

Voluntary Departures Among Tenured and Tenure-Track Faculty at Virginia Tech: A Gender Perspective

Catherine T. Amelink, Coordinator of Special Projects, Office of the Provost and Pat Hyer, Associate Provost for Academic Administration

Data contributions from Dennis Catley, Institutional Research; Susan Willis-Walton, Survey Research Center; and the AdvanceVT Assessment Team, Elizabeth Creamer and Valerie Glass, are gratefully acknowledged.

While some faculty turnover is to be expected, and may even be desirable, turnover can be costly and present a variety of unwelcome issues and problems that need concerted attention. Recruitment costs (advertisement, travel, on-campus interviews, and time involved in the search process) and start-up packages are just part of the lost investment. Loss of key hires can also stall progress on strategic initiatives, disrupt departmental assignments (teaching loads, student advising, and committee and administrative duties), and jeopardize research projects. Turnover among faculty is an important issue to monitor as it relates to achieving university goals and it is a relevant measure of the work environment university-wide. Departures of women faculty are a special concern, given the university's strong commitment to increasing the number and success of women faculty through the *AdvanceVT* project. Departures by race and ethnicity will be the focus of a forthcoming report.

Departure Trends University-Wide

This report focuses on voluntary departures of tenured and tenure-track faculty, and departures of women faculty in particular. Data from the university's personnel system cover the last six years, 1998-99 through 2003-04. Those faculty members who left involuntarily because of death, non-reappointment, or tenure denial are excluded; so too are retirements. It should be noted that there were a significant number of retirements encouraged by incentives during the period of recent budget reductions, 2001-2004, so total faculty turnover is substantially greater than the numbers reported below.

Voluntary departures include faculty members who leave for a wide variety of reasons. Some accepted better offers, higher salaries, or promotions at other institutions. Others left due to insufficient opportunities for their spouses, personal reasons, or dissatisfaction with the climate, institution, or their specific jobs. Political and financial conditions in the state also played a role in decisions to leave for some faculty members. Exit survey data described later in this analysis, and in separate reports, elucidate in greater detail some of the reasons faculty identified for leaving Virginia Tech.

The percentage of tenured and tenure-track faculty members departing between October 1 and September 30 over the last six years varied from a low of 1.6% to a high of 3.4%. Extremely stressful budget conditions appeared to precipitate a higher number of faculty seeking and accepting positions elsewhere in 2003-04 (see Table 1).

Table 1: Voluntary Departures* of Tenured or Tenure-Track Faculty by Year

	1998/99	1999/00	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	6-year Average
No. Departing	21	33	38	26	23	43	31
Total No. of Tenured/T-T Faculty	1351	1400	1393	1417	1330	1259	-
% Tenured & T-T Departing	1.6%	2.4%	2.7%	1.8%	1.7%	3.4%	2.3%

* 1998/99, for example, includes voluntary terminations between Oct. 1, 1998 and Sept. 30, 1999, the annual census date. The number of terminations was divided by the number of tenured and tenure-track faculty as of the 1998 census date to estimate a percentage/rate of voluntary departures.

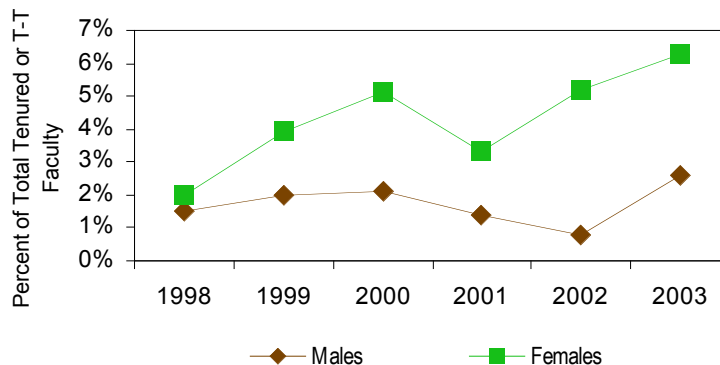
Women faculty members averaged 40% of the voluntary departures over the six-year period, while they were only 20.6% of the tenured and tenure-track faculty (Table 2).

Table 2. Percent Female among Voluntary Departures

	1998-99	1999-00	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	6-year Average
Percent Female among All Tenured and Tenure-track Voluntary Departures (No.)	23.8% (5)	33.3% (11)	39.4% (15)	38.4% (10)	65.2% (15)	39.5% (17)	39.9%

Female faculty losses were especially high during 2002-03, when 15 of the 23 departing faculty members were women. However, the departure rate for women was disproportionately higher every year of the six-year period. Chi-square analyses and Fisher's Exact test analyses reveal significant differences ($p \leq .05$) between male and female departure rates for the years 2000, 2001, 2002, and 2003 (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Trends in Voluntary Departures by Gender



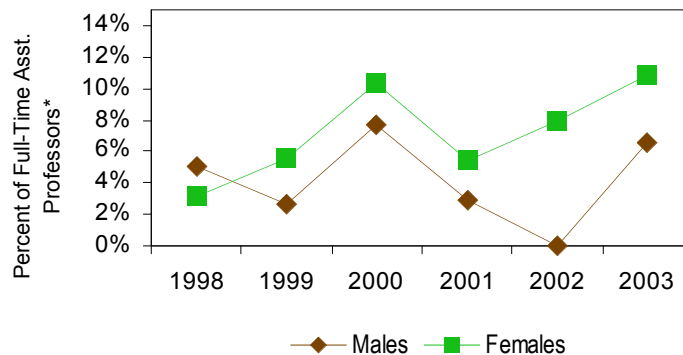
Departure Trends by Rank

The disproportionate number of voluntary departures among women is most evident among assistant and associate professors. The gap is particularly striking in the 2002-03 and 2003-04 academic year (Table 3 and Figure 2).

Table 3: Voluntary Departure Rates Among Tenured and Tenure-Track Faculty by Gender and Rank

Rank	1998-99		1999-00		2000-01		2001-02		2002-03		2003-04	
	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W
Prof.	1.1%	1.9%	1.4%	3.6%	0.7%	0.0%	0.9%	1.5%	1.3%	0.0%	1.8%	3.1%
Assoc.	0.8%	1.0%	2.6%	1.8%	1.9%	3.3%	1.7%	2.4%	0.3%	5.8%	2.2%	4.4%
Asst.	5.1%	3.2%	2.7%	5.5%	7.7%	10.3%	2.9%	5.4%	0.0%	8.0%	6.6%	10.9%

Figure 2: Departure Rates among Assistant Professors by Gender



Departure Trends By College

The number and percentage of female tenured and tenure-track faculty who departed voluntarily in each of the eight academic colleges over the six-year period are included in Table 4. Very small numbers of women in some colleges result in dramatic percentage losses, exacerbating a sense of isolation and minority status for those who remain.

Table 4: Voluntary Departures by College:

	1998/99	1999/00	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04
Agriculture & Life Sciences						
Male	1.0%	2.4%	1.9%	1.4%	0.0%	2.4%
Female	0.0%	5.7%	2.5%	4.8%	4.8%	8.1%
No. of Females Departing	0	2	1	2	2	3
Architecture & Urban Studies						
Male	3.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Female	0.0%	4.3%	0.0%	0.0%	24.0%	7.6%
No. of Females Departing	0	1	0	0	6	2
Business						
Male	3.7%	1.2%	2.5%	2.5%	1.2%	2.7%
Female	4.5%	4.0%	7.4%	0.0%	3.5%	8.3%
No. of Females Departing	1	1	2	0	1	2

Table 5 (continued): Voluntary Departures by College:

Engineering						
Male	0.7%	3.0%	2.3%	1.1%	1.1%	3.9%
Female	6.2%	0.0%	8.3%	0.0%	9.5%	0.0%
No. of Females Departing	1	0	2	0	2	0
Liberal Arts & Human Sciences						
Male	1.0%	1.5%	2.1%	2.1%	0.6%	2.5%
Female	0.8%	4.7%	6.3%	4.6%	2.5%	6.5%
No. of Females Departing	1	6	8	6	3	7
Natural Resources						
Male	0.0%	0.0%	1.7%	1.8%	0.0%	2.0%
Female	0.0%	0.0%	25.0%	0.0%	16.6%	0.0%
No. of Females Departing	0	0	1	0	1	0
Science						
Male	2.0%	2.1%	2.1%	1.6%	0.0%	1.2%
Female	7.6%	0.0%	0.0%	2.9%	0.0%	10.3%
No. of Females Departing	2	0	0	1	0	3
Veterinary Medicine						
Male	1.5%	1.5%	3.0%	0.0%	3.3%	5.0%
Female	0.0%	6.2%	6.6%	7.1%	0.0%	0.0%
No. of Females Departing	0	1	1	1	0	0

These data suggest that Virginia Tech has a particular challenge in retaining highly recruited women, and that a disproportionate number of women, compared to men, are choosing to leave Virginia Tech. The remainder of this report draws from the literature on academic faculty to set the local experience in a national context, and to utilize new survey results to gain a better understanding of why women faculty are choosing to leave Virginia Tech, or perhaps to abandon a faculty career altogether.

Voluntary Female Faculty Departures in Context

Higher voluntary departure rates for women at Virginia Tech are also reflected in the research on faculty nationwide. Greater levels of dissatisfaction with opportunities for advancement and professional development, salary, quality of benefits, and job security are attributed to higher departure rates among women faculty (Rosser, 2004). Climate issues in the work place and roles assumed by women outside of work are additional factors that contribute to disproportionate departure rates among women faculty (August & Waltman, 2004; Menges & Exum, 1983; Perna, 2001; Rosser, 2004; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004). Women in pre-tenured positions are the most adversely affected by these confounding influences as assistant professors tend to be less satisfied with their career when compared to faculty at other ranks (August & Waltman, 2004; Rosser, 2004).

Departmental climate is another factor in the work environment that explains the high turnover among female faculty (August & Waltman, 2004). Women faculty members indicate they are less satisfied with the personal influence they have relative to departmental decisions and are less content with their relationship with the department chairperson (August & Waltman, 2004).

Under-representation among women in assistant, associate, and professor positions on college campuses presents additional issues in regard to career satisfaction, work life balance, and intentions to leave the profession. Women are often asked to assume responsibilities that take up substantial amounts of a faculty member's time and are often duties which receive little recognition and/or disparate compensation. For instance, women find themselves serving on a disproportionate number of committees, assigned heavier teaching loads, and they spend more time mentoring students than male faculty (Menges & Exum, 1983). Junior women faculty receive little mentoring as to how to prioritize competing demands on their time and find themselves overwhelmed, making them especially vulnerable to burn-out (Rosser, 2004).

A more holistic approach to examining the departure rates of female faculty takes into account a faculty member's non-work life as well as satisfaction with the work environment (Olsen, Maple, & Stage, 1995). Spousal employment is an important factor in the decision to leave a current job for women faculty (Perna, 2001). In addition, women are more likely to consider changing jobs if they perceive another institutional type would allow them to better manage work and non-work duties (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004).

Trends in female faculty departures reported in the literature provide a national context that universities can utilize to more closely examine departures on their respective campuses. Institution-specific data such as the Virginia Tech Faculty and Staff Exit Survey makes it possible to determine whether trends reported nationally are reflected among tenured and tenure-track women faculty at the university.

Virginia Tech Faculty and Staff Exit Survey Data

Initiated in 2004, the Faculty and Staff Exit Surveys were distributed to former employees who leave the university so that reasons for leaving and views on the work environment at Virginia Tech can be collected. Responses from 49 faculty (26 females, 23 males) who were employed in a tenured or tenure-track position and departed between May 2002 and December 2004 were collected by the Center for Survey Research. The survey was broad in scope, asking questions about university and departmental climate and work conditions; perceptions of morale, motivation, treatment, and worklife balance; and factors influencing their decision to leave VT.

For the tenured and tenure track faculty members who left, there were clearly issues of concern about competitive salaries (cited as a strong or somewhat of an influence by 47.8% of respondents), adequate support for their research (58.7%), degree of support for faculty by university administration (58.5%), and adequate support for higher education from the state (71.7%, the item cited most frequently by these respondents). About two-thirds of respondents somewhat or strongly disagreed with the statement "Overall, I was satisfied with my employment at Virginia Tech." Half of the respondents agreed, and half disagreed, with the statement "My department at Virginia Tech was a good place to

work.” The mean scores of male and female respondents did not differ significantly on these items, except that men were more likely than women to cite state support for higher education and opportunities for advancement and promotion as strong or somewhat of a factor in their decision to leave.

However, survey responses did reveal statistically significant differences between the mean scores of male and female respondents on a number of items, including perceptions of treatment in the work environment and climate at both the university and department levels. Male faculty members are significantly more likely to say they were treated with respect and received fair treatment while employed at VT, and men were more likely than women to agree the VT campus is free of intimidation, harassment, and discrimination.

Responses to several items suggest that male respondents experienced a departmental climate more conducive to their success than did women (see Table 5 below). Males were more likely than females to report that they were treated with respect by other members of the department, that their work was valued by colleagues, and that they were recognized for the contributions they made. More men also reported that they had opportunities to participate in meetings where policy decisions were made. Women are significantly more likely to report feeling intimidated, harassed, or discriminated against in their departments.

Table 5: Selected Exit Survey Items with Statistically Significant* Differences by Gender:
(N=49)

	% M Strongly/ Somewhat Agree	% F Strongly/ Somewhat Agree
I was treated with respect while employed at VT	82.6	53.9
I received fair treatment while employed at VT	78.3	53.9
In general, the VT campus is free of intimidation, harassment, and discrimination	82.6	53.8
I felt intimidated, harassed, or discriminated against in my department	0.0	23.0
I was treated with respect by other members of my department	91.3	76.9
I felt as if my work was valued in my department	73.9	61.5
I was recognized for the contributions I made to the department	82.6	61.6
I was asked to participate in meetings in which important policy decisions affecting my department were made	86.9	57.7

* $p \leq .05$

It is an appropriate question to ask whether the perceptions and experiences of faculty members who have left Virginia Tech mirror those who remain. We are fortunate to have two surveys administered in close time proximity that covered similar topics and even utilized many of the same questions so that comparisons can be made between those who have left and those who remain.

AdvanceVT Survey Data

The *AdvanceVT* Survey, administered during the Spring of 2005, collected information on different factors that shape the work environment for faculty who are **currently** employed. All instructional and research faculty members were surveyed with a 60%

response rate. Responses from the 816 tenured and tenure-track faculty (217 females, 599 males) were examined using a 2x2 contingency table analysis to determine if there were significant differences by gender on the survey items. Results reveal significant differences by gender in regard to perceptions of the university climate and the departmental work environment. Survey findings relative to the work environment have significant implications for the retention of women faculty as they reflect reasons attributed to the voluntary departures reported in the literature.

Women are significantly less likely to agree that the campus is free of intimidation and harassment with more women reporting that they have been exposed to offensive comments or materials in the workplace. Men are more likely to agree that faculty members are treated fairly regardless of their gender. Conversely, significantly fewer women report receiving fair treatment, and they are significantly less likely to agree that there is accountability for sexist behavior. Career satisfaction among women faculty is adversely affected as females are less satisfied with their workload, job security, and opportunities for advancement (see Table 6 below).

Table 6: AdvanceVT Survey Items Pertaining to the University Climate with Statistically Significant* Differences by Gender (N=816)

	% M Strongly/ Somewhat Agree	% F Strongly/ Somewhat Agree
In general, the Virginia Tech campus is free of intimidation, harassment, and discrimination.	77.9	48.0
I have read, heard and/or seen insensitive or disparaging comments or materials in the workplace that were offensive to me.	26.9	52.9
Faculty members are treated fairly at Virginia Tech regardless of their gender.	77.7	41.4
I receive fair treatment at Virginia Tech.	81.0	71.9
There is accountability at Virginia Tech for sexist behavior.	70.6	24.6
	% M Very/Somewhat Satisfied	% F Very/Somewhat Satisfied
Satisfaction with work load.	69.1	58.3
Satisfaction with job security.	88.8	79.3
Satisfaction with opportunity for advancement.	75.6	62.4

* $p \leq .05$

Issues associated with voluntary departures among women are further illustrated by examining significant differences by gender in relation to the departmental work environment. Women are more likely to report a climate that is counterproductive to success, a significantly higher percentage cite problems with sexual harassment and they are less likely to report being treated with respect by colleagues in their department. Furthermore, women are significantly less likely to agree that colleagues in their department value their field of study. These issues may account for the higher percentage of women reporting that there is a lot of conflict in their department.

Women faculty members are significantly less likely to believe that their department head would intervene if racist or sexist behavior occurred, and they are more likely to express concern that freely voicing their opinions may be held against them. Another area of concern that can be addressed by greater transparency of departmental policies and practices is the feeling from women respondents that other faculty in the department have

greater access to information about policies and opportunities than they do (refer to Table 7).

Table 7: Selected AdvanceVT Survey Items Pertaining to the Departmental Climate with Statistically Significant* Differences by Gender (N=816)

	% M Strongly/ Somewhat Agree	% F Strongly/ Somewhat Agree
My department is supportive of the success of women faculty.	93.8	74.9
Sexual harassment is a problem in my department.	2.4	8.3
My department head/supervisor would be unlikely to intervene if racist or sexist behavior occurred.	17.8	31.1
I feel free to express my opinions in my job without worrying about negative results	73.8	57.3
I am treated with respect by other faculty members of my department.	88.0	74.7
My field or area of study is valued by colleagues in my department.	81.7	68.8
There is a lot of conflict in my department.	26.1	36.9
Other faculty in my department seem to know about policies or opportunities of which I am unaware.	27.6	41.0

* $p \leq .05$

The *AdvanceVT* Survey found many additional significant differences by gender in the experiences and perceptions of faculty members. More detailed reports on these findings will be available on the *AdvanceVT* website (www.advance.vt.edu).

Conclusions

The investigation of voluntary departure rates among tenured and tenure-track faculty over the last six years has highlighted an issue of serious concern for Virginia Tech. The disproportionately high rates of female departures is at least one reason for the slow rate of progress in diversifying the faculty over the last decade, despite significantly increased availability of women in the doctoral pool. While the research literature documents the pervasiveness of the “leaky pipeline” for women at every stage of an academic career (American Association of University Professors, 2004), it remains our urgent responsibility to understand the factors associated with voluntary resignations at Virginia Tech and to address those that are within our control. Retaining the talented faculty members that we have worked so hard to recruit is critical to building the excellence we seek.

Two very rich sources of data are now available to explore gender differences in reasons for resignation for tenured and tenure track faculty who have left Virginia Tech, and in perceptions of experience for those who remain on the faculty. Pairing results of the Exit Survey with the *AdvanceVT* survey suggests that women faculty members experience a considerably less supportive climate than do men. They feel less valued, are treated with less respect, are more likely to feel intimidated or harassed, and feel they are less well informed about their progress and departmental policies than are men. They are more likely to question the transparency and fairness of salaries, resource allocation, and treatment. While there are clearly concerns about university-level issues, it is life in the departments that seems to jump out of the survey results. Such negative perceptions

about the work environment and relationships with colleagues and administrators erode women's career satisfaction and their commitment to Virginia Tech.

Difficulties balancing family and work demands are also important considerations for women faculty members, which we have not highlighted in this report. Additional data, both qualitative and quantitative are available in other new reports drawn from the Advance survey and from focus groups conducted in April 2005.

The message of this report is not new. It is essentially the same message conveyed in the campus wide climate surveys conducted in 1998. The perceptions of male and female faculty members remain worlds apart on some dimensions. And some men have little clue as to the extent of this gap in perception or their role in creating or sustaining an environment that is less welcoming to women.

A commitment to build and retain an excellent faculty requires us to address these issues more effectively and urgently than we have in the past. Here are a few steps that can be taken to address some of the issues identified in this report and the two surveys. Clearly a collective conversation will be needed.

- Detailed examination of responses to the surveys are important clues about problems encountered by faculty members, and especially differences in perception and experience by gender. Results from both surveys provide benchmarking data to monitor policies and educational sessions designed to promote a more inclusive campus and departmental climate.
- The EO Office is working on a proposal for university wide harassment prevention training. This needs to be a priority for everyone. Department heads especially are in a position to make clear that sexist and racist behavior will not be tolerated.
- Equity and transparency in departmental decision making can be improved. Performance evaluations, salary decisions, and resource allocations can be made more equitable, with the basis of such decisions shared more broadly.
- Providing constructive feedback to faculty members on an annual basis is an important priority for department heads and deans.
- Issues of balancing work and family need addressing at both the personal and policy levels to make it easier for women faculty members to succeed in an academic career.
- Department heads or departmental personnel committees would benefit from conducting exit interviews with departing faculty to get a better handle on reasons for leaving and how to improve retention of productive faculty members.
- Conversations with women faculty BEFORE they decide to leave can make a difference if identified issues are then addressed. Asking the simple question "What can we do to make it possible for you to be even more successful?" is one way to lead into what might be an informative conversation.

References

- American Association of University Professors. (2004, Nov/Dec). Balancing faculty careers and family work. *Academe*, 90(6). Available at:
<http://www.aaup.org/publications/Academe/2004/04nd/04ndtoc.htm>
- August, L. & Waltman, J. (2004). Culture, climate, and contribution: Career satisfaction among female faculty. *Research in Higher Education*, 45(2), 177-192.
- Creamer, E. G. (1998). Assessing faculty publication productivity: Issues of equity. *ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report*, 26(2). Washington, D.C.: The George Washington University, Graduate School of Education and Human Development.
- Menges, R.J. & Exum, W.E. (1983). Barriers to the progress of women and minority faculty. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 54(2), 123-144.
- Olsen, D., Maple, S.A., & Stage, F.K. (1995). Women and minority faculty job satisfaction: professional role interests, professional satisfactions, and institutional fit. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 66(3), 267-294.
- Perna, L. (2001). The relationship between family responsibilities and employment status among college and university faculty. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 72(5), 584-611.
- Rosser, V.J. (2004). Faculty members' intentions to leave: A national study on their work life and satisfaction. *Research in Higher Education*, 45(3), 285-306.
- Ward, K. & Wolf-Wendel, L. (2004). Academic motherhood: Managing complex roles in research universities. *The Review of Higher Education*, 27(2), 233-257.