Reforming Gendered Tenure Policies in U.S. Higher Education: A Policy Recommendation

Donald Mitchell Jr.
Grand Valley State University

Abigail Johnson
Grand Valley State University

Laura Poglitsch
Grand Valley State University

Men receive tenure more often than women in United States higher education. One reason may be due to current tenure policies. Within this article, the authors evaluate three policy alternatives—benefits packages targeting women, a three-track tenure process, and support programs—using the evaluative criteria effectiveness, affordability, administrative operability, and political feasibility to determine which alternative might be the best option for decreasing the tenure gap between men and women. Each policy alternative was assessed and ranked based on the outcomes associated with the identified criteria. The authors conclude by recommending the three-track tenure policy and suggesting ways to implement and evaluate the recommended policy.

INTRODUCTION

Fifty years ago, White, Protestant men dominated the academy. Today, the academy is more diverse and the number of women in academia has grown and will continue to increase in the foreseeable future (Altbach, 2005). While the proportion of women entering the academy has increased, men still receive tenure more often than women in United States higher education. The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) noted "substantial disparities in salary, rank and tenure between male and female faculty persists despite the increasing proportion of women in the academic profession" (Ginther & Hayes, 2003, p. 34). Subsequently, continuing current tenure policies in academia is problematic because tenure policies—which appear to be inherently biased and male-centric—could be considered social injustices given the documented gender gaps. As such, this article offers a policy recommendation—based on the

consideration of three policy alternatives—to decrease gender tenure gaps at the institutional level. After the policy alternatives and potential outcomes of implementing the policy alternatives are introduced, the recommended policy alternative is presented as determined by comparative analyses and ranking the three policy alternatives using evaluative criteria.

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

During the 2011-12 academic year, 45% of full-time faculty at institutions with a tenure system were tenured (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). When considering gender as a variable, 54% of men were tenured while 41% of the women were tenured, a 13-percentage point gap (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). In addition, numbers shift as aggregate data are dissected and examined by discipline and institutional type.

In 2011, women received 52% of the doctorates awarded in the humanities and 22% of the doctorates awarded in the life and physical sciences (National Science Foundation, National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics, 2011). Because doctorates are typically required for tenure-track careers, the data highlight the pipeline issue that further complicates the gender tenure gap in academia. While gender tenure gaps decrease slightly in the humanities, tenure gaps widen in science, medical, and technology fields (Glazer-Raymo, 2003). Within the AAUP's "Gender Equity Indicator Report of 2006" the following was noted about tenure based on institutional type: at doctoral-level universities, 26% of women and 74% of men were tenured; at master's-level institutions, 35% of women and 65% of men were tenured; and at baccalaureate institutions, 37% of women and 63% of men were tenured (West & Curtis, 2006). Furthermore, women spend more time securing tenure. McElrach (1992) concluded men receive tenure in less time than women, averaging a difference of eight months.

Extant literature highlights three themes concerning gendered tenure disparities: (a) tenure policies do not consider the balancing of women's roles as faculty and family members; (b) women are more likely to spend more time teaching and offering service when research is the top priority in tenure decisions at most colleges and universities; and (c) women's research is more likely to be considered low-quality and/or irrelevant.

Balancing Roles as Women Faculty

Though women are entering academia at higher rates than men, their promotion in the academy lags behind that of their male peers. For example, Aguirre (2000) reported that women comprised 30% of positions at the associate professor level, but representation dropped to 20% with full professor status. Recent literature revealed women's roles as partners in committed relationships (e.g., marriage) and as mothers contribute to the gender disparities in faculty positions in the academy (Drago et al., 2006; Quinn, 2011). Finding balance in work and family roles as a faculty member is particularly difficult for women during the tenure process as tenure policies are historically male-centered and requires one to be "married" to their work as faculty members (Drago et al., 2006; Quinn, 2011). Though attitudes about tenure policies as they affect women balancing their work and family roles are changing, current norms, practices and policies continue to make it difficult for women to secure tenure comparable to men alongside the roles that many women hold in their personal lives (Gilroy, 2005; Quinn, 2011).

Because current tenure policies are not friendly toward holding outside roles as caregivers, women tend to engage in behaviors to hide or limit their expression regarding their roles (e.g., wives or mothers) to reduce experiencing bias in the workplace (Drago et al., 2006). Drago et al. (2006) explained that women carry a greater burden as caregivers than men in society; they are also more likely to be penalized for their roles in the workplace through lesser pay or less opportunities for job advancement. Because of this culture, women engage in bias avoidance behaviors such as not asking for more flexible policies (Drago et al., 2006). Furthermore, Armenti (2004) found that historically women faculty are pressured to plan their pregnancies around the academic year; they plan to have children in May, so they will not have to take time off during the busier times of the year.

Armenti (2004) noted that in more recent times, women are postponing pregnancies until after they receive tenure, so they will not find it necessary to hide their personal lives at work. In addition, stringent tenure-track time-line policies place bearing on the number of publications one produces, which can be interrupted due to the physical demands of pregnancies and the time demands of raising children; these policies fail to look at potential (Armenti, 2004). Furthermore, Drago et al. (2006) found that even at master's level and liberal arts institutions, women were more likely to miss important family roles in favor of work.

With the current culture within academia, many women may be discouraged from the tenure path in the first place (Drago et al., 2006). In a culture in which women tend to take on more of the work in family relationships and careers for women are traditionally under-prioritized in comparison to their men counterparts, the academy is likely losing out on women candidates (Drago et al., 2006). Subsequently, the current tenure process norms in academia both "silence" parenting and partnered women, or put women in the position of having to make the choice between a career and academia or pursuing these other life roles. Women who *do* pursue tenure-track positions often have heavier teaching and service roles.

Teaching and Service Loads

There are three criteria typically used to evaluate tenure-track faculty members: research, teaching, and service. Yet, it is important to note that these criteria are not equally weighted. All faculty members are required to teach, however, solely outstanding teaching will not secure tenure at most institutions (Park, 1996). Furthermore, service is expected of faculty members, although very few faculty members have been denied tenure due to inadequate service (Park, 1996). This leaves research as the primary factor in determining if a faculty member is granted tenure (Park, 1996). This emphasis on research proves to be unfair to women faculty members who are attempting to obtain tenure because women typically spend more time teaching and offering service (Park, 1996; Xu, 2008).

When compared to male faculty members, women have a heavier teaching and service workload because they are often assigned to teach undergraduate classes and they perform more service activities (e.g., advising committees focused on women; Aguirre, 2000; Lee, 2011). These heavier loads and emphases on teaching and service can make it harder for women to find time to complete research (Aguirre, 2000; Lee, 2011). Moreover, due to the tenure system's emphasis on research, it is harder for women faculty members with heavy teaching and service workloads to obtain tenure since those roles are often overlooked in the faculty reward system (Aguirre, 2000). Women who teach undergraduate or core classes encounter more work due to the size of their courses, while faculty members—who are typically men—who are engaged in

research, often teach smaller graduate-level courses, and are more likely to receive course reductions or sabbatical leaves (Park, 1996). It is apparent that the tenure reviews of women who focus more on teaching and service are negatively influenced because research is the top consideration for tenure. Nevertheless, when women do actively engage in research, it is still more likely to be discredited by faculty peers (Xu, 2008).

Women Faculty and Research

Historically, research in the academy has been labeled as "men's work" (Xu, 2008). As such, when women produce scholarship, their work is regarded as less scholarly, particularly when their research focuses on topics such as women's studies, feminism, or gender issues (Aguirre, 2000; Ropers-Huilman & Shackleford, 2003; Xu, 2008). These gendered-limiting views often devalue the appreciation of women's research and scholarship in the academy and pushes women's research outside of top-tier journals, although Xu (2008) found women's publications were more scholarly as measured by the number of references used. In addition, as noted earlier, because of more teaching and service assignments, women faculty often produce fewer publications than their male colleagues (Xu, 2008).

EVALUATIVE CRITERIA

Four evaluative criteria were used to assess the anticipated outcomes of the proposed policy alternatives. The criteria were: (a) effectiveness, (b) affordability, (c) administrative operability, and (d) political feasibility. Each policy alternative was assessed and ranked based on the outcomes associated with the identified criteria. *Effectiveness* was measured by how well each policy alternative might reduce the tenure gap and maintain tenure equity. While effectiveness was chosen as a criterion, its measure is synonymous with equity, which could be considered philosophical and immeasurable; therefore, effectiveness was chosen as a broader title. *Affordability* was measured by assessing possible financial implications for implementing the proposed policy alternative. In addition, given the current fiscal climate in the United States, higher financial costs—particularly at public institutions—are more likely to reduce the possibility of implementation. *Administrative operability* was used to measure the human capital needed to initiate, implement, and sustain the proposed policy alternatives. Administrative operability was chosen as a measure because a sustainable policy alternative is important in reaching the overarching goal and objectives. Finally, *political feasibility* was used to assess stakeholders' possible stances on the proposed policy alternatives. A recommendation that is not politically feasible suggests there is too much opposition and/or too little support to implement the policy. The political feasibility of a policy alternative was measured using a PRINCE analysis. PRINCE (acronym for probe, interact, calculate, execute) analyses are used to measure stakeholders' political power and projected stances on the policy (Baradach, 2005; Patton & Sawicki, 1993). Collectively, these criteria were used to measure and rank the outcomes of the three policy alternatives. Informed by extant literature, the following policy alternatives might be considered.

ALTERNATIVES AND OUTCOMES

Benefits Packages

Benefits packages targeting women is the first policy alternative. This policy alternative suggests making adjustments to benefits packages for full-time, tenure-track faculty members. While several universities have implemented benefits packages targeting women, there is still a need for reshaping benefits policies across the higher education landscape. The adjustments might include benefits such as pregnancy-disability leave, family-care leave, emergency-care leave, longer-term leave for child rearing and other family responsibilities, stopping the tenure clock for childbirth, child care, and flexible work policies and schedules (AAUP, 2001). Benefits packages targeting women are reasonable options because the policies recognize women faculty are more likely to have to balance work and family roles while in the academy. Benefits packages would offer financial assistance and invest in faculty using a more holistic approach. This policy alternative uses a distributive policy approach; a distributive policy provides financial incentives as a form of assistance (Fowler, 2004). In addition, this policy is an inducement mechanism, which are policies given to a specific group with expected outcomes (Fowler, 2004). If implemented, costs and equity concerns are likely to emerge as issues. The proposed policy alternative appears to favor women because benefits such as child-care, elderly care, and maternity leave are more likely to be used by women faculty. These changes may bring about opposition from male faculty or those who may not see themselves taking advantage of the benefits. Lastly, there may be opposition from administrators, governing boards, and legislators due to high financial costs.

Three-track Tenure Policy

A *three-track tenure policy* is the second alternative. This policy alternative allows faculty members to identify research, teaching, or service as their primary evaluative measure for tenure, modeling a "division of labor" system (Smith, 1776/2004). This policy alternative is also supported by Boyer's (1990) call for expanding the definition of scholarship in the academy by giving more weight to the scholarship of teaching and service. By offering a three-track tenure policy, faculty would no longer be penalized for teaching or offering service because they could be identified as their primary role in the academy, which might indirectly increase the number of women who receive tenure. This alternative is a regulatory policy. A regulatory policy is implemented solely based on its feasibility (Fowler, 2004). In addition, the policy is a mandate, which suggests the policy should be implemented or there will be consequences (Fowler, 2004). If implemented, affordability would not be a chief concern. Yet, administrative operability would be concerning as the policy requires additional or new roles for faculty, staff, and administrators. In addition, evaluating teaching and service has not been as tangible as evaluating research in tenure decisions; therefore, new evaluative practices must be developed to more effectively measure teaching and service. There may be opposition from faculty members and administrators who might suggest research should be the primary measure for tenure evaluations. In addition, institutions might be faced with too many faculty members who might want to emphasize one criterion (e.g., several faculty choosing teaching as their primary focus).

Support Programs

Support programs are the third, and final, policy alternative. This policy alternative calls for certain campus programs and practices to be adopted, targeting women. This policy alternative would include programs such as accommodating two academic career couples (hiring couples who both have PhDs); faculty support groups for family events (e.g., birth of child, sick parent, divorce, etc.); part-time tracks with re-entry rights (allowing faculty members to become part-time during the tenure track); and, discounting "resume gaps" or recognizing family concerns may produces lapses in research and teaching duties (AAUP, 2001). This policy alternative would offer women educational programs (e.g., making transitions between family and the academy more seamless). This alternative is a distributive policy and the policy mechanism used is a hortatory mechanism, which are policies highlighting values (Fowler, 2004). If implemented, affordability would be a moderate concern due to new programs being offered. In addition, administrative operability might be a moderate concern as human capital will be required as new programs are developed. There may be opposition by faculty members because of the part-time tracks developed and discounting "resume gaps." Some faculty may find it unfair to offer faculty members options that appear to favor women.

Evaluation of Alternatives

The proposed alternatives were evaluated and ranked using scores of 1, 2 or 3 (3 being the highest ranking) for each criterion, then added to get a final score. *Effectiveness* was measured by how well each policy is predicted to reduce the tenure gap and maintain tenure equity in relation to gender. *Affordability* was measured by assessing financial implications for implementing a proposed alternative. The affordability criterion was weighted by two due to current budget cuts within educational institutions and because of the fiscal climate in the United States. *Administrative operability* was measured by predicting the manpower needed to initiate, implement and sustain the proposed alternative. *Political feasibility* was measured by ranking the acceptability of a proposal by the major stakeholders using a PRINCE Analysis (see Tables 1-3). Stakeholders' stances (scored -3 to 3) are added to the groups' priority score (1-3, 3 representing the highest score), which determines the extent of the groups' interest in the problem, the multiplied by the groups power score (1 to 3). Then, all of the stakeholders' scores are added to predict the political feasibility of the policy. The overall alternative evaluation scores (see Table 4) identify the dominant, or best, alternative by ranking each policy proposal (Patton & Sawicki, 1993). The policy with the highest score was the policy recommended.

Table 1
Benefits Packages Alternative PRINCE Analysis

Stakeholders	Stance (-3 to +3)	Priority (1 to 3)	Power (1 to 3)	Total
For				
Women faculty	3	3	1	9
Against				
Administrators	-3	1	3	-9
Governing boards	-3	1	3	-9
Men faculty	-1	1	1	-1
Overall Score				**-10**

POLICY RECOMMENDATION

When comparing the three alternatives, *benefits packages* and *support programs* are similar as they are distributive policies; the *three-track tenure policy* is a regulatory policy. The benefits packages appear to be the least affordable, while the three-track tenure policy is the most affordable. In addition, the three-track tenure policy appears to promote the most equity because of the policy's gender-neutral stance. Support programs would appear to be the most administratively operable and politically feasible because of the subtle changes it requires in existing policies, but when compared to the three-track tenure policy, it is not as equitable and less affordable.

Table 2
Three-track Tenure Policy Alternative PRINCE Analysis

Stakeholders	Stance (-3 to +3)	Priority (1 to 3)	Power (1 to 3)	Total
For				
Some faculty	3	3	1	9
Administrators	1	2	3	6
Governing boards	1	1	3	3
Against				
Some faculty	-3	3	1	-9
Overall Score				**9**

Given the literature reviewed, evaluative criteria considered, and the projection of possible outcomes, the recommended policy is the three-track tenure policy based on its overall score of 12 (see Table 4). Although the three-track tenure policy and support programs received identical scores, the three-track tenure policy received an affordability score of 6, meaning it is the most affordable. While support programs appeared to be the most politically feasible, finances are more concerning, thus, affordability has to be considered top priority. In addition, the three-track tenure policy received the second highest score in political feasibility and given the closeness in those scores, the three-track tenure policy appears to be the best possible policy alternative.

Table 3
Support Programs Alternative PRINCE Analysis

Stakeholders	Stance (-3 to +3)	Priority (1 to 3)	Power (1 to 3)	Total
For				
Women faculty	3	3	1	9
Administrators	2	1	3	6
Governing boards	1	1	3	3
Overall Score				**18**

Implementation

The recommended policy should be implemented immediately. Faculty who are currently on tenure-track should not be eligible for the new policy unless they are willing to restart or renegotiate their tenure-track timeline. Faculty who start new tenure-track positions will be eligible, and must declare their primary track (i.e., research, teaching, or service) upon signing their initial contract. The declaration of a faculty member's primary tenure measure (i.e., teaching) should not influence pay and job descriptions should include the other tenure criteria in reduced loads (estimated percentages are appropriate). While there are no notable financial costs, implementation of the three-track tenure policy will require faculty service and considerable attention from the administrators and governing boards. A dean of faculty position might be appropriate for this policy alternative.

Table 4
Overall Alternative Evaluation Scores

	Effectiveness	Affordability (x2)[a]	Administrative Operability	Political Feasibility	Overall Score
Benefits packages	1	2	2	1	**6**
Three-track tenure	3	6	1	2	**12**
Support programs	2	4	3	3	**12**

[a]Affordability rankings are multiplied by two because of the current fiscal climate in the United States.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The three-track tenure policy will not have immediately tangible results because it generally takes five-to-seven years to secure tenure; therefore, there is a five-year lapse in evaluating summative outcomes of the policy. The policy should be monitored using surveys to measure faculty satisfaction. Once the first cohort of faculty members are eligible for tenure, institutions can evaluate the effectiveness of the policy by (a) comparing the gendered tenure percentages to past data; (b) comparing tenure rates between men and women of the first eligible cohort; and (c) continuously monitoring the gender tenure gap. In sum, the three-track tenure policy is recommended as the best option of the three policy proposals for institutions to consider. In turn, the proposed policy recommendation might lead higher education institutions toward more equitable and diversified workplaces. In addition, the policy might result in a multitude of positive outcomes for faculty, students, higher education institutions, and broader communities.

LIMITATIONS

We would like to note several limitations of this article. First, the proposed policy recommendation was informed by extant literature, data projections and a comparison between the other two policies introduced in the article. Given this, other policy options might be feasible but were not included in the current article. In addition, implementing the recommended policy might differ in reality and across institutional type. Second, the authors took the stance that institutions are seeking to implement new policies to close the gender gap and that institutions are not currently implementing the proposed policies. Nevertheless, we acknowledge that some

institutions might have some of these policies or programs in place and therefore might use alternative plans to evaluate the proposed policies. However, we trust that our presentation of the proposed policy alternatives and eventual recommendation might provide guidance for institutions that are exploring ways to eradicate gender tenure gaps at their institutions.

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Correspondence regarding this article should be addressed to Donald Mitchell Jr, Assistant Professor of Education, Grand Valley State University. Email: mitchedo@gvsu.edu.