising systems.

Managerial efforts can contribute to a more supportive and hospitable departmental climate. Chairs can develop institutional mechanisms that distribute service on a rotating basis. They also could restrict the number of new-course preparations in a year, allow faculty members to teach courses that complement their ongoing research, and assign teaching loads and schedules that accommodate family responsibilities. Hiring additional faculty members of color might well be necessary so that the few existing faculty members of color are not relied on to do all the diversity-related work. Service roles related to diversity and inclusion must be distributed

equitably among new hires and other faculty who aspire to be allies. Structural inequalities cannot be eliminated only through cluster hires or adding new courses to the curriculum.

There also must be a shift in what administrators, coworkers, partners, and families expect from women academics and faculty of color. Systems of support must be institutionalized by colleges and universities. Self-assessment of service differentials should be administered across and within departments, colleges, and universities. Department chairs and deans should be aware of

how service assignments are allocated; increasing colleague awareness of service loads potentially makes it easier for women academics and faculty of color to accept or decline service requests at the same rate as other faculty (Flaherty 2017). There must be greater institutional efforts and accountability as the higher-ups reflect on what they are doing to support women academics and faculty of color. Regular data collection and research-practice partnerships such as the Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education¹ can inform ongoing conversations among faculty and administrators and also lead to programmatic efforts that provide robust support, equitably balance service across faculty and within departments, and is inclusive of diverse members. To create such an environment requires sustained dialogue, establishment of systems and policies, and periodic reevaluation of those systems and policies to assess whether they are working as intended and effective over time.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there are no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research. ■

NOTE

1. See <https://coache.gse.harvard.edu>

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