ACADEMIC EMPLOYMENT DECISIONS AND GENDER

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This study explored gender differences in the reasons why academics accept or reject offers of faculty positions. Using both open-ended questions and rating scales, 115 academics in the early stages of their careers who had accepted or declined/resigned university positions between 1986 and 1989 were interviewed. Contrary to suggestions in the literature, few significant gender differences emerged. In particular, family needs were a major consideration for both men and women. Responses revealed that both female and male academics who accepted positions generally were influenced most strongly by the academic reputation of the department and university, the compatibility of the appointment with the needs of family members, including dual-career relationships, and the attractiveness of the job offer, especially the length and type of contract. Male rejecters showed a similar pattern while female rejecters focused primarily on family needs and the job offer. Opportunities for personal development, support for research, the job market, teaching assignments, and geographical location were generally less influential for all respondents. Salary and discrimination were cited least frequently as factors underlying employment decisions. The results imply that academic recruiting for both female and male faculty members can be best enhanced by emphasizing the quality of academic life in the department and university, accommodating the needs of family members, and offering greater job security in the form of longer, tenure-track appointments.

The recruitment and retention of female faculty members, a topic of continuing concern at colleges and universities, served as the impetus for this study. Despite a recent upward trend, women currently comprise less than 20 percent of university faculty in Canada, and, at the present rate of increase, it is highly unlikely that gender balance could be achieved in the professoriate this century (Blakeley, 1989). Although recruitment of females was a primary focus of this study, we examined factors motivating academic job decisions of both men and women. It is important to avoid the common error of looking at only one gender and consequently being unable to determine if the findings can be gen-

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eralized to both. Moreover, in Kanter’s words (1977, p.266), “The problem of equality for women cannot be solved without structures that potentially benefit all members more broadly.” In order to identify these structures, we studied both women and men.

The question of how a university can recruit and retain faculty members, especially women, to replace its retiring faculty in the next two decades cannot be answered simply. A comprehensive analysis of the factors contributing to faculty recruitment to and retention in academic positions would require consideration of the effects of many variables at several key decision points. For example, one might ask why individuals study particular subjects, what attracts them to graduate school, or why new Ph.D.s choose academic careers over industry or the public service. At each decision point along the path to an academic career, gender differences could be explored. The purpose of this project was to contribute one element to the analysis of faculty recruitment and retention by focusing on the employment decision and specifically on gender differences in factors that contribute to academics’ decisions to accept or reject offers of employment (especially first jobs) at one university.

**FACTORS INFLUENCING EMPLOYMENT DECISIONS**

To attract academics to university positions, Brakeman (1983) suggested that universities should offer openings that include: the possibility of tenure, good colleagues and leadership, attention to the needs of dual-career couples (an area in which universities lag behind industry; Hileman, 1990), research assistance, and a lack of discrimination. Baldwin and Krotseng (1985) discussed research support, teaching load, colleagues, facilities, and discretionary funds for both travel and symposia as important faculty incentives. Intuitively, salary would seem an important consideration. The relative value placed on research and teaching, the location of the university, and the quality of life in the surrounding community might also influence academics’ employment decisions.

It was after we completed our project that Matier presented data on the relative importance of 33 factors in faculty recruitment (1990a) and retention (1990b). These factors were grouped into intangible benefits (e.g., reputation of the institution, congeniality of associates, and opportunities for career advancement), tangible benefits (e.g., salary, teaching load, and research facilities), and non-work-related benefits (e.g., geographic location, spousal career opportunities, and housing costs). A study by Burke (1988) revealed that professional opportunities, research compatibility, and flexibility in teaching were the most important; reputation of the institution and departmental prestige were second; geographical location and related opportunity for spousal employment third; and intellectual quality of the campus or department fourth as the four most important factors, in that order, underlying academic choices among tenured or tenure-track academics.