

Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost

Navigating Mid-career: Challenges and Opportunities

Noel Estrada Hernandez and Lois J Geist

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Today's Objectives

- Discuss and identify:
 - Perceived and real needs of mid career faculty
 - Perceived and real barriers to promotion
 - Potential strategies to maintain engagement and participation
 - Potential benefits from changing directions



Associate Professors

- What happens after promotion?

Promotion and Tenure

- Being promoted to Associate Professor with tenure suggests that ***“you have made it”***
- Promotion takes the pressure off from the probationary period
- Staying at Associate Professor grants you access to a job and resources, and provides you with the opportunity to re-evaluate your trajectory, your interests, and your choices

Literature on Associate Professors

- May experience:
 - Low morale when compared to other ranks, or when reflecting on time as Assistant Professor
 - Decreased institutional and/or departmental attention relative to pre-tenure faculty
 - Lack of mentoring and career planning
 - Lack of clarity regarding promotion criteria

(Baldwin & Chang, 2006; Pruitt et al., 2010; Strange & Merdinger, 2014)
- Some call it an “academic midlife crisis”.

Literature on Associate Professors

- Additional challenges
 - Disproportionate service or administrative duties that interfere with progress toward promotion, especially for women and minority faculty
 - Unclear and inconsistent feedback and communication from DEOs, Deans, or senior colleagues
 - Low recognition and appreciation for multiple projects
 - Low job satisfaction

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UI Snapshot of Tenured Associate Professors



UI Snapshot of Tenured Associate Professors

31%

- Associate Professors at UI
- (456 out of 1465)

40%

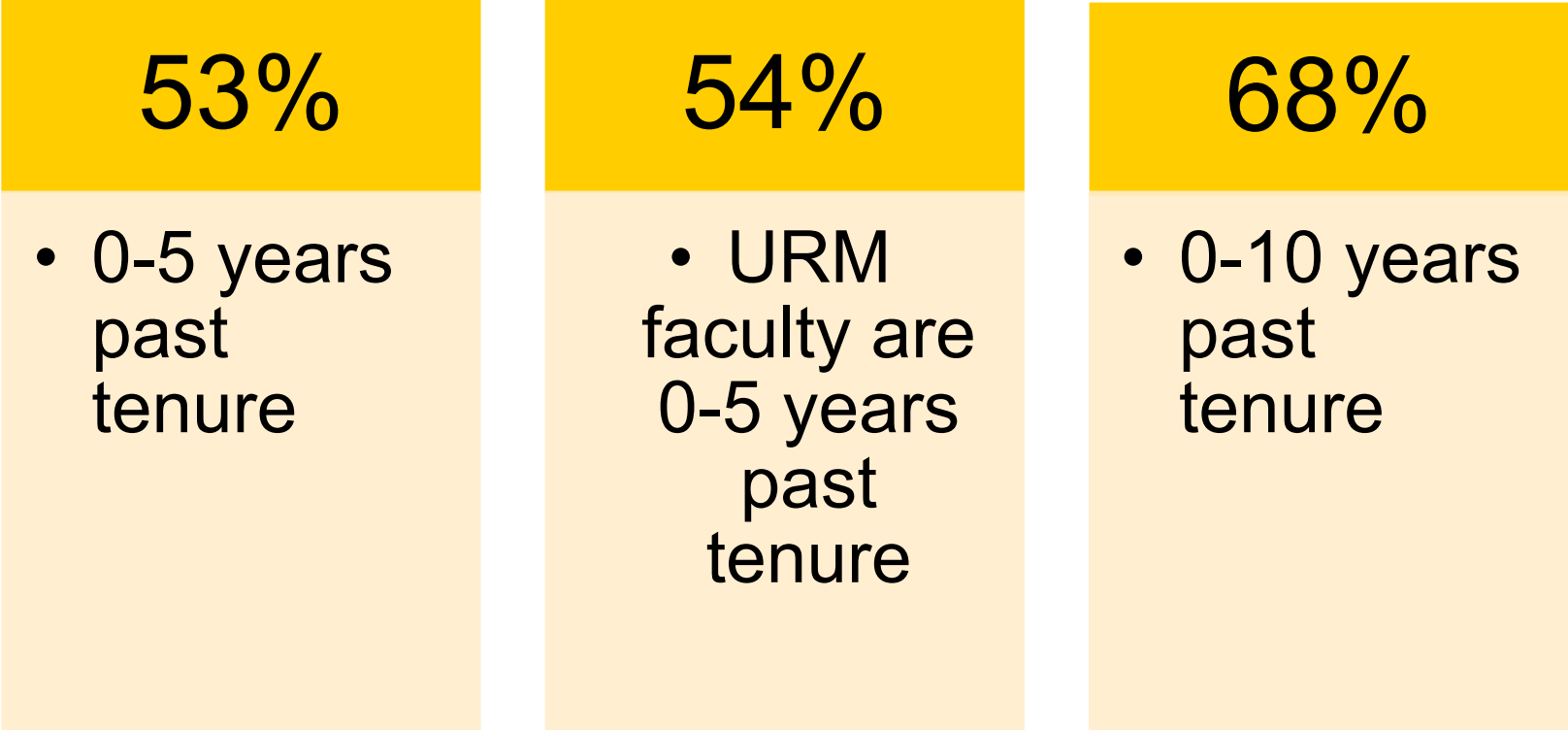
- Female
- Approximately half a year longer for promotion

7.7%

- Faculty members from URM groups

(as of November 2020)

UI Snapshot of Tenured Associate Professors

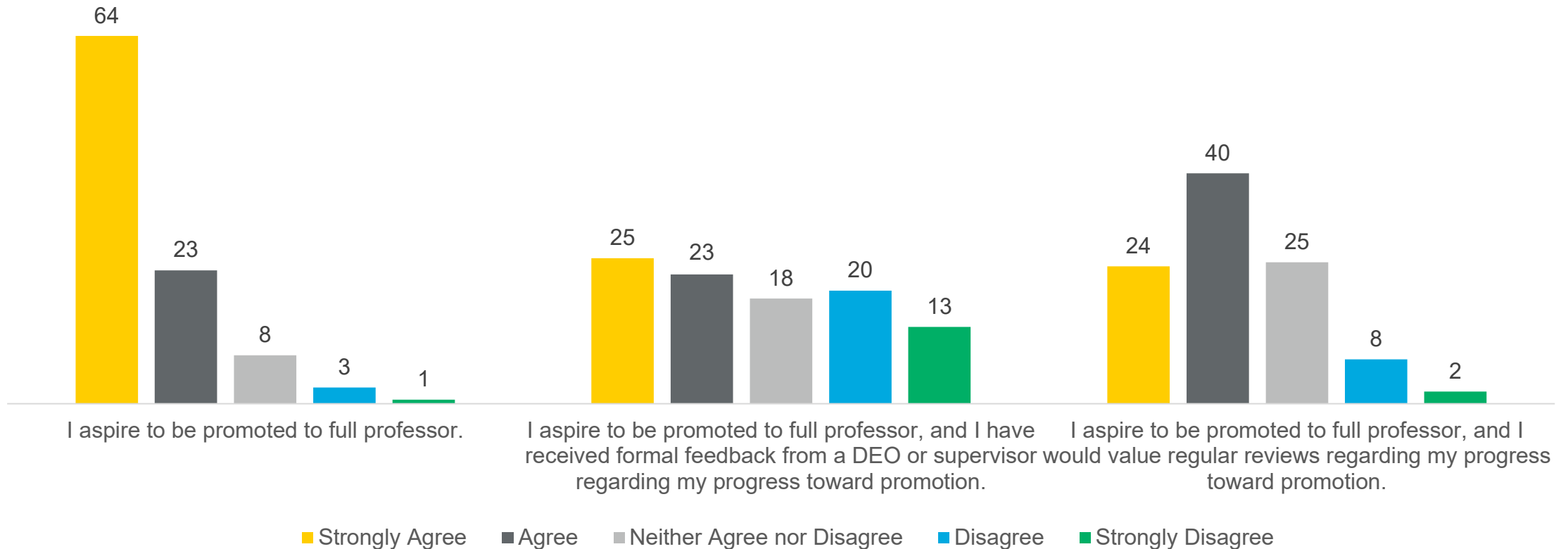


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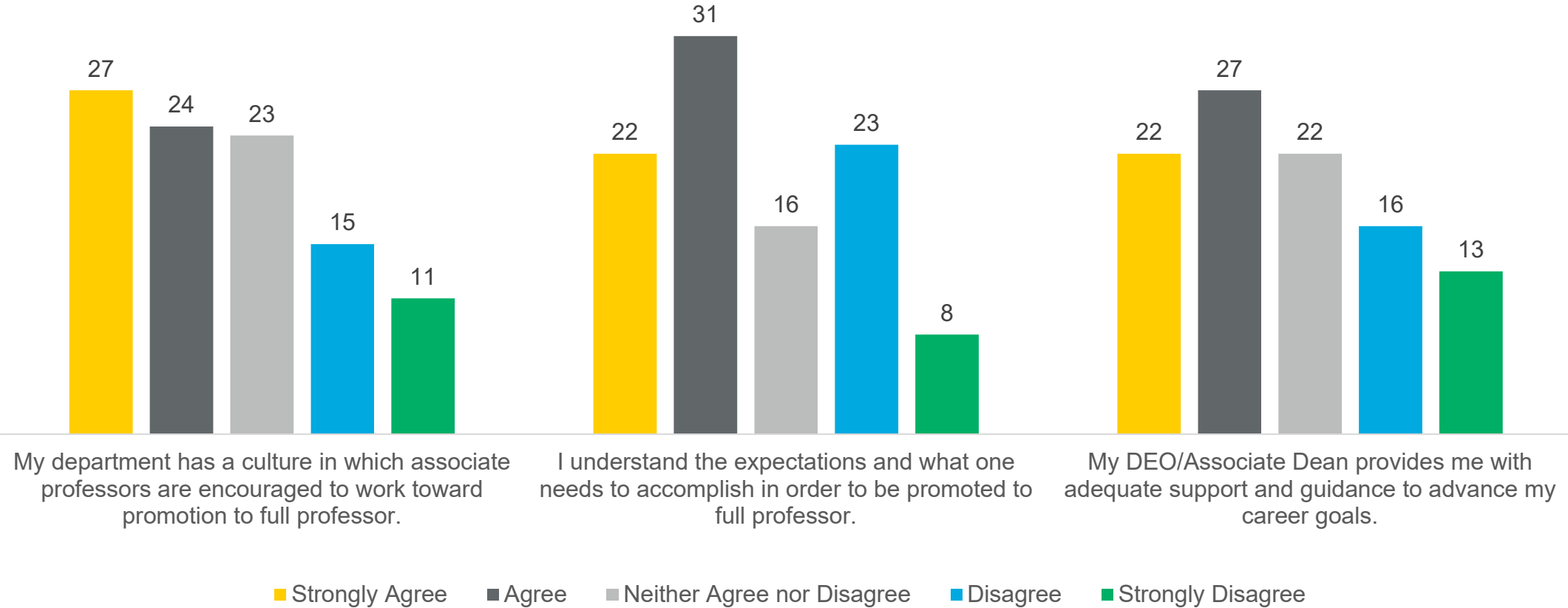
Associate Professor Project (17-18)

- Office of the Provost Survey of Associate Professors
 - Sent to approximately 200 UI associate professors
 - 141 responses (nearly 70% response rate)
- Office of the Provost Focus Groups, in collaboration with Faculty Senate and HR
 - Conducted three focus group sessions fall 2017
 - Approximately 70 participants across all colleges

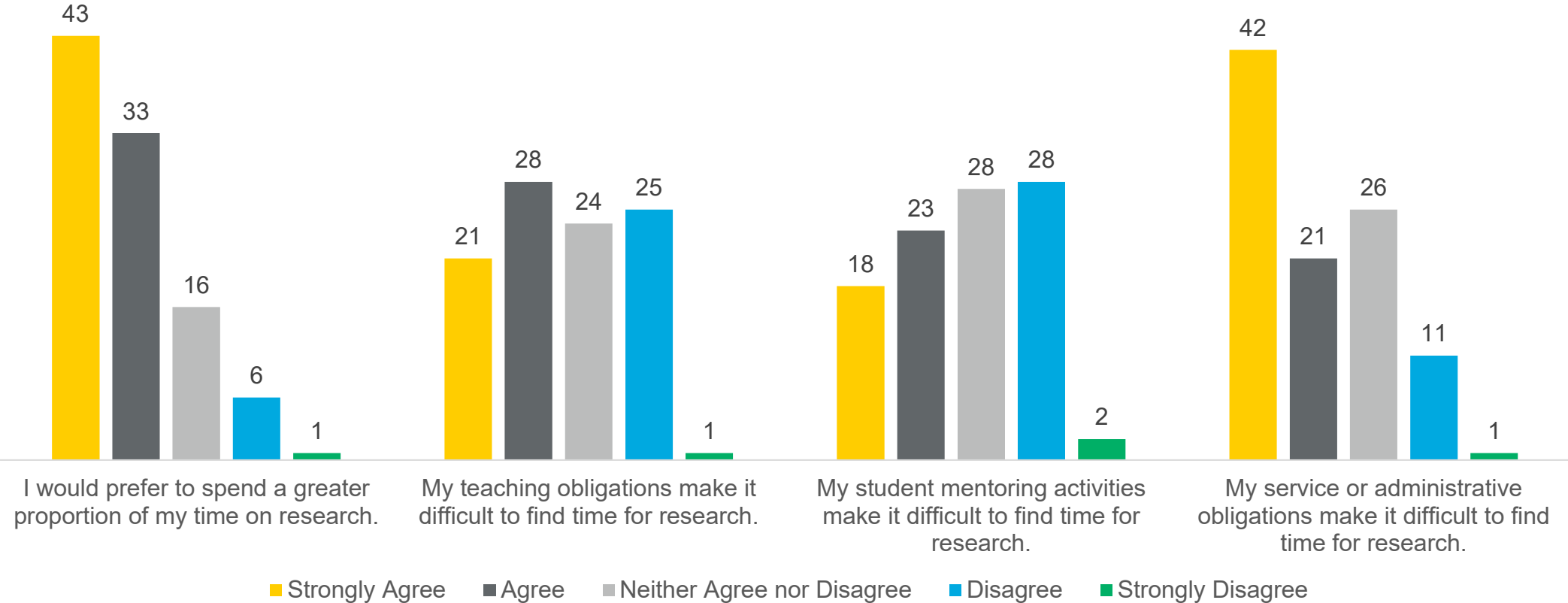
Associate Professor Survey Results



Departmental Culture, Expectations & Support



Research Efforts



Promotion to Full

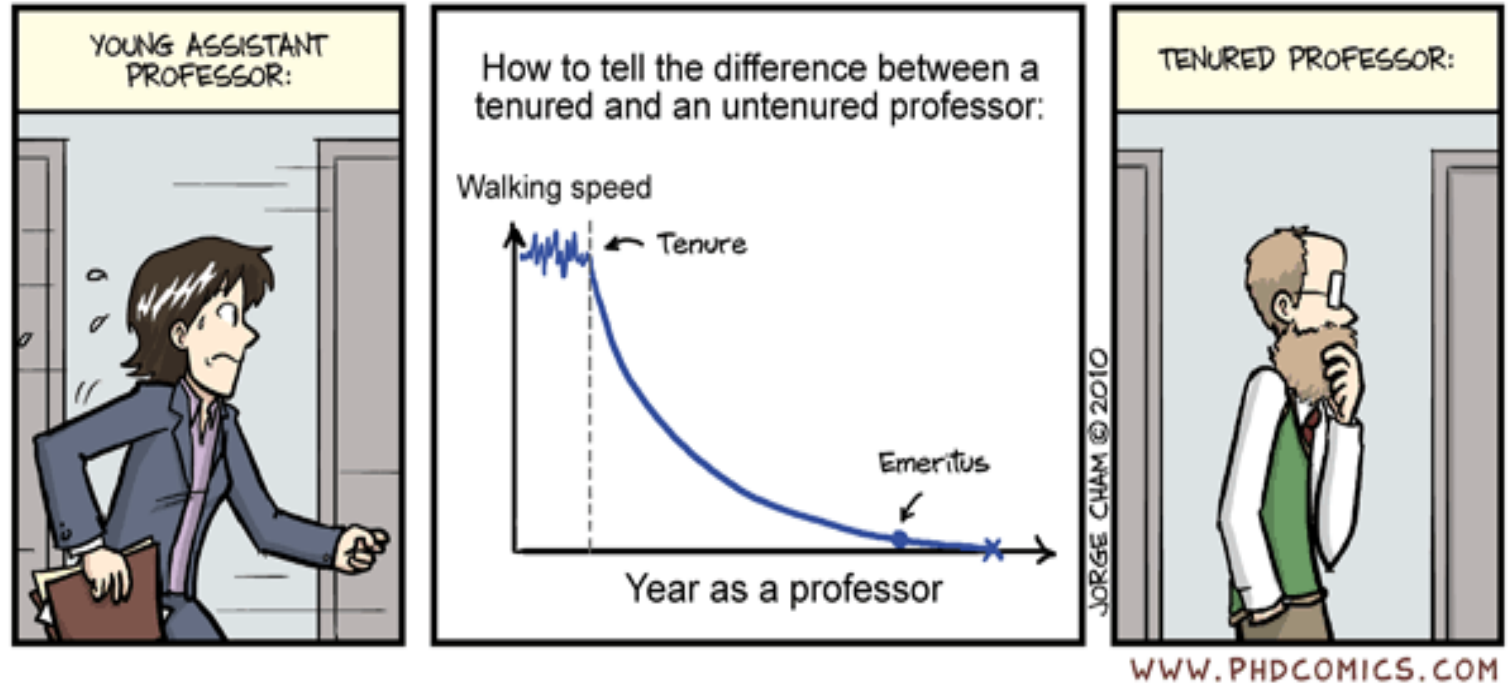
- There is no specific time for you to seek promotion to Full Professor
- Literature suggest that guidelines for promotion are ambiguous particularly regarding the definitions of:
 - Scholarly productivity to make rank
 - National reputation
 - International reputation
 - External funding requirements

Talking to your peers [breakout]

- Are you planning to apply for promotion in the next two years?
- Do you have mentors?
- Do you seek feedback on your progress from your DEO/supervisor?

So why become a Full Professor?

- Incentives
- Prestige
- Autonomy
- Benefits for your department and your institution



Time to Next Promotion

- For the tenure track:
 - Ranges between 1 year and 17 years
 - Women promoted at an average of 7 years
 - Men promoted at an average of 6 years
 - Quickest in Law; slowest in Pharmacy



Why not seek promotion?

- More autonomy after tenure
- No time pressure & many choices
- Maybe you have developed an **alternate path** such as:
 - Focusing only on teaching
 - Entering administration
 - Becoming involved in the institution's change efforts
 - Public service

Rockquemore, 2012



Why not seek promotion?

- At some point, some feel “stuck“, which is more common than may be appreciated
- Reasons why some may remain in current rank:
 - Lack or paucity of scholarly productivity rather than poor teaching
 - Fear of failure
 - Workload paralysis – too much going on ...
 - Need support to make decision
 - Comfort as Associate Professor which may lead to disengagement



“Disengaged Associate Professors”

→ Characterized by:

- Withdrawal from intellectual exchange and collaboration with colleagues,
- Not a participant on decision-making processes,
- Deliberate withdrawal from departmental social activity (or giving cynical advice to junior faculty),
- Lack of involvement in mentoring relationships

Huston, Norman, & Ambrose (2007)

Changing Directions

- A way of addressing feelings of been stuck, disengaged, unmotivated, and in need of guidance
- What does it look like?



Changing Directions: Scholarship

- Become aware of the difference in research requirements between promotions
- To **Associate Professor** – establish a record of scholarly productivity
- To **Full Professor** – not necessarily quantity, but impact and national or international reputation
- Need something to AIM for...



Changing Directions: Scholarship

- It may be necessary to re-define your scholarship to forge a new path that will lead to promotion
 - Re-focus scholarship emphasis (dig deeper into already established foci)
 - Define a new scholarship emphasis
 - Join an established research team (collaborate with others)
 - Seek training on advanced research methods/techniques
 - Be strategic about journals and conferences in which you choose to disseminate your work

Talking to your peers [breakout]

- Do you feel stuck or on track? If stuck, why?
- Have you changed directions?
- What did that look/feel like?
- How did you go about doing it?

Changing Directions: Mentoring

- Seek mentoring and/or consultation from your DEO or senior colleague to:
- Identify and address barriers to promotion
 - Getting unstuck
 - Explore further career development
 - Address fear of failure and work paralysis
 - Use a Individual Development Plan (IDP)

Changing Directions: Individual Development

- Individual development plans (IDP) serve the purpose of identifying your career goals, your professional development needs, and personal and professional aspirations
- Enhances communication with your DEO or mentor
- Think about it as your “Individual Strategic Plan”
- **Review annually** to keep you accountable



Changing Directions: IDPs

→ Your IDP will answer the following questions:

- What are your personal goals and values?
- What are your career goals?
- What are your short and long term goals as you think of your career goals?
- What timelines and benchmarks will you set?
- What resources do you need? (technical, financial, mentoring, consulting)
- How will you measure success?

Your IDP and Your Annual Review

- Consider using your IDP as a framework to guide your annual review discussion with your DEO. Be sure to:
- Discuss performance and promotion **expectations**
 - **Inquire** about progress toward promotion
 - **Educate** your DEO on unique aspects of your scholarly impact and reach
 - Discuss effort allocation in relation to achieving promotion, particularly for **women and URM faculty**
 - **Seek frequent feedback** from DEO and senior departmental faculty

What to expect from your DEO?

- Assist in defining what constitutes national reputation
- Continue to provide or facilitate mentoring
- Strategically use resources (e.g. internal funding) to facilitate travel, to hire GAs, or facilitate necessary developmental task
- Reward and acknowledge departmental contributions (e.g. program coordination work)

What to expect from your DEO?

- When appropriate, your DEO may recommend a change in effort allocation to reflect additional teaching or service (to college or university)
- Recommend and support leadership development IF administrative roles will be part of your future portfolio



Changing Directions

- Changing directions may also imply a new work environment outside of the current institution (e.g., private practice, government, other institutions of higher education).
- Make sure to access necessary transition resources.

Closing Thought

“There does not have to be a midlife crisis in academia. Investing in midcareer faculty leads to happier faculty members and stronger institutions.”

Misra & Lundquist, 2015

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