

## **Report on Focus Groups with Associate Professors in LSA<sup>1</sup>**

### **May 2009**

During April and May of 2009, the UM ADVANCE Program held 3 focus groups with a total of 53 Associate Professors in LSA. As is common in research of this kind, these focus groups included more women than men (18 men, or 15% of the men in the rank and 35 women, or 35% of the women in the rank). The participants in the focus groups were, however, representative of the three divisions in the College, of racial-ethnic groups among this rank, and of average time in rank (see Table 1).

The comments provided by each focus group are listed separately for each group, and include detailed, near-verbatim notes that were reviewed and corrected by focus group members themselves before inclusion in this report. The dynamics of the three discussions were certainly different, but many of the same themes emerged across the groups.

Consistent themes about the positive aspects of the rank included: job security, salary increase, increase in status and responsibility both in the field and in the department, increased freedom to pursue intellectual interests, to benefit from interdisciplinarity and the wider university, to make choices about allocation of effort, to balance work and home life more flexibly, and to pursue individual career development.

Consistent themes about the negative aspects of the rank included: great increase in service responsibilities, isolation, unmanageable workload, continued lack of status and autonomy relative to full professors, decreased availability of internal support for research, lack of support for continued career development, and lack of clarity about criteria for and normative expectations about promotion to full.

Many suggestions for improvements were made, though there was no consensus on some suggestions. For example, though some favored more access to mentors, advice, and/or feedback, others opposed these to the extent that they would replicate pre-tenure structures, and feel like increased surveillance. Less disagreement met suggestions for increased clarity about expectations of the rank and for promotion to full, as well as suggestions that associate professors should have more access to resources for scholarship including funding, opportunities for manuscript workshops and other vehicles for intellectual exchange, and nurturance leaves. Some also suggested greater freedom for faculty to create annual or 2 or 3-year plans for teaching, service and scholarship so that they could manage their own commitments to free up some time for scholarship by allocating teaching-intensive and service-intensive periods. Finally, there was considerable support for more flexibility in the criteria for promotion, with particular enthusiasm for greater weight on service and teaching, and for broader and more flexible criteria for scholarship.

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<sup>1</sup> This report was prepared by Abigail J. Stewart, based on notes taken by Timothy Corvidae, Elisabeth Paymal and Cynthia Hudgins.

**LSA Associate Professor Focus Group**  
**April 6, 2009, 12-1:30**  
**15 Participants**

**Positive things about being in the Associate Professor rank**

Having a job/the security of having a job.

Money—getting a raise.

More confident and increased freedom to speak up and take action on issues.

A secure life, not having to worry about whether one will be leaving this community and all of the ties one has here.

No longer hearing threats that I will not get tenure.

Reduction of anxiety about being rooted.

Knowing that I can say no to a service request. Service feels more like a choice. It feels different because it is chosen, more tolerable even when very demanding.

Feel free to choose research differently—less expedient and more experimental research directions.

No longer enslaved to student evaluations. Able to either coast on courses that were developed as a junior faculty, or to be braver and more experimental in how one develops courses.

Time horizon lengthens, it is possible to stretch out one's thinking about future.

There is a sense that institutional investment will be paid back over time.

Able to serve as better advocate to graduate students, who know that there is not a risk that you may soon be leaving.

Can take license in taking on riskier, less respected service commitments.

Doesn't feel different; has mentally opted out of awareness of tenure implications on personal career decision-making.

People express less concern about one's stress-levels and emotions about progress towards tenure; let one be on one's own.

More able to do community service beyond on the university.

**Negative things about being in the Associate Professor rank**

Most of my research is now collaborative, and I worry about how I am going to produce a single-authored book.

Pressure to get another single-authored book out. Before tenure, one had doctoral thesis and the research years behind it to turn into a book. Now, one must start from scratch with less time and fewer resources to support development of an idea and a product. And what about false starts or significant shifts in research focus

Uncertainty about what will be required for promotion to full professor. No clarity of expectations.

Challenges to writing and publishing at associate professor stage include: no sense of nurturance about this, need outside grant to support it, juggling family (can't take residential fellowships to support research), not as much creative support and space, too many time demands.

Difficult to come up a new big idea.

There is no nurturance leave for us.

In joint appointments:

Sometimes expectations in one department are contrary to those in another (teaching highly valued in one, while research output expected in the other, for example).  
Heavy expectations in both departments (i.e., full day retreats x 2). Two sets of increased requirements when promoted to associate. Ramping up of expectations x 2.  
Have expressed interest in but not invited to be on committees that may be critical in the promotion process.  
Only communication from leadership about expectations to attain full professorship was a short meeting with chair in which newly promoted associate professor was handed an LSA document about full professorship, which was not useful and has not been opened since.  
Does not have a mentor, but is expected to mentor others. No one is meeting with me.  
No system for providing mentorship to associate professors in some departments.  
We know the expectations but need mentoring about the promotion process.  
Want advice about career advancement, or information about career advancement, but not mentoring per se.  
Unlike when I was up for promotion to associate professor, now I have more demanding family responsibilities. More difficult to find unrestricted time for idea development.  
Forces me to become very pragmatic, parsimonious, and utilitarian.  
Childcare demands at this stage in life are heavy; babysitting expenses are high to accommodate attendance at committee meetings and after-hours functions (i.e., child care costs for me to attend five dinners with candidates). Child care costs when I need to attend a conference.  
Summer is not as useful a time for research as it is supposed to be, as wrapping up after winter term and preparing for fall is very labor and time intensive.  
Want someone in the department to tell them it is okay to say no to things.  
Liminality. Still can't influence departmental climate and systemic problems in department that are maintained by senior faculty with whom associate professors do not have influence.  
Lack of authority to make changes.  
Some senior faculty are clueless about gender and sexual harassment, and I feel that I am still in a limited position. Do not have power to change the environment in critical ways.  
In some cases, the frustration is with certain senior faculty, but I do not see the associate professor rank as the problem.  
Unclear about time line of promotion to full professor, and about what is expected to prepare for this. What is the balance of service, teaching, and research output? When does it become too late?  
Have received advice to avoid going up for full professor as long as possible, in order to avoid the tremendous increase in workload.  
Warned about the time commitment of writing tenure and promotion reviews.  
Everyone outside of U-M is very impressed with gaining tenure here, but actually feels like a great lack of control. Doesn't feel that anything has changed since attaining tenure, doesn't see a way to carve out desirable leadership roles.  
Internal tenure vs. external tenure. It is possible to have a fabulous career profile for success within the institution, but be relatively unmarketable outside of U-M. This is perhaps related to heavy service load expected here, which does not appear impressive or is not comparable to the demands on associate professors at a different institution.

It is possible to be externally impressive but not promotable internally, as well. To have many books published and be highly regarded in field as successful, but to be told that one does not have the right combination of achievements to be promoted to full professor here.

Engaged in trying to figure out what is going on at U-M.

Do not live here because partner does not live in Michigan. Regret that I have not developed closer relationships with faculty colleagues here.

Feel even less powerful now than I did before tenure.

Yes, you can do riskier research, but there is no time to do a book. Service load makes it hard to do field work and research.

Serve on 28 dissertation committees.

There is nothing bad about having tenure that is as bad as not having tenure.

Feel diminished because I am not producing as much as I had before.

Counseled that the only way to succeed at writing book is to write a grant and take a leave.

Participating in tenure decisions is hard: time consuming, emotionally challenging, uncomfortable being crunched between full and junior faculty.

Hate voting about someone's life and career.

Don't want mentorship any more, don't want to feel like one is in a constant state of tutelage.

Sense that it was not enough to be untenured. Then not enough to be associate. Then won't be enough unless a center director...

There is a stigma of not being promoted to full in the right amount of time.

On a bad day, there are the voices in my head saying that everyone agrees that I should never have been given tenure. Fear of being labeled deadwood.

Don't want to end up like people I have seen who are unpromoted and unpromotable.

### **What is needed to thrive as Associate Professors/ What could help**

A memorandum of understanding. Someone should be aware of what we are doing.

Money—available research funds without terrible strings attached (such as need to relocate for fellowship, or need to produce output in short time frame)

Nurturance leave

It would be nice to know that after taking on a huge service assignment for three years one could have a guaranteed leave afterwards.

Irritating to get a salary bump and still be making less than newly minted PhDs in same department.

Salary compression is a big issue.

Feels valued at UM as an individual, but does not feel this value translated into financial nurturance.

Research assistants and graduate assistants would help.

Tuition support for children (one person stated that faculty at Michigan State get 50% tuition waivers for their children).

Nurturance in terms of institutional resources.

Mentoring is infantilizing and patronizing.

Mentoring is fine for junior faculty, but associate professors need a different kind of support. The nature of mentoring needs to change with the change in rank.

Wants information, not mentoring.

Want things like manuscript workshops that are offered to junior faculty (also recognize that with limited resources it is most important these are offered to junior faculty first).

Feels like role has been to become a bureaucrat and institutional workhorse, not a productive intellectual.

Valuable to get people together with other people at same level. It would be good to have a meeting like the chairs and directors meeting for associate directors, associate chairs, and directors of centers inside of departments (those not included in C and D meeting).

This should be defined by the leadership role itself, not by faculty rank. Those who are close to the top of the food chain, but not quite there, don't have leadership support.

Reluctant to ask for mentorship from full professors because they look so busy, and do not want to add to their workload.

No recognition for taking on more students, number of dissertation committees, undergraduate thesis committees. These are not counted in any substantive way.

Course release because of service would be helpful.

Teaching is undervalued.

Teaching is noted when it is exceptional enough to win an award, but not valued generally, and there are limited awards available to recognize teaching.

Fear of becoming seen as deadwood because I care about teaching.

We are not going to receive an outside offer because of our teaching.

Different units value different things: some teaching, others output.

Cross-departmental balance of service for those with joint appointments would be helpful, to acknowledge that service load in one may be much heavier but can be balanced by lighter demands in the other to create one full load (need some kind of "currency" for balancing out loads—not just service, also teaching and scholarship).

Need more staff support. Feel like paperwork load (letters of reference, for example) is too heavy, overwhelming.

As staff have been cut-back, faculty are provided with "opportunities" to learn administrative procedures, but feels like one more thing to learn/do.

CTools and other technology tools are hard to have to learn. Also helpful once learned.

What criteria will count towards promotion to full? What criteria should count (whether or not it is what currently does)?

Has received advice from senior faculty to cultivate image as bad administrator in order not to be given service assignments. There needs to be an incentive to behave, or disincentive to feigning incompetence.

It would be nice to have greater clarity on how merit raises are calculated, to have this more explicit and uniform.

### **LSA Associate Professor Focus Group**

**18 Participants**

**May 6, 2009, 12–1:30 pm**

#### **Positive things about being in the Associate Professor rank**

Relief to be over w/ tenure process

Love the job security

Recognition of one's contribution

Ability to:

Be more creative

Take on more risky projects

Freedom to start projects that are:

- bigger
- riskier
- more creative
- more challenging
- will take more than 6 years to complete
- outside of past expertise

Freedom to teach more experimentally, as well.

Because of tenure, confidence to speak one's mind, say anything one likes, in department.

Sense of relationship to department as citizen has changed; think about how one wants department to be, not just how can fit self into the department as it now exists. Start thinking of how one can start influencing her department.

Opportunity to introduce changes in the department.

A lot of opportunity in this rank to figure out what is important to oneself here and what one is going to do about it, now and with further promotions.

Access to meetings previously excluded from.

Greater knowledge of how the institution works.

Greater understanding of institutional hierarchies—how they work and how one relates to them

Freedom from the clock clicking in the background.

Can say "No" more now, even though this will still have to be paid for eventually.

Freedom to actually say "no" to senior colleagues and challenge them on their administrative duties as well. Facilitates clarification re. who does what in the department

Promotion means you are going to be here for a long time and people respect you more

Freedom (to say no/make choices) in department, but also in field at large, not just at UM.

Freer as associate than as assistant or as full professor to "not be definitive." Less well-known and high-profile, more freedom to experiment or deviate from core expertise when Assoc. Prof.

The sense that associate professors don't need help; freedom from having people looking over shoulder, but miss mentoring, coddling.

Status as associate professor feels more in keeping with age and experience.

Rank affords more respect from students, especially for women and people of color who did not feel they had this previously.

Recognition of some level of equality with full professors and other associate professors.

Opportunity for mentoring junior faculty in the department. Nice to feel that one can help others out with one's experience.

Good for personal life:

- finally able to set down roots (buy home, have kids) with expectation that one does not need to move again (unless by choice)
- fosters ability to make choices about when to speed up and when to slow down in the juggling of career and family

- Sense of security that one can take time to care for kids, when necessary
- With tenure, deadlines are less stressful which is good with respect to family obligations
- Can now address the “biological clock” and decide to have children

Some people always did lots of service, so the difference between assistant and associate service loads is not remarkable.

For some, increase in service requests happen immediately with tenure, but only after a couple of years.

A move from a joint to a single appointment relieved service load stress some.

The possibility of another promotion—being full prof.—is a good motivator.

### **Negative things about being in the Associate Professor rank**

#### **Increase in service load (general consensus)**

Lots of service in both units of joint 50/50 appointment (one unit does not know what the other unit has already asked for, so ask for a lot as well).

It seems inevitable that the workload would increase; “pay back time.”

Service as director does not lead to the book publication required for promotion to full.

Asked to serve as graduate director in the same phone call as offer of tenure.

There is a sense that UM has a greater service expectation for associate professors than do other institutions.

The nature and quality of service is not satisfying. One must divert energy from one’s own work in order to perform tedious and unsatisfying service work required of associate professors who end up in 2nd tier administrative positions. The work is often solitary, invisible, not stimulating, not valued, not financially rewarded (for example, writing or rewriting manuals, hounding colleagues about scheduling issues, and other such administrative work).

Job is less pleasureable as a result.

It seems like service was more communal as assistant professor (serving on committees, getting to know other faculty and network), and very solitary as associate professor (directorships, etc.).

Implicit hierarchy in the service: assistant and full profs serve on committees where get to know people, dept. colleagues; associate profs perform administrative functions that are isolating (e.g., letters of recommendation).

Idea/feeling taken from John d’Arms’ lecture that faculty is divided between superstars and people who do service; chairs don’t want to burden a star to do service for fear of losing them; so assoc profs must pick up the slack.

Certain number of “deadwood” faculty in department who don’t get assigned service and other colleagues have to pick up the slack. At same time, “superstars” are protected from service. So everyone between the deadwood and the Superstars has more work.

Deadwood seems to have intentionally messed up at service so as to get out of it.

#### **Overall workload:**

Both increase in service obligations and in effort to prepare new coursework in new areas in teaching for interdisciplinary work in joint appointment.

Workload is astronomical, with no appearance that it will ever diminish.

Greater burden on partner as workload has increased with tenure (though dean suggested post-tenure things could/would even out). Can't handle own share of house and family work, and this is not fair to partner.

Increase of work especially in advising of graduate students, and some in service.

Different kinds of demand; have to sacrifice something from workload, and research is what gets cut out.

Creates tension between all these issues.

Evaluation time comes round, and productivity is what is looked at for salary raise: at least half of what gets considered is research, but can't find time to do research with all the other obligations.

Impossible to have down time to oneself.

Sense that own well-being depends on intellectual engagement with other researchers, and no time for this.

Increased complexity of teaching tools takes more faculty time.

Increased expectations of faculty to respond to student email (posting email address on c-tools) greatly increase workload for faculty.

Expectations include so many elements (C-tools, emails, teaching, service, and then research). Triage approach is often the only way to clear space for one's research as an assistant professor. But triage does not justify time for associate professors' research: One's institutional survival does not depend on it and so it yields to matters seen as more pressing, including untenured colleagues' (real) needs.

The culture of intense busyness is stimulating, but also exhausting.

### **Financial support:**

There is less financial support available to associate professors within units. There are fewer fellowships than for assistant professors, no nurturance leave, and no start-up package to help the second project like there was for the first when one was incoming. Research budget for 2<sup>nd</sup> project--continuation is lacking from the university.

Faculty who go out to get outside offers and then play those against UM in salary negotiation end up leap-frogging over other faculty.

Football coach phenomenon: Attain tenure and then get hired elsewhere to get big promotion and professional recognition. There is a penalty for staying put, as you don't get this boost.

There is a trend in academia generally to slot professors into either Superstar or Service Droid slots upon receipt of tenure. Unfair system.

Inequities in department, and across departments to staggering degrees.

Fear that the "deadwood" started where we are now; don't want to become that.

Attaining tenure did not provide a "Get Out of Jail Free" card from bullying by full professors, especially those who control resources in the department. Junior status still feels very relevant.

Don't have same credibility to play the triage card as untenured faculty, because their tenure clock is ticking and the associate's is done. Tenured faculty encourage junior faculty to throw things overboard, but it is then up to tenured faculty to catch this flotsam and jetsam. Can't see being selfish enough to focus on research with junior colleagues looking to one for support and delivery of services.



**Research:**

It is maddening that there are so many barriers to doing research, which is what we love and are good at and what got us to this point. Isn't this what we are valued for?

Attempted to attend series or talks, but no one has time or energy to attend. It is a rare luxury to actually talk about research.

Research is not only about getting the next promotion, it is what brings all the other aspects together and creates meaning.

Sense that one's well-being is dependent on whether one is writing and researching.

Happiest when doing work, this is when one is best person; very hungry and unsatisfied when unable to get to this because of other obligations.

Anxiety about getting second project done.

Hard to get funding for some kinds of research: on topics that are less "trendy"; or cutting edge research that is terrifying to a field.

Our research nourishes us, but is also toxic.

Psychological pressure to be researching; this nags and torments when one can't find time.

Real ability to think and engage intellectually is suffering in this environment of busyness.

Finds research to be less and less a part of daily life and conversation as other demands increase (both because of rank but also because of changes in University culture and technology: students want more attention over email, CTools, longer syllabi).

Being taken away from research results in burnout and frustration.

**Promotion to Full Professor:**

Contradictory signals regarding what one can and should do as associate professor. On the one hand, encouraged to choose projects freely. On the other hand, at salary review time may end up lower for having chosen "wrong." Criteria for promotion at the University and policy are there in vague terms, and if you don't have a second book out, don't bother.

Double-standards between "superstars" and others.

Standards that are clear for the tenure decision are not there at the associate level. Much less definition of what is recognized and valued; and inequities do exist.

Had been looking forward to tenure and the opportunity to do longer range project that would span more than 6 years, but then found pressure to publish again within 6 years in order to go up for full.

A sense that things have deteriorated over the last 6-7 years.

Sense that it is inappropriate to spend more than 6 years in the rank—while you have not had the time to do your research to get promoted to full.

No clarity in expectations of associate rank or what is required to advance to full.

Ambiguity about acceptable time frame to be in associate rank; some messages that it is okay to stay as long as one likes, but also pressure to advance or become deadwood.

Lack of equity across the university

Had not heard that there was an expected time in rank before getting tenure, now feels this clock ticking all over again.

Clarity of what is required to advance to full, but unclear how an associate professor can find time to do it!

**Mentoring/support:**

Associate rank is a more isolated moment in career. As assistant, had time to participate in research or writing groups; because of difficult schedules group now only manages to meet once a year.

No time to go and have coffee with colleagues to talk about research.

No time to engage about our work with colleagues and share.

Formal mentoring program from the department (where mentoring is focused on junior faculty). But mentoring is formalized empathy and support; associate professors need it too.

Mentoring to know how much time they can spend on their research.

“Left to the wolves after having been cuddled and mentored.”

Anxiety about time consumed with service

Example of group of associate professors who had to meet over a difficult departmental issue and realized that they never had met as a group before. It turned out to be a great thing to do.

How are we supposed to deal with all these anxieties we didn't even know would exist?

Hard to shine in a new discipline as associate professor, when switching departments.

With luxury of tenure, it is easy to say that getting to full doesn't matter, but it means everything to some, and the fear of not getting there is devastating.

Took sabbatical right after tenure, but this was in gearing up stage of second book project, which is a low productivity stage, and so did not position well for getting time to complete the book upon return from sabbatical. Now it is hard to imagine finding the time to complete the project.

**What is needed to thrive as Associate Professors/ What could help**

Say to senior faculty that associate professors still need to be protected, still have relevant work to be doing and still junior so that senior faculty should bear more of the burden of administrative service.

Best practices guidelines for expectations and support of associate rank. Compare to other institutions. Could stand to gain from comparing beyond UM. We write many more internal letters of recommendation than colleagues at other institutions, for example. Our service load is rumored to be much higher at associate rank (maybe at all ranks?).

Need to create official awareness of what it is like to be in associate rank, both for associate professors and for leadership. The problem is not failure to give attention, but lack of awareness of what it is like.

Stop putting associate professors on advisory committees (committees that don't make final decisions). It's not sexy, a waste of time, and their opinions are often overridden anyway.

New pressure from department to faculty to think about topics they did not have to think about before (for example, enrollments, energy savings).

Some people certainly want to go into the administrative track, and should be allowed to. But not everyone wants this amount of administrative focus in her/his career.

Have a three-year review for rank?

Need an ombudsperson to help manage joint appointments. Chairs and directors do it now, but they don't have the time or leverage to get the information and coordination that is needed.

Deans and executive committees need to be educated on expanding ideas of what counts as productivity. For example, one may be producing cds but is asked "Where's the book?" or "How many cds equal a book?"

Preserving sabbatical equity should be automatic when not able to take a sabbatical just after receiving tenure.

### **Mentoring:**

A formal mentoring program for associate professors. Mentoring is formalized empathy, and it helps.

No formal mentoring programs. Informal mentoring works very well, and formalizing just gets in the way and chafes.

Don't create constrictive guidelines, but some sort of loose mentorship system, development plan; maybe a mentorship committee, several people involved so that not one person can tell you what you **MUST** do that would be just what HE/SHE would do. For the first year since I have been an Associate Professor, my chair asked to speak with me about where I am and then asked for a text outlining where I am with each book chapter. I found this process helpful and encouraging: like someone actually cares. I would not want a "mentor," but if I had been in conversation with my chair each year in this kind of friendly, helpful way and perhaps had another interlocutor in the department, I might be further along.

A manuscript workshop for associate professors, just like there is for assistant professors.

### **Research:**

It would be great to have structured time and space for research sharing and work as part of the academic year. Perhaps a meeting time for department, for several weeks in a row, with a room reserved and food provided.

Issue of not being ready to start second project right after getting tenure.

Create more flexibility for how faculty allocates time over the year. For example, teach 3 courses for each of two terms, then have a term free from teaching. Or, take on large service load for a year, and then a light load the following year. Some have tried to do this with department, but then in reality they were not protected from service.

Make the allocation of time stick; enforce it. There could be some sort of currency for negotiating this.

Perhaps looking at career in blocks of years, 3 years for example, and balancing workload over that larger period of time instead of juggling everything all at once every year.

One associate professor had an arrangement with the department, but once the "no service time" came, they asked for more help anyway.

One semester isn't enough time for people in book fields to accomplish much. People end up spending several months writing proposals to get the second semester off, which in effect cancels out the nurturance leave. On the flip side, knowing there's a whole year off up front gives people not just the time of the leave itself, but also the time they would have spent writing proposals. So there's considerable added-value to a full year, as opposed to a term.

Bring two people from outside the university to read and discuss the book manuscript. Small grants from UM for associate professors like what is available for assistant professors.

### **Address Excessive Service Demands**

The University needs to confront changes that have led to increasing service work demands. Bit by bit, faculty is picking up more and more service work. Example of how on-line student registration for courses leads students to make direct contact with the professor about issues that are not really appropriate or relevant; in turn the professor, to avoid criticism, must respond within 48 hours.

This is “invisible” and time-consuming work.

IT has redistributed labor onto faculty.

The federal government is required to report the cost to the taxpayer when implementing a new regulation. The University should have to report the time cost to faculty when new regulations are created, and account for how this will be met.

LSA’s KPI system increases faculty workload.

Dealing with grade whining is on the rise; needs to be curbed.

The mechanisms in place in LSA for dealing with student issues are poor. Plagiarism cases, for example, take many hours and are often botched by office that is supposed to handle them. Some of this service and technology work could be handled by staff. But not at current staffing levels; staff are also very busy. Increasing appointments of some staff to full time, or adding staff, would help.

## **LSA Associate Professor Focus Group 21 Participants May 12, 2009, 12–1:30 pm**

### **Motivation to attend focus group/General reflections**

#### **Share experience as Associate Professor:**

Feels like out in deep, maybe dark waters and wants to share experience.

ADVANCE is generally helpful, so expects this to be too.

Sharing and hearing experiences will be interesting, helpful.

Had a lot of opportunities like this as assistant professor, this is first opportunity as associate professor.

It is fun to see other associate professors outside of department.

Appreciates the great privileges that come with tenure, but the associate rank feels like a desert. Want to be part of what’s going on.

Received a lot of nurturing as assistant prof and now feels cast adrift, staring into an abyss.

New to rank, wanted to hear what others experiences are.

#### **Focus Group itself**

Curious about what it would be like.

For my own research I have asked a lot of people to be in focus groups so now it is my turn.

Not in a focus group before, so curious about it.

### **Guidance about promotion**

Reaching the end of the rank, and it will be nice to talk.

Hear others' experience as I think of the next promotion.

[In a departmental leadership role], questions of promotion are very relevant.

Interested in maintaining the rank, wants to speak up about this.

Associate feels the same as assistant, so now what?

Came from another institution and UM is great in comparison, but is a much more complicated institution; need all the help one can get figuring it out.

Help assistant professors go through the tenure process; dramatic change with the associate professor rank. It is very good to do something for us!

The lack of clarity around associate rank is detrimental to the science fields.

Different departments produce different experiences of the rank, depending on size, culture, etc.

### **Miscellaneous**

Resentment toward the full professors who do not have to do so much service.

### **Positive things about being in the Associate Professor rank**

Sense of being young and full of promise.

Sense of belonging to the institution, from the inside

### **Job security**

Grateful every single day for job security.

Pay raise. Suppressing the rank will affect the pay raise.

### **Freedom**

Freedom to do whatever one wants. This and job security almost cancel all the negative.

Having tenure is incredible.

Able to reflect on doing the best I can for teaching, research and administration.

Freedom to take on teaching projects that are not rewarded but allows me to do my best.

Get to develop new courses, experiment with teaching.

Freedom to abandon my previous research for a new direction.

Explore new areas of research. Intellectually very stimulating.

Switched focus of research almost entirely since rank.

Able to expand research—feels like shifting from 2<sup>nd</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> gear—getting additional grants, etc.

Expand as much as change.

Having authority and freedom.

Sabbatical leave.

### **Visibility and respect**

Visibility in discipline, now viewed as “That person who has 20 years left.”

Don't feel invisible in department anymore.

People listen to you.

Appreciative of not much academic hierarchy in department.

### **Departmental participation**

Invited to serve on committees at higher level: yes burden BUT great opportunity and very early on. Participation in the department has been great.

Learned a lot about other things at the university.

Changing collegial relationship: not a lot of difference between associate and full ranks.

Recruit, place, and mentor graduate students.

Enjoy mentoring assistant professors who have energy and new methodological ways of thinking.

Get to disperse information to assistants, try to make it easier for them to navigate. On the other side of the tenure committee is very “revealing.”

Able to focus on students and postdocs, help them with their research and not have to worry so much about one’s own publication schedule.

### **Inter-departmental and cross-cultural work**

More flexibility in interdepartmental position; as associate professor, it is much easier to collaborate with colleagues between departments and disciplines. It is possible to switch appointments; you are not vulnerable to the department that initially hired you.

Able to be involved in center grants at UM with interdisciplinary focus; wasn’t able to do this as assistant.

Interdepartmental work is possible now; don’t have to prove oneself as scholar in only one department anymore.

### **Opening beyond the department to the institution level and beyond**

As assistant, chief judge of work was within the department; as associate, the broader field is now judge, other interlocutors outside the department, OVPR.

University service: get to meet people outside of department. and field, and make a difference at the Institution level. Feeling of being part of the institution.

Become part of the structure of this great public university; get to represent it in the world with pride and belonging.

Previous to this rank, related to the University from the “outside,” with a critical lens.

Now sees the complexity of decision making and has more respect for administration.

### **Personal impact**

Job security and promotion give more flexibility in terms of family life and kids; it would have been much harder without tenure.

Tremendous sense of family relief for both partner and I who got tenure at about the same time.

### **Negative things about being in the Associate Professor rank**

#### **Confusion regarding expectations and promotion**

Lack of clarity has been astounding.

Lack of communication as to what is expected.

It was not that long ago that policies for assistant professors were fleshed out; it is maybe only a matter of time before greater clarity in associate rank.

At associate rank, the problem of the “Michigan Effect” is that people flatten out in research and become administrators, deadwood, etc.

Very active nurturing of assistant professors drops off completely with associate rank; needs to continue.

Felt intellectual freedom right after receiving tenure, but then moving through the rank one realized that one was going to be judged by the same criteria that were used for tenure.

There is so much leeway that committee has in selecting letter writers for promotion to full, and how much time one is in associate rank.

### **Lack of nurturance; loneliness**

When offered tenure, was told “There’s good news and bad news. The good news is that you have tenure. The bad news is that now you’re on your own.”

Yes a lot of freedom but you are on your own; nurturing is a closed off option.

All into production now, no more nurturing provided.

Didn’t even know needed help [but did]; not sure what would have helped.

Was lost after tenure. Without an axe blade over neck, didn’t know why one would get up and sit at desk to work every day.

There is an unchartedness about the associate rank. Combination of freedom to change research and time of life when parents and/or children require demanding care, can lead to getting lost.

No structure to support parent care. First in cohort to have to deal with aging parents’ care and total desert, no structure, nothing to help.

### **Time management between research and service**

The problem is that research is still the criteria for promotion and that service is not valued while associate professors are asked and expected to carry so much service.

Hard to balance what to say “no” to.

What are the differences between full and associate?

Many full professors in one department seem to be at the top of the field because they don’t bear much of the service load, which is instead borne by the associate professors. Fine if this is what it means to be an associate professor, but no one is explaining what the role is supposed to be.

Seems associate professors have all the responsibilities of full, but not the privileges (such as not getting a vote on certain things, and knowing that you’re still coming up for promotion review).

With tenure, you become the person to go to for students.

Law School does not have the rank; in committees you have the same weight when you say something.

I thought that associate professor was the same as full, but no, only some types of services are for the associate professors. Full professors get “reserved” services.

I work as hard as a full professor, as associate professor I carry more a daily burden of services.

Service burden creates a shock effect when promoted and no longer protected from service.

When full professors ask associate professors to do service, there is no ability to say “no.” As assistant, you would talk over service requests with your mentor, and they would help determine whether the service assignment was appropriate to your rank and that moment in your career.

Department size matters: In one small department, receive excellent mentoring from the chair and service rotates.

### **Retention issues**

Flattening out after tenure. Michigan Effect is also that career takes off, receive a lot of nurturing and investment into someone, and then, they leave. Retention issues. Faculty get poached from Michigan after UM has invested in them for years, and the investment is lost. This happens especially at Michigan because of the cultural desirability to many faculty of the coasts; Midwest phenomenon.

Another reason UM faculty get poached is that UM supports a lot of interdisciplinary and cross-cultural work, and encourages junior faculty to have a lot of freedom to be on the edge of their field. Appears very cutting edge to other schools, makes our faculty very desirable.

Wonder if tenure is an illusion, if looking ahead over 10-30 years in a changing world things might happen that make the job less secure.

### **Gender and minorities issues**

As a woman of color, aware of the very low rate of promotion of women of color and so feels scared, skeptical.

Department is diverse by rank but not by gender and minorities. Top of pyramid is quite controlled.

Feels that there are decisions that are made only by full professors (hiring at full, promoting to full); this acts as a gate keeping function.

In some departments, people feel they have a voice that is respected, even if they do not have a vote on these issues.

As a woman in a male-dominated field, has experienced tremendously higher level of service than male colleagues. Not only in the department, but community service nationally in the discipline (organizing conferences and such).

As a woman with a child, have to slow down in productivity.

Women are more than proportionally represented across university and outside in committees. Mentoring to help figure out how to balance all the demands would be helpful.

Administrative burden distributed among gender unequally. Department has been trying hard to avoid imbalances, nonetheless they persist. Even when department leaders are women, promotion to full professor is all men. Want to know why.

Article in Chronicle of Higher Ed about women taking 2-3 years longer in associate rank than do men, nationally.

Service arrangement and gender: imbalance is not within department, balanced more by research area, not necessarily the big committees but the smaller service activities (that also don't count) that get piled on women.



### **Hierarchy and power**

Confronted with people in department that are above you and tell you that you must do this, no matter how it fits in your career.

In one's department there is a large proportion of women, 4-5 are full professors and so one does not feel the imbalance along gender lines. Full professors are also given large burdens. Some "research areas" might be more asked than others to take service on.

### **Funding**

Vulnerability is high in this rank when grants come up for renewal.

So focused on getting past tenure, now expected to compete nationally, have to compete against all.

### **What is needed to thrive as Associate Professors/ What could help**

Solution is not to get everyone promoted, but to recognize that there will be a wide variety of trajectories.

Not advocating something rigid and inflexible, but it can be a terrible burden to carry an internalized timeline regarding one's promotion to full.

Flexibility is good but different guidelines between departments are confusing. Have a policy so that you don't get the sense that if you have passed so many years at the rank level, you are falling behind; that it does not make you feel insecure as a reflection of your scholar's worthiness.

Offer annual workshop to explain rank (like is done for assistant professors).

Rethink promotion process. Don't model on tenure process. Needs a different paradigm.

Manuscript workshops for associate professors as it happens at the assistant level.

In "book fields," think outside of the book in evaluation. Other criteria.

Expectations should be summed over a range of skills that are evaluated.

Do not implement another 3<sup>rd</sup> year review. No more surveillance through reviews.

Regular reviews that duplicate the pressures of tenure would be bad.

Hard to get 6-8 external reviewers to write.

Need to be more flexible in expectations; include teaching and service as criteria, in addition to research.

It would be nice to see department look at candidate and use its own evaluation of their work, not be so reliant on letters of recommendation and outside evaluation.

Recognize that some people are good at writing books, others at teaching, others administration. Have them do what they are good at. There should be a way to make choices, not have them imposed from the outside, and have different ways of evaluating their production, not only use the 2<sup>nd</sup> book as a means of evaluation.

Acknowledge diversity of career paths at the rank level. It is bad for people to internalize one, rigid idea of what they should be doing.

Clear guidelines for individuals are important.

Give even more clear guidelines if you leave up to the faculty to approach the chair when they feel ready to go for promotion.

Idea that "we hire you because we want you to promote you." You could be promoted faster if we gave you the guidelines to follow.

Look into other universities to find out what it "the norm." How much time is expected to be spent at the rank level.

Find a way to protect research time. Summer, on leave? Have support groups to share experience between each others.

Regular meetings—reality checks—with experienced, senior colleagues who can give advice, support, and perspective would break the isolation.

We all have the illusion of being unique, but in reality we are more similar than different, and sharing experiences with people in the same boat is helpful.

Reality checks at different levels: in the department, at the university level and from outside.

If institution feels there is something nebulous that needs clarification.

For most of us, the first book comes out of our dissertation. The second book is from something else, and alone. Wandering alone in the desert can be good so the 2<sup>nd</sup> book is not like the first. But risk taking looks like being unproductive.

Material support dries up in this phase—no nurturance leave, no grant money.

Retention-related issues—Be appreciated for the range of things we do so we don't have to get outside offers to get decent raises.

When someone gets promoted to associate, get new start-up package (done at Harvard).

Places ball in your court, you decide what to do with this. Strong incentive to think about what you are doing. Could happen at the full professor level.

Good spousal accommodations at UM would be good incentive to stay.

Special research funds for mid-career scholars.

The incentive to get promoted to full is weak (they make a little more money, and have even more service). A stronger incentive might be good.

It would be sad if what comes out of this is more service burden on full professors to mentor associate professors, since the service burden is already onerous.

Invite faculty to have a conversation with their chair when they feel ready for promotion.

Have a reality check with the Chair, and if the plan seems reasonable, the faculty could apply for a semester leave to make the plan happen. But this cannot be imposed or it would be infantilizing.

Annual review process in one's department and meeting with the chair. It is additional surveillance, but also assumes some understanding of how to go from associate to full professor. It gives you a least a framework; open to different paths, times and make for a nice conversation.

A lot of colleagues don't even know what each other's research is about. It would be positive to foster more sharing.

Monthly lunches of associate professors in the department. Could invite people from outside to inform the group about various issues.

This focus group was therapeutic.

Table 1: Comparison of Focus Group Participants with All Associate Professors in LSA

**Focus Groups with Associate Professors in the College of LSA: Winter/Spring 2009**

	Focus Group Attendees		All Associate Professors with Funded Appointment in the College of LSA <sup>1</sup>		Resp Rate by Group
	N	%	N	%	
Female	35	66%	100	45%	35%
Male	18	34%	122	55%	15%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>53</b>		<b>222</b>		<b>24%</b>
<b>Demographics</b>					
Asian/Asian American	6	11%	26	12%	23%
URM	10	19%	30	14%	33%
White	37	70%	166	75%	22%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>53</b>		<b>222</b>		<b>24%</b>
<b>Disciplines</b>					
Humanities	19	36%	85	38%	22%
Natural Sciences	11	21%	48	22%	23%
Social Sciences	23	43%	89	40%	26%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>53</b>		<b>222</b>		<b>24%</b>
<b>Promotion</b>					
Promoted from within UM	40	75%	170	77%	24%
Not promoted from within UM	13	25%	52	23%	25%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>53</b>		<b>222</b>		<b>24%</b>
<b>Rank</b>					
Years in Rank (all)	4.96		5.93		
Years in Rank (female)	5.37		6.13		
Years in Rank (male)	4.16		5.77		

<sup>1</sup>Faculty with joint appointments in LSA are counted only once in the department associated with their primary appointment

Source: LSA Focus Group Attendance Lists; M-Pathways Human Resources Data Warehouse (effective date: 03/01/2009)

<b>Distribution of College of LSA Associate Professors within Rank</b>				
	Asst (n=199)	Assoc (n=222)	Full (n=436)	Total (n=857)
Humanities	26%	38%	24%	28%
Natural Sciences	32%	22%	36%	31%
Social Sciences	42%	40%	40%	40%