

Why Do Tenure Track Faculty Leave U-M?

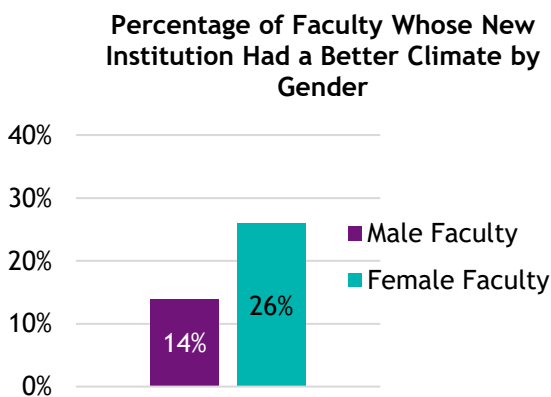
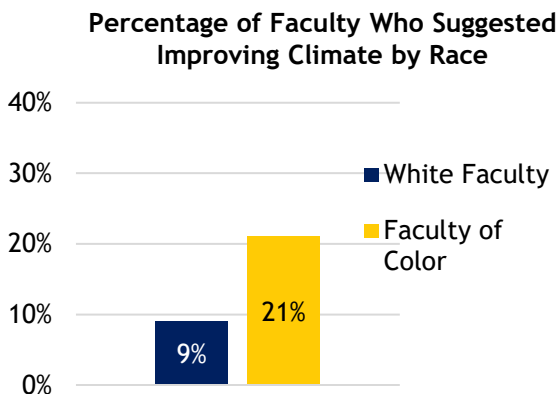


The ADVANCE Program offers exit interviews to tenure track faculty who choose to leave the university. This report is based on exit interviews with 218 tenure track faculty who left between 2011-2019¹. Although these faculty left U-M, they generally spoke highly of U-M, their former units, and their colleagues.

At the same time, the interviews revealed that the most common reasons that faculty leave are: 1) poor climate, 2) to improve resources for research, 3) lack of mentoring/opportunities for leadership and 4) family needs. For most faculty (55%) the decision to leave happened gradually over time, but for some faculty (35%) was precipitated by specific events, such as experiences of bias or negative interactions with a colleague.



1. Climate



Poor school/department climate was the most common reason given for leaving, with 46% of faculty mentioning it as a factor in their decision. Faculty noted negative interactions with colleagues, unhealthy expectations around work-life balance, and experiences of racial and gender discrimination. In addition, faculty often identified department leadership as a concern. Women were more likely than men to cite department leadership as the worst aspect of their unit.

Issues of poor school/department climate were of particular importance to faculty from marginalized groups. Faculty of color were more likely than White faculty to cite a poor climate at U-M as a reason for not accepting a counteroffer, and to suggest that U-M could improve the faculty experience by improving the climate. Women were more likely than men to report that their new institution had a better climate than U-M. These findings provide important evidence that faculty from marginalized groups experience a poorer climate at U-M and that this contributes to their decisions to leave. To maintain a diverse faculty, we must work towards creating a more inclusive and welcoming climate for all faculty.

2. Research support and resources

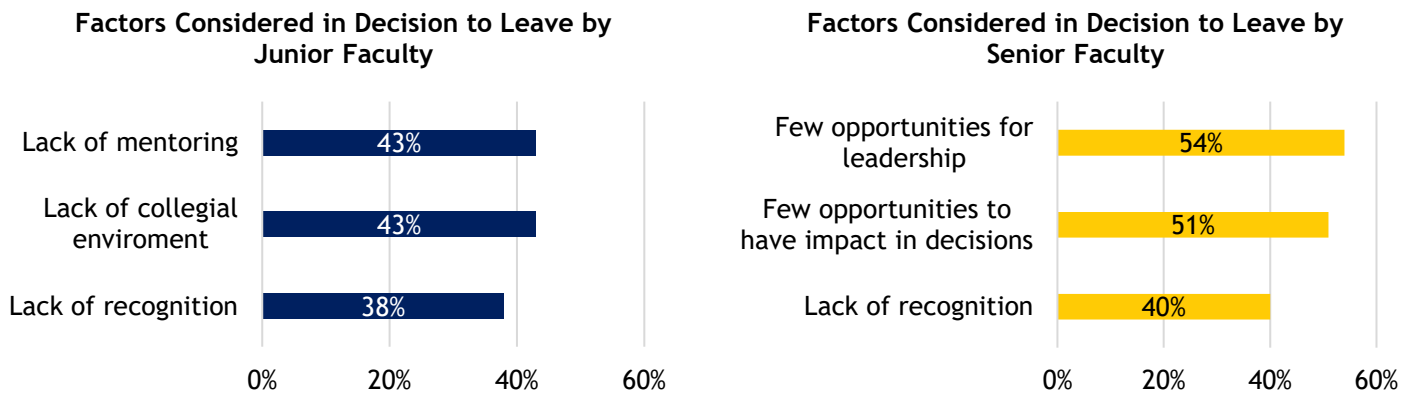
Almost a third of faculty mentioned that better research support and resources at their new institution were a factor in their decision to leave, making it the second most common reason that faculty cited. Improving resources and salaries for faculty was the most frequently suggested policy change (22%). These findings highlight the need for resources to improve faculty retention at U-M.

¹The full report can be found at <https://advance.umich.edu/research/>

3. Opportunities for mentoring and for leadership

A lack of leadership opportunities was noted by 20% of faculty as a factor in their decision to leave. In addition, 21% of faculty mentioned that improving faculty mentoring could aid in the University's efforts to help faculty develop as scholars.

When examining the factors that galvanized faculty to leave, important differences emerged between junior and senior faculty. Junior faculty were more likely than senior faculty to report that a lack of mentoring was a consideration in their decision to leave. In contrast, senior faculty were more likely to say that having few leadership opportunities contributed to their decision. Both groups noted a lack of recognition as a factor in their decision. Taken together, these findings highlight faculty concerns around career development.



4. Family needs



Family needs were cited by 20% of faculty as a reason for leaving U-M. When asked to rate their satisfaction with specific aspects of their experience at U-M, 43% of faculty were dissatisfied with opportunities for their partner and 11% of faculty suggested that improving support for those with dual career needs would help to improve this situation. Faculty were also dissatisfied with their ability to secure childcare on or around campus (26%), with women being more dissatisfied than men. Location was also important; 20% of faculty mentioned that they or their family were unhappy in Ann Arbor and 16% desired to move closer to family and friends. These results call attention to the dissatisfaction and lack of support that faculty experience regarding family.

These four factors motivated faculty to leave U-M and highlight areas where U-M might focus its faculty retention efforts. Improving opportunities for leadership and mentoring, expanding and increasing equitable access to research support and resources, and supporting family needs are ways to improve U-M for all faculty. Efforts to improve the climate may be particularly instrumental in retaining faculty members from marginalized groups. Pre-emptive retention efforts are important; most faculty describe a gradual process of deciding to leave U-M that is influenced by multiple factors.