

# When Winning Is Really Losing: Teaching Awards and Women Political Science Faculty

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## ABSTRACT

Based on a recent survey of political science professors in the United States, women tend to win teaching awards at higher rates than their male counterparts. This may seem like good news for female faculty, particularly amid continuing reports of gender gaps in publications and citations as well as the “leaky pipeline” phenomenon within promotions. However, a closer look at these findings suggests that in cases in which such awards might be most beneficial to women, they are less likely than their male colleagues to receive such acknowledgments. In fact, women are more likely than men to receive these awards only in institutional contexts in which research output is more important for tenure and promotion than teaching. Thus, the achievement of teaching excellence may have an overall negative impact on the advancement of female faculty by reducing their time and focus available for research.

Within the past decade, increasingly more attention has been given to the existence of gender disparities within academia. More specifically, women appear to be lagging behind men within academic professions in various ways. Recent survey data, however, suggest that women are outperforming their male counterparts in regard to recognition of teaching excellence. In a 2013 national survey of more than 600 political science faculty members, more than one third of respondents (34.5%) reported receiving a teaching award or other teaching recognition from their department, college, or university within the past five years.<sup>1</sup> When categorized by gender, we found that a greater percentage of female faculty members received teaching awards or recognition than male faculty members (39.6% versus 31.4%, respectively). These findings therefore suggest that teaching excellence is an area of academia in which women are *not* underrepresented.

This appears to be a welcome development among seemingly continuous reports of gender disparities within the discipline

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of political science and academia more broadly. For example, a recent article published on behalf of the Committee on the Status of Women in the Profession suggested that the position of women in academia is only partially improving. Although gender parity exists in graduate school enrollments, women achieve professional milestones (e.g., tenure, promotions, and raises) farther down the “pipeline” at lower rates than male academics (Monroe and Chiu 2010). Hesli and Lee (2011) found that women in US political science departments publish less, on average, than their male counterparts and that these results are significant at all ranks. Breuning and Sanders (2007) found that the percentage of publications by women in eight top journals lags behind female representation in these respective fields. However, the authors also found that when comparing submissions by women to those articles that are actually published, women fare comparatively well—having at least as many, if not more, of their articles accepted than their male counterparts. Similarly, Østby, Strand, Nordås, and Gleditsch (2013) found no significant gender bias in terms of the rates of acceptance from submissions in the *Journal of Peace Research*. These findings suggest that the problem is not necessarily with reviewers or editors but rather that women are perhaps less likely to submit their work in the first place.

Of course, not all of the research points to women publishing less than men. In reviewing the gender breakdown of individuals publishing in *Political Communication* and the *International Journal of Press/Politics*, two interdisciplinary journals, Evans and Bucy (2010) found that whereas women did publish less than

men, their rates of publication were actually higher than their representation in the field. Evans and Moulder (2011) found that, again, although publishing less than men overall, women's publication rates in four political science journals (i.e., *American Political Science Review*, *American Journal of Political Science*, *Journal of Politics*, and *PS: Political Science and Politics*) were consistent with the representation of women in the field. Such proportionality also has been found concerning female contributions to edited political science books (Mathews and Andersen 2001). Thus, although women remain underrepresented in political science, recent findings suggest that publication rates are roughly proportional to representation.

Gender gaps, however, may be seen more prominently when we consider specific types of research. In their analysis of four top political science journals, Evans and Moulder (2011) demonstrated that articles by female authors were significantly more likely to be qualitative in nature than articles by male authors; similar results were found in a study by Breuning and Sanders (2007) of eight top political science journals. More dramatic gaps exist concerning the subfield. Kadera (2013) suggested that within the field of international politics, the cultures, institutions, and practices within academia often lead to the undervaluing of women's scholarship. This idea is reinforced by recent research on a possible "citation gap" between the published work of men and of women: Maliniak, Powers, and Walter (2013) found that women are cited less frequently than men in international relations literature, even after controlling for a variety of potentially confounding variables. Similarly, Mitchell, Lange, and Brus (2013) found that male authors and mixed-gender author teams that publish in *International Studies Quarterly (ISQ)* and *International Studies Perspectives (ISP)* were less likely than female authors to cite work by female scholars. This gender gap in citations, however, was not found in the *Journal of Peace Research* (Østby, Strand, Nordås, and Gleditsch 2013).

Despite a few rays of light, existing research paints a bleak picture of the status of women in political science and other academic disciplines. As such, the finding that female academics in our sample demonstrated higher rates of winning teaching awards than their male colleagues appeared to be a welcome change. However, a closer look at these data and a more thorough discussion of the potential implications of this finding suggest that any celebration may be premature.

*Overall, the consideration of how rank and gender intersect in regard to teaching awards suggests that the gains made by women by "winning" such awards actually may not be a victory.*

#### GENDER, TEACHING AWARDS, AND PROFESSIONAL ADVANCEMENT

One of the more important factors in considering the receipt of teaching awards is academic rank. As shown in table 1, teaching awards were most frequently received at the ranks of lecturer, full professor, and emeritus professor. These results are not particularly surprising because faculty at full and emeritus ranks will have had more years of teaching experience, and lecturers are primarily teaching faculty at most universities and colleges. When these totals are categorized by gender, some interesting patterns may be seen.

Table 1

#### Faculty Teaching Awards by Gender and Rank

Rank	Female	Male	All
Part-Time Faculty	0.00% (0/17)	<b>24.14%</b> (7/29)	14.89% (7/47)
Lecturer	36.84% (7/19)	<b>50.00%</b> (10/20)	42.50% (17/40)
Assistant Professor	<b>32.56%</b> (28/86)	22.08% (17/77)	27.44% (45/164)
Associate Professor	<b>53.85%</b> (35/65)	29.63% (32/108)	38.29% (67/175)
Full Professor	<b>48.98%</b> (24/49)	36.89% (45/122)	40.35% (69/171)
Emeritus Professor	100.00% (1/1)	44.44% (4/9)	45.45% (5/11)

Note: Values represent the percentage of respondents who received a teaching award within the past five years. Total N of respondents reporting their gender was 606; N of respondents reporting their rank was 608.

Table 1 shows the breakdown of teaching awards by rank and gender. As indicated in the table, women are more likely than men to receive teaching awards at the assistant, associate, and full professor ranks (note that emeriti professors are excluded due to the small number of women emeriti). This trend suggests that women at all ranks of tenure-track positions are expending significant time and effort to teaching and are being recognized accordingly. This finding is potentially promising and, as such, positive recognition will likely have some value in considerations of tenure and promotion. However, given the extraordinary time and effort required to be an exceptional teacher, this effort is likely to have negative consequences for research productivity. Thus, the possibility exists that female faculty members are spending more time on their teaching, especially in the critical pretenure years, whereas their male colleagues are spending more time on other professional responsibilities—namely, research. This gender-based difference in the allocation of time supports findings (e.g., Breuning and Sanders 2007) that show lower rates of submission for publication by women than men.

Furthermore, for lecturers, for whom teaching may be the primary focus, men are decidedly more likely to receive teaching awards than women in these positions. Thus, for individuals in positions in which teaching awards may provide evidence for promotions and raises, women no longer appear to have an advantage over men in terms of winning them; in fact, the opposite is true.

Overall, the consideration of how rank and gender intersect in regard to teaching awards suggests that the gains made by women by "winning" such awards actually may not be a victory. Given that many political scientists do not value teaching

excellence as highly as research achievements—especially in regard to tenure, promotions, and raises—focusing on teaching and attaining recognition in this area may have a negative impact on the likelihood of professional advancement for women. Furthermore, in positions in which teaching may be more important for advancement and pay (e.g., lecturers), women become less likely to win teaching awards than their male counterparts.

Because research productivity is not valued to the same degree in all institutions, it may be that spending additional time on teaching can be a “winning” strategy for female faculty at liberal arts colleges and other four-year institutions. Unfortunately, as demonstrated in table 2, women are less likely than men to receive teaching awards at four-year institutions—institutions in which excellence in undergraduate education is significantly more likely to be important for tenure and promotion than research productivity.

Women do receive teaching awards at a higher rate than men at all other types of institutions; however, it is again unclear whether this represents an actual benefit for female faculty members. In institutional contexts (e.g., PhD departments) in which research productivity may be more valuable than teaching effectiveness, becoming an exceptional teacher can put female faculty at a disadvantage for tenure and promotions.

**DISCUSSION**

Perhaps it is not surprising that women often are more likely to receive teaching awards than their male counterparts. As many scholars have noted, women tend to spend more hours per week in the classroom and preparing for their classes; teaching, however, often is valued less than research, particularly in regard to tenure and promotion (Park 1996). The relationship between teaching time and research productivity is supported in the literature. For example, Fox (1992) found that the number of courses taught, undergraduate teaching load, hours spent in course preparation, and time for undergraduate advising all were negatively associated with publication productivity. If women are spending more time on teaching (and winning more teaching awards as a result), their research is likely to be negatively affected. Whereas this might not be

problematic in certain institutional contexts, it is undoubtedly detrimental for women at research-oriented institutions.

The results presented in this article suggest that women are likely expending more of their time and effort in teaching than their male counterparts, even at universities in which teaching may be considered less important than research. Given the potentially negative consequences for tenure and promotion, why would female faculty allocate their time in this manner? One explanation is the differing perceptions of expectations for faculty members. In a study of international studies faculty, Hancock, Baum, and Breuning (2013) found that men were considerably more likely than women to believe that their university expected them to devote the majority of their time (i.e., as much as 80%) to research. Correspondingly, female faculty in this study were more likely to believe that their institution expected 40% or less of their time to be directed to research activities. This significant difference suggests that women may underestimate the amount of time that they are expected to spend on research and therefore spend more time on teaching than their male colleagues.

Another possible explanation for different approaches to teaching time may be the perceptions of ability. Recent research posits the existence of a “confidence gap” between male and female faculty. Kay and Shipman (2014) suggest that compared with men, women generally underestimate their professional abilities (e.g., readiness for tenure and promotion). This underestimation of abilities and/or lower level of confidence has the potential to explain many gender-based differences in faculty behavior and performance. Specific to teaching, in which professors must effectively “perform” for an audience of students, female faculty may feel a particular need to not only prepare for class but also to *over-prepare* for their teaching performance. This over-preparation (to overcome the “confidence gap”) could be one factor that explains the higher percentage of women than men receiving teaching awards. Whereas this may have a positive impact in regard to women’s accomplishments in teaching, it is likely to have a negative impact on their research productivity because every hour spent on class preparation is one less hour that can be spent on research. Lower levels of confidence may decrease research output further in more direct ways because women might feel the need to spend more time than men on research projects before submitting them for review.

The amount of time and effort expended on teaching by female faculty members also may be influenced by how women are evaluated in the classroom by their students. Sprague and Massoni (2005) found that students tend to hold certain gendered expectations for faculty members. For example, female professors are expected to be caring and nurturing, whereas male professors are expected to be funny and energetic. The authors also found that students enforce such expectations through their evaluations; specifically, faculty members that fail to conform to these gender expectations receive negative evaluations from students. Certainly, the expectation to conform to gender stereotypes represents a burden for male and female faculty alike, but these burdens may not have an equal impact on other aspects of professional academic life.

To be considered “good” teachers consistent with gendered expectations, female faculty members need to construct relationships with new students each semester and have greater interaction

Table 2

**Faculty Teaching Awards by Gender and Institution**

Type of Institution	Female	Male	All
Two-Year or Community College	<b>30.77%</b> (8/26)	24.24% (8/33)	26.67% (16/60)
Four-Year College or University	40.30% (27/67)	<b>47.69%</b> (31/65)	35.15% (58/165)
Master's Degree-Granting University	<b>33.90%</b> (19/56)	22.73% (20/88)	27.40% (40/146)
PhD-Granting University	<b>45.05%</b> (41/91)	37.58% (56/149)	40.25% (97/241)

Note: Values represent the percentage of respondents who received a teaching award within the past five years. Total N of respondents reporting their gender was 606; N of respondents reporting their institution was 612.

with them inside and outside of the classroom; these nurturing or relationship-based activities often are time-consuming. In our sample, female faculty appear to be meeting these demands and being rewarded accordingly. However, given the amount of time

and not inherently problematic. However, the systematic miscommunication or misperception of faculty expectations should be considered by institutions that seek to address gender disparities in academic professional development. ■

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and effort required to achieve this status, women are likely spending significantly more time on teaching than their male colleagues to achieve positive evaluations.

In conclusion, although it is encouraging that women are doing well in one area of the profession, our findings suggest that women are still “losing” within the larger struggle for gender parity in the academic world. Women appear to be recognized more than men for their teaching but not within the institutional contexts in which such awards and acknowledgments have the most impact. Furthermore, given that more time being spent on teaching must mean less time being spent on something else, such excellence in teaching likely will come at the cost of decreased research activity for female faculty members.

These findings should not be interpreted as suggesting that female faculty should stop caring about teaching or pursue only their research agenda; such solutions are ultimately shortsighted. Rather, these findings suggest that female academics need to think more strategically about advancement within their particular institutional context by ensuring that (1) their perceptions of faculty performance reflect actual institutional policies, and (2) their available work time is allocated accordingly. Stronger efforts in mentoring female faculty (especially junior faculty and advanced graduate students) may improve many of the issues raised in this article, including increased confidence of women in the field, more effective allocation of work time, and practical strategies for professional advancement.

Additionally, and perhaps more important, department chairpersons and other college and university administrators should be mindful of the gendered dimensions involved in issues of professional advancement. To minimize potential misconceptions, institutions should strive for maximum clarity and transparency regarding teaching and research expectations for tenure and promotion. Similarly, chairpersons and other administrators should actively monitor the allocation of teaching and research assistants, course releases, and other institutional resources to ensure that female faculty are not underutilizing these opportunities. Different understandings of what is “important” for professional academics are natural

#### NOTE

1. This survey was sent to 6,291 political science faculty in 20 different states around the United States. A total of 660 individuals responded to the survey, for a response rate of 10.49%.

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