

Voluntary Departures among Faculty at Virginia Tech: Differences by Race/Ethnicity

Patricia Hyer, Associate Provost, and
Catherine Amelink, Coordinator of Special Projects, Office of the Provost

The departure of any contributing faculty member is an institutional concern, and understanding why valuable faculty members leave is critical to determining more effective retention strategies. The loss of minority faculty is especially concerning because racial and ethnic minority faculty members remain seriously underrepresented on college campuses nationally and each departure has special ripple effects throughout the campus (Harvey & Anderson, 2005; Menges & Exum, 1983). While disparity in representation is an issue in and of itself, small numbers of minority faculty and administrators also make it more difficult to create a more inclusive campus climate (Branch, 2001). Meaningful interaction between minority students and faculty members that might result in better student retention is clearly hampered when racial and ethnic minority faculty members have only token representation (Antonio, 2003; Branch, 2001).

Under-representation among minority faculty is further exacerbated by the disproportionate number of non-white faculty who depart from academia before they attain a senior position (Harvey & Anderson, 2005; Menges & Exum, 1983). The literature identifies several reasons for higher departure rates for minority faculty including discriminatory campus climates that lead to a sense of marginalization (Branch, 2001; Viernes Turner, 2002; Wiley, 2001). Faculty of color are more likely to cite feeling demoralized by heavier teaching loads and committee duties, as well as receiving less support for their research interests (Thompson & Dey, 1998).

Discriminatory and unwelcome climates may also account for the disparity in rates of promotion among racial and ethnic minorities when compared to white faculty (Branch, 2001). African-American faculty, in particular, view the promotion and tenure process as highly stressful and feel they do not receive recognition for research and scholarship interests, especially when they focus on the experiences of minority groups (Thompson & Dey, 1998). In addition, minority faculty members perceive their work load as greater than that of their co-workers since they are asked to take on more committee assignments and other administrative duties than their non-minority colleagues (Branch, 2001; Viernes Turner, 2002). Minority faculty members also speak of the unfair burden of having to be “bicultural” in order to navigate the norms of majority white institutions. Yet the majority faculty members are often oblivious to the deeply embedded cultural patterns that define daily interactions and success in academe and they feel no responsibility for learning the norms of another culture (Johnsrud & Sadao, 1998). These factors interact with one another and lead minority faculty to depart from institutions of higher education at a greater rate than their white colleagues (Menges & Exum, 1983).

This report focuses specifically on voluntary departures at Virginia Tech, with the goal of identifying the rates of voluntary resignations among various types of faculty members over recent years. Data from two surveys provide some clues as to similarities and differences in reasons for departure and perceptions of the work environment at Virginia Tech.

University-Wide Trends in Voluntary Departures

Data from the university's personnel system covering the eight years, 1998-99 through 2005-06, were examined to identify trends in voluntary departures by minority status. Because work environments, expectations, and job responsibilities differ according to faculty appointment type, trends are analyzed for the three major categories of faculty employment: for tenured and tenure-track faculty, for administrative and professional faculty, and for special research faculty. This report does not include an analysis of non-tenure track instructional faculty positions, such as instructor or visiting professor, because of the temporary nature of many of these appointments.

A separate report [http://www.provost.vt.edu/documents/Voluntary_Departures.pdf] examined voluntary departures by gender from the university.

Minority status in this report denotes faculty who are self-identified as Asian, African-American, Hispanic, and Native American with U.S. citizenship or permanent residency. This report focuses on voluntary departures and excludes faculty members who left involuntarily because of death, non-reappointment, or tenure denial as well as faculty who retired. Voluntary departures include faculty members who leave for a wide variety of reasons. Some accepted better offers, higher salaries, or promotions at other institutions. Some resigned to pursue advanced degrees on a full-time basis at Virginia Tech or elsewhere. Others left due to insufficient opportunities for their spouses, personal reasons, or dissatisfaction with the climate, institution, or their specific job.

Some caution is advised in overinterpreting the reasons provided for departure since these are provided by departmental personnel and they may not reflect the individual's reasons for departing.

Voluntary Departures Among Tenured and Tenure-Track Faculty

The data in Table 1 document the fluctuation in overall size of the tenured and tenure-track faculty during these years. Budget reductions in 2001-03 resulted in a dramatic loss of faculty positions, most through an early retirement incentive program, but also through departures of faculty members with better opportunities. Not surprisingly the vast majority of retirees were white -- the number of white faculty members went down 13% between 1999-2000 and 2003-04, the year when total faculty size was at its lowest in recent times. However, the number of minority faculty members increased every year during this 8-year period. The number of foreign scholars also increased every year during this period from less than 1% of the tenure-track faculty to over 5% of the tenure-track faculty.

Table 1 also allows us to compare the voluntary departure rate of white (and non-resident alien) faculty members and that of minority faculty members. The departure rate is calculated by taking the number of faculty members who voluntarily resigned throughout the year and comparing that to the fall census count. While the rates vary from year to year, the overall departure rate for minority faculty members is very similar to that of white faculty members. In 1998-99, the minority departure rate is higher; in other years, the rate is lower or about the same. The 8-year trend is actually slightly lower than the white rate.

Table 1. Voluntary Departure Rates of White and Minority Tenured and Tenure-Track Faculty Members, 1998-99 to 2005-06

	White and Non-Resident Alien			Minorities		
	Number Employed	Number Departing Voluntarily	Voluntary Departure Rate	Number Employed	Number Departing Voluntarily	Voluntary Departure Rate
1998-99	1221	17	1.4%	131	4	3.1%
1999-00	1260	31	2.5%	141	3	2.1%
2000-01	1246	32	2.6%	148	3	2.0%
2001-02	1255	25	2.0%	163	4	2.5%
2002-03	1167	21	1.8%	163	1	0.6%
2003-04	1095	37	3.4%	164	6	3.7%
2004-05	1110	27	2.4%	169	3	1.8%
2005-06	1136	17	1.5%	190	1	0.5%
over the 8 years	9490	207	2.2%	1269	25	2.0%

Highlighted rows indicate notably higher departure rates.

Examining departure trends of tenured and tenure track faculty by racial and ethnic group provides additional context when considering the long-term effects departures have on creating community among minority faculty (refer to Table 2). Over an eight-year period African Americans constituted 3.9% of the total departing faculty while during that same period of time they comprised 3.0% of the total tenured and tenure-track faculty.

Table 2. Voluntary Departures by Race/Ethnicity among Tenured and Tenure-Track Faculty 1998-99 to 2005-06

	Minority Detail - Departures Only						Total Departures
	Hispanic	Asian	Black	Amer Ind	Total Minorities	NR Alien	
1998-99		3	1		4	0	21
1999-00		2	1		3	0	34
2000-01		2		1	3	1	35
2001-02		1	3		4	2	29
2002-03	1				1	0	22
2003-04		3	2	1	6	2	43
2004-05		2	1		3	1	30
2005-06			1		1	1	18
over the 8 years	1	13	9	2	25	7	232
% of Total Departures	0.4%	5.6%	3.9%	0.9%	10.8%	3.0%	
% of Total Faculty	1.5%	6.9%	3.0%	0.4%	11.8%	2.6%	

Voluntary Departures among Administrative and Professional Faculty

Administrative and professional (A/P) faculty members serve in a wide variety of non-tenure track roles at Virginia Tech. They are employed as counselors, physicians, librarians, coaches, academic advisors, extension agents, professional staff in student affairs, development officers, and executives and managers in both academic and

administrative units. These positions are characterized by a higher turnover rate than among tenured and tenure-track faculty members. The data in Table 3 document the significant reduction in overall numbers of A/P faculty between 2001-02 and 2003-04, after which the number of positions is rebuilding. Unlike the case of the tenured and tenure-track faculty members, however, the voluntary departure rate for minority A/P faculty members is notably higher than the rate for whites throughout the 8-year period.

Table 3. Voluntary Departure Rates for White and Minority A/P Faculty Members, 1998-99 to 2005-06

	White and Non-Resident Alien			Minorities		
	Number Employed	Number Departing Voluntarily	Voluntary Departure Rate	Number Employed	Number Departing Voluntarily	Voluntary Departure Rate
1998-99	627	34	5.4%	80	10	12.5%
1999-00	651	39	6.0%	85	10	11.8%
2000-01	681	50	7.3%	90	10	11.1%
2001-02	725	38	5.2%	92	4	4.3%
2002-03	668	49	7.3%	81	8	9.9%
2003-04	629	44	7.0%	78	10	12.8%
2004-05	667	60	9.0%	76	8	10.5%
2005-06	716	57	8.0%	86	5	5.8%
over the 8 years	5364	371	6.9%	668	65	9.7%

Highlighted rows indicate notably higher departure rates.

Examining departures by racial/ethnic group reveals that the departure rate for African Americans is notably greater than their proportion among A/P faculty. The mix of faculty members from different racial/ethnic backgrounds varies for each category of faculty position. African Americans have greatest representation among A/P faculty, while Asians are more heavily represented in both tenured and tenure-track positions and among special research faculty positions.

Table 4. Voluntary Departures by Race/Ethnicity among Administrative/Professional Faculty 1998-99 through 2005-06

	Minority Detail - Departures Only						Total Departures
	Hispanic	Asian	Black	Amer Ind	Total Minorities	NR Alien	
1998-99	1		9		10	0	44
1999-00		1	9		10	0	49
2000-01	2	1	7		10	0	60
2001-02	1		3		4	0	42
2002-03	1		6	1	8	0	57
2003-04		1	9		10	0	54
2004-05		1	7		8	0	68
2005-06		1	4		5	1	62
over the 8 years	5	5	54	1	65	1	436
% of Total Departures	1.1%	1.1%	12.4%	0.2%	14.9%	0.2%	
% of Total Faculty	0.6%	0.7%	9.7%	0.1%	11.1%	0.3%	

Voluntary Departures among Special Research Faculty

Special research faculty members hold such ranks as postdoctoral associate, research associate, research scientist, and project associate. These faculty members are typically funded by sponsored grants and contracts, and they are usually on restricted appointments due to the uncertain nature of their funding, which accounts in part for the higher departure rate. In addition, postdoctoral associate positions are considered training positions for those planning to enter a tenure-track or permanent research position. Hence these positions in particular are expected to turn over after several years of employment.

Unlike positions funded from state sources, the number of research faculty positions has increased every year during this period, as the university's funded research has grown. The number of minority faculty members has also increased every year. The overall minority departure rate over this period is about the same as the departure rate for white and foreign faculty members.

Table 5. Voluntary Departure Rates for White and Minority Special Research Faculty, 1998-99 to 2005-06

	White and Non-Resident Alien			Minorities		
	Number Employed	Number Departing Voluntarily	Voluntary Departure Rate	Number Employed	Number Departing Voluntarily	Voluntary Departure Rate
1998-99	267	50	18.7%	30	6	20.0%
1999-00	295	72	24.4%	33	9	27.3%
2000-01	324	51	15.7%	33	5	15.2%
2001-02	356	65	18.3%	43	7	16.3%
2002-03	391	54	13.8%	47	6	12.8%
2003-04	412	58	14.1%	43	8	18.6%
2004-05	434	71	16.4%	61	5	8.2%
2005-06	466	46	9.9%	61	9	14.8%
over the 8 years	2945	467	15.9%	351	55	15.7%

Highlighted rows indicate notably higher departure rates.

Foreign scholars increased from about 20% of the special research faculty to 30% in 2005-06. Since most are on H1B or other non-permanent visas, they are more likely to depart the university when their visas expire. This pattern is reflected in the much higher departure trends among "non-resident alien" faculty members below (refer to Table 6). Faculty members from other racial and ethnic minority groups have departure rates comparable to their proportion among the faculty.

Table 6. Voluntary Departures by Race/Ethnicity among Research Faculty 1998-99 to 2005-06

	Minority Detail - Departures Only					NR Alien	Total Departures
	Hispanic	Asian	Black	Amer Ind	Total Minorities		
1998-99	1	4	1		6	18	56
1999-00		6	3		9	31	81
2000-01	1	3	1		5	21	56
2001-02		6	1		7	35	72
2002-03	1	4	1		6	31	60
2003-04		2	6		8	29	66
2004-05		4	1		5	39	76
2005-06	2	6		1	9	18	55
over the 8 years	5	35	14	1	55	222	522
% of Total Departures	1.0%	6.7%	2.7%	0.2%	10.5%	42.5%	
% of Total Faculty	1.3%	6.7%	2.6%	0.1%	10.6%	26.1%	

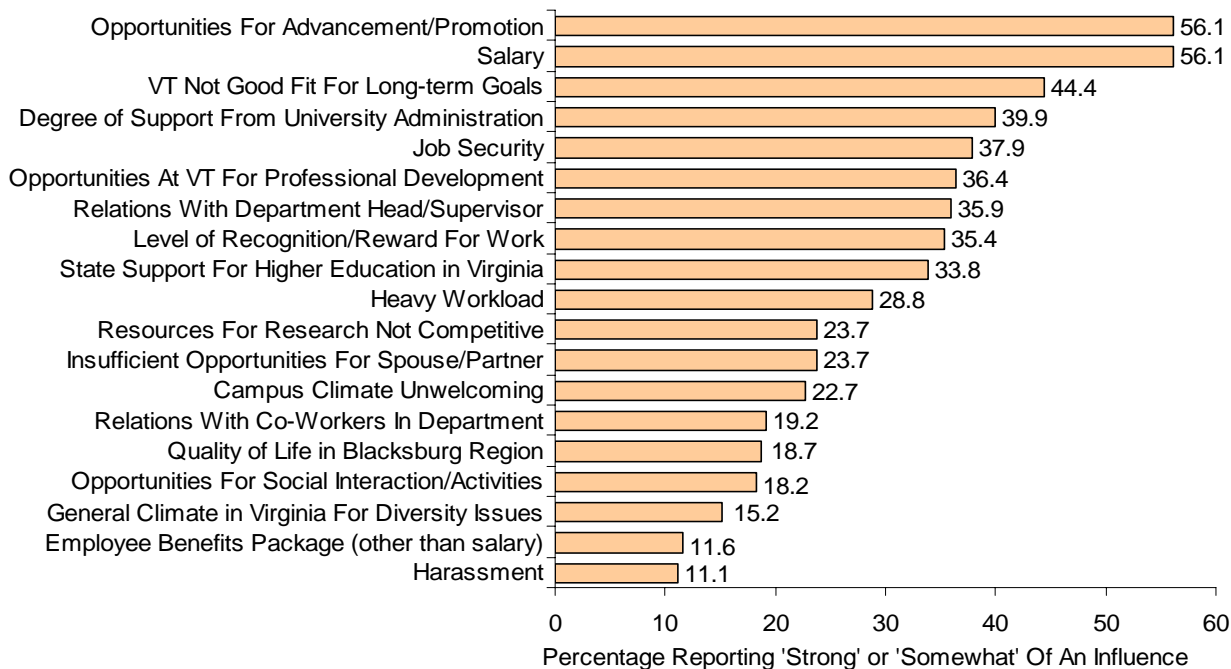
Reasons Cited for Departure

The Faculty and Staff Exit Surveys were distributed by the Center for Survey Research to employees who left the university between May 2002 and December 2004 to collect information on their reasons for leaving and views on the work environment at Virginia Tech. Responses were received from 49 tenured and tenure-track faculty, 41 instructional faculty who were not tenure eligible, 78 research faculty, and 74 administrative professional faculty. [An executive summary of the survey results can be found online at http://www.provost.vt.edu/documents/Executive_Summary.pdf]. The survey was broad in scope, asking questions about university and departmental climate and work conditions; perceptions of morale, motivation, treatment, and work-life balance; and factors influencing their decision to leave Virginia Tech. Breakdown by racial and ethnic groups are reported in Table 7. Low numbers of minority faculty respondents required grouping responses by faculty type and minority status, unfortunately masking what might be important differences.

Table 7. Respondent Faculty Designation (N=242)

Race	Instructional Faculty – Tenured/Tenure-Track	Instructional Faculty – Non Tenure Eligible	Research Faculty	Administrative/Professional Faculty	Total
Amer. Indian/Alaskan Native	0	0	0	1	1
Asian	0	2	22	1	25
Black	2	2	2	5	11
Caucasian	45	37	54	67	203
Hispanic	2	0	0	0	2

Respondents indicated which factors were possible influences on faculty decisions to leave VT. Faculty members whose contract ended or their funding was terminated did not respond to this survey item. Refer to Figure 1.

Figure 1. Factors Influencing Faculty Decisions to Leave

There were statistically significant differences by minority status in factors influencing decisions to leave among faculty.

- Minority respondents were more likely than whites to cite salary, the quality of life in Blacksburg, and the general climate in Virginia for diversity as reasons for leaving Virginia Tech.
- White faculty were more likely than minorities to cite state support for higher education.
- Specifically among minority groups, African Americans were more likely than other minorities to cite campus climate and general climate in Virginia for diversity as reasons for leaving.
- Other minorities were more likely than African Americans to cite lack of opportunities for their spouse/partner as a reason for leaving.

The majority of faculty respondents (53%) expressed confidence in university leadership; minority faculty expressed more confidence than white faculty. Fifty-four percent (54%) of the respondents agreed that the morale among faculty at VT is good. Minority faculty respondents perceived faculty morale to be better than white respondents. They were also more likely than white respondents to agree that VT provides an environment that motivates faculty to do their best work.

Indicators of campus climate reveal that different perceptions are held among minority and non-minority faculty by faculty types. The direction of these responses mirrors much of the literature in which white faculty members are less aware of sexism and racism in daily interactions or decision making.

- Among tenure-track faculty, white respondents were more likely than minority respondents to agree that jokes, negative comments about gender, race, ethnicity, disability, age, and sexual orientation are not tolerated at VT.

- Among tenure-track faculty, white respondents were significantly more likely than respondents of other races to agree that VT treats faculty members fairly regardless of gender or sexual orientation.
- Among research faculty, minority respondents were also significantly more likely than whites to report they had read, heard, and/or seen insensitive or disparaging comments or materials in the workplace that were offensive.

Significant differences were seen with regard to departmental leadership across faculty types. White faculty were less likely than other races to agree their department head provided useful recommendations on how to improve job performance. Among tenured and tenure-track faculty, white respondents were significantly more likely to view VT as a good place to cultivate friendships and are more likely to report a good relationship with co-workers at VT.

Minority respondents were more likely than white respondents to report that they had the equipment and space they needed while employed at VT and that they received an adequate orientation when they started their job. However minority respondents on the tenure track were less likely than their white counterparts to report that they received adequate opportunities for training while employed.

Across faculty types, minority respondents were more likely to agree VT cares about the home life of faculty. However, minority respondents were significantly less likely than white faculty to agree that there is a good quality of life in Blacksburg. Among minority respondents, African Americans were even less likely than other groups to agree there is a good quality of life in Blacksburg.

Summary

Results from the Exit Survey are consistent with trends reported nationally with regard to reasons minority faculty cite for leaving faculty positions. Lack of an inclusive climate at Virginia Tech and in the Blacksburg area is significant factor contributing to voluntary departures among minority faculty, particularly African Americans. Minority faculty may also feel marginalized in a work environment that appears to tolerate negative comments about gender, race, ethnicity, disability, age, and sexual orientation and where minority faculty are more likely to be exposed to offensive comments or materials. Lack of representation among minorities across faculty types and isolation within departments may limit their ability to establish a strong sense of community. Salary issues were also cited as a significant factor.

While indicative of issues that should be addressed, survey results, such as these, cannot tell the whole story. Interpretation of the data needs to be cautious because of small numbers of minority respondents and the consequent grouping of responses in ways that might mask important differences.

References

- Antonio, A.L. (2003). Diverse student bodies, diverse faculties. *Academe*, 89(6), 14-17.
- Branch, A.J. (2001). How to retain African-American faculty during times of challenge in higher education. In L. Jones (Ed.), *Retaining African Americans in Higher education* (pp. 175-192). Stylus: Sterling, VA.
- Harvey, W.B., & Anderson, E.L. (2005). *Minorities in Higher Education: Twenty-First Annual Status Report 2003-2004*. Washington, DC: American Council on Education.
- Johnsrud, L. K. & Sadao, K. C. (1998). The common experience of "otherness": Ethnic and racial minority faculty in the academy. *Review of Higher Education*, 21(4) 315-342.
- Menges, R.J., & Exum, W.H. (1983). Barriers to the progress of women and minority faculty. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 54(2), 123-144.
- Thompson, C.J., & Dey, E.L. (1998). Pushed to the margins: Sources of stress for African American college and university faculty. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 69(3), 324-345.
- Viernes Turner, C.S. (2002). Women of color in academe: Living with multiple marginality. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 73(1), 74-96.
- Wiley, J.W. (2001). Retaining African-American administrators: A subconscious deluge of neglect or a conscious subterfuge of reject? In L. Jones (Ed.), *Retaining African Americans in Higher education* (pp.125-148). Stylus: Sterling, VA.