Study analyzes characteristics of political science professors who earn more than others

Submitted by Scott Jaschik on February 1, 2017 - 3:00am

Among political science professors, even controlling for measures of productivity, some types of faculty members earn more than others. A new study [1] published in *PS: Political Science and Politics* seeks to illustrate the characteristics of those who are compensated better. The study is based on an analysis of full-time faculty members who earned Ph.D.s from 2003 through 2008.

Among the findings, based on demographics and career trajectories that the researchers in the study tracked (and controlling for some measures of scholarly success), the study shows that in political science departments:

- Women earn about $3,500 less on average than men do.
- People with children earn an average of $3,420 less than those without children.
- Nonwhite people earn an average of $4,770 less than white people.
- The professors who graduated from top-ranked programs (per the National Research Council) had a significant wage advantage.
- Those who earned Ph.D.s at institutions in the Northeast or West earned more than those who earned doctorates elsewhere.
- The more undergraduate courses a political science professor teaches, the lower their salary is likely to be.
- Negotiating over salary appears to result in gains for male faculty members but not female faculty members.

For many political scientists -- say, a minority woman who earned her Ph.D. at a nonelite institution and who works at a teaching institution -- these factors can build upon one another.

While salary inequities are nothing new in higher education, the study may be significant because it looks at relatively recent cohorts of Ph.D.s who, in theory, were entering the academy at a time when equity was valued, if not assured.

Vicki Hesli Claypool, professor emeritus of political science at the University of Iowa and one of the authors of the study, said via email that she realizes many people can't act on the information in this analysis. Some have been hired at institutions that are focused on teaching undergraduates, for example. Still she said, based on the study, "where wiggle room does exist, in terms of which courses one teaches, yes, I certainly advise to opt for the graduate courses. I believe the benefits of teaching graduate courses are too numerous to list, but here are two: first, one gets paid to review relevant literature for one's own research when one puts together a graduate course. Second, when teaching grad courses, one becomes friends with graduate students who eventually become valuable co-authors."
As for the impact of negotiation, Claypool said it was important that women engage in salary discussions and not simply accept offers, even if men are more likely these days to benefit from such tactics. "A lesson learned from this study is that everyone should negotiate; they should do it regularly and forcefully," she said. "Not all negotiations lead to requests being met, and some superiors may be a bit put off by it, but (on average and over the long run) the potential benefits of negotiating far outweigh any negatives."

The research also has important implications for department chairs and administrators, Claypool said. Her advice to them: "The playing field is not level. Helping out women and minorities is still a good and fair thing to do."

Sara McLaughlin Mitchell, a professor of political science at Iowa and another author of the paper, said via email that one way to help the careers of women is to focus on factors that are rewarded. She noted that the study shows women are rewarded for publications, and yet women publish fewer articles on average than do men. "Institutions could take steps to ensure that female faculty have access to opportunities that promote research productivity, including leave opportunities, lower teaching loads, support for securing external grants, reduced advising and service responsibilities, and access to graduate research assistance," she said.

Further, Mitchell said, women should be encouraged to learn how to negotiate, and departments should educate everyone about gender bias. "I have heard male administrators say that a woman was being too 'pushy' or 'demanding' in negotiations," Mitchell said. "I firmly believe that some of these gender biases can be minimized by a) educating administrators about implicit biases and b) teaching students/faculty how to negotiate, given these biases exist."

The other authors of the paper are Brian David Janssen and Dongkyu Kim, both graduate students at Iowa.

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