

Why do Associate Professors Leave the University of Michigan?

Report prepared by the ADVANCE Program

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Project Background & Goals

- Associate Professors are in a career phase with unique challenges and opportunities after earning tenure. Moreover, ADVANCE campus-wide faculty climate survey data (AY 2022-23) suggests that, compared to Assistant Professors at U-M, Associate Professors are overall less satisfied with the broader campus climate, and their role at U-M, and feel less valued.
- The purpose of this brief report is to identify, based on exit interview data collected by ADVANCE since January 2023, factors associated with departure by Associate Professors compared to Assistant Professors. We hope that these findings will help lend insights into how U-M can improve experiences at U-M for Associate Professors, and more effectively retain these valuable faculty members.

Methodology

- From January 2023 through October 2023, ADVANCE staff conducted exit interviews (either virtually or via survey) with 26 former U-M faculty (14 Associates and 12 Assistants) who left U-M from 2019 to 2022
- As part of conversations or surveys, former faculty answered a variety of questions probing reasons for their departure, including climate/culture, the tenure process, salary, equity, and personal issues
- Michigan Medicine faculty, faculty who retired, or who were denied tenure were not invited to participate
- Conversations with faculty were recorded and transcribed; ADVANCE analyzed the interview transcriptions and recorded survey responses using best practices for qualitative data analysis
- To protect participant confidentiality, and because the sample size is small, ADVANCE did not compare findings across faculty groups aside from rank (e.g., racial identity, gender identity, department, unit)

Key¹ Takeaways – as of October 2023

- Relatively more **Associate** Professors left U-M from 2019-2022 due to concerns about:
 - Salary, including benefits
 - Opportunity to have impact through their scholarship and/or teaching
 - Access to discretionary funds
 - Level of local social connections and support
- Relatively more **Assistant** Professors left U-M due to overall workload
- **Both** Associate and Assistant Professors left U-M due to concerns about:
 - Department climate and culture
 - Department leadership style and skills
 - Work-family challenges
 - Unequal treatment compared to peers
 - Level of recognition/appreciation received
- **Fewer** Associate and Assistant Professors left U-M due to concerns about:
 - Access to physical space and support services
 - Quality of graduate students and postdocs
 - Access to teaching and research assistants
 - Physical or mental health challenges
 - Local climate (religious, political, etc.)

¹ A selection of supporting direct quotes from former faculty appear on subsequent pages. A more detailed report is forthcoming pending additional data collection.

SUMMARY OF REASONS FORMER FACULTY LEFT U-M

Which of the following played a role in your decision to leave your role at U-M, and to what degree?²

	Associate Professors (n = 14)			Assistant Professor (n = 12)		
Reasons for Departure	Major factor	Minor factor	Not a factor	Major factor	Minor factor	Not a factor
Job/Role Factors						
Level of recognition/appreciation	43%	21%	36%	33%	33%	33%
Research/Teaching/Service workload	14%	36%	50%	33%	33%	33%
Amount & usefulness of feedback	7%	36%	57%	8%	33%	58%
Sense of meaning	21%	14%	64%	25%	17%	58%
Opportunity for impact (scholarship, teaching)	29%	29%	43%	25%	17%	58%
Degree of job/role autonomy	29%	14%	57%	17%	8%	75%
Salary, including benefits	64%	7%	29%	17%	17%	67%
Unit/Department Factors						
Support for securing grants	7%	29%	64%	17%	8%	75%
Access to discretionary funds	29%	14%	57%	17%	17%	67%
Access to physical space/resources	21%	7%	71%	17%	17%	67%
Access to support services (admin., tech)	7%	29%	64%	17%	8%	75%
Quality of graduate students/postdocs	14%	43%	43%	17%	25%	58%
Access to teaching assistants	0%	21%	79%	8%	17%	75%
Access to research assistants	0%	21%	79%	17%	25%	58%
Equal treatment compared to my peers	43%	7%	50%	50%	8%	42%
Department climate and culture	57%	29%	14%	67%	8%	25%
Department leadership skills and style	64%	21%	14%	42%	17%	42%
Environmental & Personal Factors						
Local affordability/cost of living	0%	0%	100%	25%	25%	50%
Local climate (e.g., political, religious)	0%	21%	79%	0%	42%	58%
Work-family challenges	36%	14%	50%	50%	17%	33%
Physical and/or mental health challenges	0%	7%	93%	25%	8%	67%
Level of local social connections/support	29%	7%	64%	8%	17%	75%

² Prior to participating in an exit interview or longer survey, former faculty were asked to fill out a brief survey indicating which factors played a role in their departure. In this summary of these data, darker blue cells indicate a higher percentage of faculty endorsed a response, whereas lighter blue cells indicate a lower percentage of faculty endorsed a response.

SUPPORTING QUOTES FROM FORMER U-M FACULTY

Relatively more Associate Professors left U-M due to concerns about:

Salary, including benefits

Major factor for 64% of Departing Associate Professors

The majority of former faculty felt that they were not receiving adequate monetary compensation commensurate with their contributions, and felt that other institutions provided more competitive offers...

- It's a competitive labor market for faculty, and if we were going to get paid our actual market rate, we would have to leave to get it, because it did not seem like Michigan was going to be willing to play ball
- I chose to leave because....my salary had stagnated relative to my peers despite evidence of career success
- Michigan does not have competitive salaries compared to most other academic institutions. Other offer was 2.5 times the amount in terms of salary at Michigan.

Opportunity for Impact

Major factor for 58% of Departing Associate Professors

Many former faculty sought out opportunities where they perceived greater opportunity for impact due to stronger leadership support for their scholarly endeavors...

- I think Michigan is a place to do good work, but not a place to do *great* work. We will need substantially more investments in research support in order to be considered a top institution in the nation.
- At my new institution, I have more *new* research opportunities; e.g., I have an opportunity to be more impactful through research on policy
- The senior faculty ... are not on board with ... the new research methods, or how people are doing research outside of Michigan. And it seems as though the department is coasting on its name and its top status, but you can't rest on your laurels too long

Access to Discretionary Funds

Major factor for 29% of Departing Associate Professors

A substantial portion of former faculty felt that, compared to other institutions, their unit did not provide them with the discretionary funding required to effectively pursue their goals...

- There were some things that would have helped me to [create] the research environment that would have made it more sustainable for me to stay. When it comes to building things, they said, or public goods for the department, those are things that you can get easypeasy -- No. We asked for many things to try to build and they weren't even that expensive."
- At U-M we needed to get approval from a grants administrator to spend any money as it relates to a grant or even discretionary funds. Now, that might be unit specific, but it's a barrier because I understand we don't want rampant spending, but it underscores the lack of trust. At my new institution, there's just this implicit trust that I'm not going to misuse that, and that it just feels nice

A substantial portion of former faculty desired a greater sense of belonging to their local community....

- My partner and I are both from the East Coast. And so when we accepted the position, it was just like, 'Wow, we got jobs in a top five department, this is amazing.' But of course, at the back of our heads, it was just like, 'we are far away from our families...' It's not the fault of Michigan, just, we're not from the midwest
- I'm an immigrant and there's just not that many immigrants here [in Ann Arbor]. There are immigrants around the university, but it's not in the same way-- like where I grew up outside of [city, state].

Relatively more Assistant Professors left UM due to concerns about:

Former Assistant Professors felt that their overall workload, in terms of time spent on research, teaching, and service was burdensome, and sought out more sustainable early career faculty roles elsewhere...

- My new institution has a different balance of research and teaching. I do much more research. I teach less than I did at Michigan. And so in some ways I feel like I actually have better balance to my life because research expectations for Michigan were extremely high and they also wanted you to teach three semester long classes a year
- Junior faculty need to do this and work insane hours simply to survive and complete their bare minimum of requirements, due to the huge workload of teaching and service while one attempts to cobble together a research program in what precious few hours one can spare to do so - lest one get fired for not meeting research expectations.
- I came into this system very happy with my job. 5 years later I was very unhappy with my job. I felt that I was brought here because of my research and I got so bogged down with other things that the reason I got the job has nothing to do with what I spend all my time doing.
- Faculty are expected to be high performers (e.g. do multiple jobs like teach, research, mentor, write grant proposals, run a small business). The job is "easy" when I have to do 2 of those things. The job is very stressful for me, and my family, when I have to do 3 or more of those things.

Both Associate and Assistant Professors left U-M due to concerns about:

Department Climate and Culture

Major factor for 57% of Associates, and 67% of Assistants

Former faculty frequently mentioned dysfunctional interpersonal dynamics within their units as a key factor impacting their departure....

- A lack of awareness or willingness to even recognize or grapple with them [gender dynamics]...just a total lack of understanding of what other people's experiences beyond their own might be like
- The Department has had a lot of issues with senior faculty blocking progress/gaslighting junior faculty who are trying to institute change
- ...A [department] culture of competition instead of cooperation and collaboration

Department Leadership Style and Skills

Major factor for 42% of Associates, and 64% of Assistants

Many former faculty shared concerns about their former unit's leadership, in terms of lack of self-awareness, poor communication style, inadequate use of authority, identity-based maltreatment and generally disrespectful behavior...

- Specifically, issues around racism and racist violence; e.g., when shootings happen, I just felt like there was this culture of caution, of not wanting to rock the boat and say too much or say the wrong thing, but then you can't, that undermines your ability to lead... Where is the statement? Where is the recognition that this horrible thing is happening that's very relevant to all of our work and it is definitely affecting certain members of community?
- The vast majority of my time has been one where I've been treated poorly by men in leadership, including being bullied and disrespected on a daily basis
- [Department] has a longstanding problem with sexual predators. Since administrators condone the behavior, they are complicit and have no incentive to change...Inaction only emboldens the predators, making things worse and worse as time goes on
- Very unsupportive...It was very much a bullying, top-down managerial perspective that didn't take into consideration that we're people, that we're human beings

Equal Treatment

Major factor for 43% of Associates, and 50% of Assistants

Former faculty frequently cited concerns about unequal treatment in terms of pay and promotion, and epistemic exclusion, as compared to their peers...

- Faculty doing research on underrepresented populations or those faculty who come from underrepresented backgrounds are continuously under valued in subtle and more blatant ways
- Merit raises are inherently unfair and politics are rampant in our school
- Department had and continues to have a major issue with retaining mid-career faculty, especially physician-scientists due to discrimination/sexism and lack of support/mentoring
- Me and another female faculty of color, were the two lowest paid people in the department, and I was livid. And I also found out that everybody was getting signing bonuses, like mortgage assistance, and I just did not know that that was a thing to ask for. It was not offered to me...I felt so undervalued

Work-Family Challenges

Major factor for 36% of Associates, and 50% of Assistants

A variety of work-family challenges, including support for dual careers, elder care, and family planning were key departure factors for a substantial portion of former faculty...

- I chose to leave because I did not receive enough support for my partner, an academic...Although my other offer was higher, I would have accepted less from UM if there had been any effort by the Dean to address my dual career concerns
- Number one reason was probably the lack of support for spousal hire for my partner, which caused location challenges for our family...I was at Michigan having to be a single parent during the week with no recognition of what that did to our family.
- I had had a lot of issues with my maternity leave...That was the undoing, I would say, for me and my faith in the leadership.
- my parents live in the X area and are getting on the older side, and it was useful for me to be around for them.
- I really loved it and I can't emphasize enough the fact that I did not want to leave. The reason I left is because my partner and I were long distance... But the offer that they were making was that my partner would have to give up tenure and start as an assistant professor, wait for several years, and then go up for tenure again

Level of Recognition

Major factor for 43% of Associates, and 33% of Assistants

Aside from monetary compensation, former faculty felt that leadership did not provide adequate recognition for their efforts...

- Hit the glass ceiling. Was told by leadership that I was not the future of the division I was in, although I was the main faculty member producing research...
- Failure of recognition despite excessive service requirements as compared to peers...

DATA-BASED RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

ADVANCE's preliminary exit interview/survey data indicates that former Associate Professors left U-M primarily due to concerns about *salary, opportunity for impact, access to discretionary funds and local social support*. Additionally, both former Associate (along with Assistant) Professors had challenges with *department climate, culture, and leadership, work-family issues, unequal treatment as compared to peers*, and the *level of recognition* they received for their efforts. Taken together, ADVANCE suggests the following action steps to Department/Unit and School-level leadership to begin to address these concerns and more effectively retain Associate Professors at U-M:

Regularly Measure Department Climate and Culture

- Secure professional support for the administration of surveys to measure and track changes in faculty's perceptions of the departmental climate and culture.
- Insights from assessments can inform changes to policies and practices to help improve unit climate and culture in areas such as leadership, belonging, professional development, and sources of stress.

Perform Salary Equity Analyses

- Conduct salary equity studies to identify differences between predicted and actual salary across faculty tracks, ranks, demographic groups and institutional human resource data.
- Predicted salary differences, in combination with additional factors, including performance of the faculty member, may help to identify subsets of faculty who may be experiencing inequitable compensation.

Enhance Dual Career Support

- Manage expectations for partner support when first engaging with faculty candidates.
- Inform the University community about the mission of the dual career office and encourage communications to support dual career families.

Cultivate Local Community-Building

- Organize and sponsor identity-based social events, communities of practice, and other social touchpoints intended to help faculty connect with others and attain a stronger sense of belonging and support at the University, and in the broader local community.

Amplify Faculty Recognition Efforts

- Frequently recognize faculty for their holistic efforts, including their scholarship, teaching, and service contributions, both visible and invisible.
- Inquire about the various ways in which faculty may contribute to the University community, through unofficial activities to make the academy a "better place."
- Recognize faculty in informal settings, such as departmental meetings, and refrain from only recognizing faculty during formally designated times (e.g., Faculty Activity Report review).

Encourage Faculty to Use Available Career Resources

- Utilize available professional development resources, such as 1:1 coaching (offered by certain Schools and Colleges), and other career development tools to help newly promoted faculty navigate this critical juncture in their careers

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