# Addressing Generational Change with Senior Faculty Members

*Custom Research Brief • April 23, 2012*

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Networking Contacts
I. Research Methodology

Project Challenge

A member institution approached the Council with the following questions:

- What cultural or generational gaps do administrators observe between senior and junior faculty? Which generational tensions are most salient across departments?
- How do senior faculty members react to an increasingly diverse faculty?
- What strategies do administrators offer to help senior faculty members to understand and embrace changes in institutional culture? Do strategies for bridging cultural or generational gaps differ across academic disciplines or departments?
- Do administrators offer programs targeted at senior faculty members to bridge cultural or generational differences? What types of programs are most common?
- Do written academic policies reflect generational biases or tensions? If so, how do administrators ensure that written policies accommodate and respect all faculty members?
- How do administrators ensure that programs demonstrate respect for the views of senior faculty members? How do administrators prevent senior faculty from feeling stigmatized or criticized?
- How do administrators assess the efficacy of programs for senior faculty members? What are the programs’ outcomes? Does the number of conflicts about cultural or generational differences among faculty members decrease as a result of programming?

Project Sources

- Education Advisory Board’s internal and online [www.educationadvisoryboard.com](http://www.educationadvisoryboard.com) research libraries
- National Center for Education Statistics [NCES](http://nces.ed.gov/)

Research Parameters

The Council interviewed academic officers at the following institutions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Approximate Enrollment (Total / Undergraduate)</th>
<th>Carnegie Classification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cornell University</td>
<td>Northeast: Small City</td>
<td>Private not-for-profit</td>
<td>20,900 / 13,900</td>
<td>Research University (very high research activity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kent State University</td>
<td>Midwest: Large Suburb</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>26,600 / 21,200</td>
<td>Research University (high research activity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stanford University</td>
<td>West: Large Suburb</td>
<td>Private not-for-profit</td>
<td>19,500 / 6,900</td>
<td>Research University (very high research activity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of California-Los Angeles (UCLA)</td>
<td>West: Large City</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>38,200 / 26,200</td>
<td>Research University (very high research activity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of California-Santa Barbara (UCSB)</td>
<td>West: Midsize Suburb</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>22,200 / 19,200</td>
<td>Research University (very high research activity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Virginia</td>
<td>South: Small Suburb</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>24,400 / 15,600</td>
<td>Research University (very high research activity)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: National Center for Education Statistics
II. EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW

Key Observations

❖ No contact institutions offer programs or training specifically targeted towards intergenerational difference or conflict; instead, administrators incorporate information about generational changes in standards for faculty performance into other faculty programs. Contacts believe that most senior faculty members would resent programs or trainings that aim to acculturate them to changing standards for faculty performance, which they may perceive as patronizing or overly critical. As such, administrators should address generational changes to standards for work/life balance, research funding, and publication rates throughout other programs for senior faculty members to indirectly address those tensions.

❖ Some contacts experience tension over research funding and publication rates, but contacts note that the formal tenure and promotion process typically precludes intergenerational conflict from entering into tenure and promotion decisions. Faculty governance bodies typically oversee the tenure and promotion process – although the central administration provides final approval – so junior faculty members have the opportunity to intervene if they believe that a tenure or promotion decision is unfairly biased against junior faculty members.

❖ Generational differences typically involve gender, especially around expectations for work/life balance. Contacts believe that gender is closely related to these generational shifts because single-parentage and dual-working partnerships are increasingly common among junior faculty members. To address this, several contacts suggest that administrators can provide faculty members with data on unconscious bias in hiring, promotion, tenure, and daily professional interaction. Contacts suggest that data on unconscious bias provide senior faculty members with a framework to evaluate their own attitudes towards junior faculty members without directly confronting or criticizing senior faculty members.

❖ Senior faculty members are more likely to understand and accept generational shifts in standards for faculty performance if they engage in frequent, collaborative experiences with junior faculty members. Contacts believe that didactic programs about generational change are ineffective in bridging generational differences between senior and junior faculty members. Instead, administrators should provide senior faculty members with leadership programs and mentoring opportunities; these programs encourage dialogue between junior and senior faculty members, which promotes understanding of generational change.

❖ Faculty-driven programs and policies are the most durable, so administrators should ensure that all programs and efforts to eradicate generational tension and bias are faculty-led. For instance, administrators at Kent State University established a process to identify and eradicate bias in formal institutional policies that incorporated faculty members in each step. Contacts suggest that this faculty-driven approach ensures that all faculty members understand the importance of eliminating bias in formal policies.
Contacts report only occasional generational conflicts among faculty members; most conflicts occur between department leadership and a junior faculty member, typically regarding promotion, tenure, or research and publication standards. However, all contacts believe that intergenerational tension and conflict is endemic to higher education; senior faculty members typically adhere to the standards of their own promotion and tenure processes, and they expect the same of junior faculty, regardless of the changing cultural and financial landscape of higher education. As such, most contacts defer the resolution of generational tensions to human resources on an ad hoc basis when individual conflicts arise. That is, administrators at most contact institutions do not maintain programming that targets generational tension or conflict on an institution-wide level.

However, because all contacts experience generational conflicts and tensions among faculty members at their institutions, they identify three characteristics of effective programs to address generational conflict:

### Characteristics of Effective Generational Conflict Resolution

**Indirect**

Senior faculty members generally resist attempts by the central administration to monitor or influence faculty behavior; accordingly, contacts believe that most senior faculty members resent programs or trainings that aim to acculturate them to changing standards. Programs to address cultural change with senior faculty members must approach the topic without directly confronting or criticizing them; instead, programs should highlight areas of difference and provide opportunities for discussion among faculty. This ensures that senior faculty members feel respected throughout the program and encourages them to engage in the discussion critically rather than defensively.

**Gender-Conscious**

Generational conflicts typically arise in gendered contexts, such as a female faculty member seeking tenure and a male senior faculty member objecting based on a generational standard. This is especially true for standards around work/life balance, as single-parentage and dual-working partnerships are increasingly common among junior faculty members. As such, contacts believe that programs to address generational change must discuss gendered matters such as parentage, family obligation, and unconscious bias; this ensures that administrators do not ignore a common characteristic of generational tension.

**Department-Specific**

Standards for promotion and tenure differ among academic units, and grant award rates and expectations vary widely among departments. To ensure that faculty members understand how generational tensions and biases affect their departments, administrators must attend to each department differently. Contacts note that senior faculty members typically understand that funding opportunities and research awards are increasingly scarce throughout higher education; but faculty attitudes about promotion and tenure standards are unlikely to change unless faculty members understand the relative scarcity of grants and awards in their field, based on statistical data about grant award rates and availability.

“In my 28 years in higher education administration, I have always seen tension between senior and junior faculty. I think it’s just a natural part of the landscape.”

- Council Interview
IV. Strategies for Senior Faculty Engagement

Although no contact institutions offer programs that target acculturation for senior faculty members, administrators incorporate data and information about generational conflict, tension, and bias into a variety of other faculty programs. Contacts report that this indirect approach is effective to help senior faculty members understand the changing landscape of higher education, especially with respect to work/life balance, funding availability, and publication rates. Administrators communicate these messages through leadership and mentoring programs and promotion and tenure workshops.

Leadership Programs and Mentoring Opportunities for Senior Faculty

These programs offer senior faculty members the opportunity to learn about the experiences of junior faculty members at the institution, as well as ways that senior faculty members can assist junior faculty members in their career development. Contacts note that these programs directly expose senior faculty members to the current standards for work/life balance, promotion and tenure, and research funding; additionally, these programs encourage senior faculty members to engage with junior faculty members as collaborators and advisors rather than as competitors, which makes senior faculty members more receptive to generational change. Contacts believe that these programs are effective in acculturating senior faculty members to generational change because they allow senior faculty members to learn about through experience and dialogue with junior faculty members.

Faculty members are nominated to these programs by their peers or departmental leadership; administrators limit enrollment in these programs both to accommodate budgetary constraints and to ensure that faculty members perceive the program as prestigious and worthwhile.

Program Characteristics

- **Leadership programs** provide faculty members with skills to lead their peers and departments, especially with respect to department growth and guidance for junior faculty members. Leadership programs typically take the form of half-day seminars or workshops, annual faculty retreats, or semester-long faculty development courses.

- **Mentoring programs** pair a senior faculty member with a junior faculty member from a different academic department. In the mentoring relationship, the senior faculty member helps the junior faculty member explore the institution’s culture and provides guidance on career advancement, teaching, and other matters of concern. Contacts find that these relationships help junior faculty members adjust to the institution; additionally, the mentorship helps senior faculty members understand the challenges faced by junior faculty members, which reduces generational tension and misunderstanding.

Establishing a Nomination Process to Promote Program Prestige

Faculty members are nominated to leadership and mentoring programs by their peers or departmental leadership; administrators limit enrollment in these programs to accommodate budgetary constraints and to ensure that faculty members perceive the program as prestigious and worthwhile.
Administrators at several institutions offer faculty members statistical and quantitative data on subjects of generational tension and conflict, including data on:

- National trends in publication expectations and rates
- Rates of research grant awards and availability
- Rates of dual-working parent academic households or single-parent academic households

Administrators at several contact institutions, including UCLA and UCSB, use these types of data to engage senior faculty members; administrators present this data to senior faculty members in workshops on hiring and tenure standards, which faculty members must attend if they contribute to their department’s hiring or tenure review processes. Administrators at Stanford University hold a two-hour workshop during the spring semester for all departmental leadership at the institution to provide them with data about the tenure process at Stanford through a guest speaker to the institution; the workshop includes data on the evolving research, publication, and work/life standards for faculty members, as well as an open question-and-answer period in which attendees can express concerns. The workshop is not mandatory, but contacts report that it is well-attended by faculty. Contacts also report that departmental leaders are ideal targets for data distribution, as faculty members are more likely to accept information from their department chair than an administrator.

Administrators often pair statistical data on publication rates, research funding, and work/life balance with social science research on unconscious bias; contacts suggest that data on unconscious bias provide senior faculty members with a framework to evaluate their own attitudes towards junior faculty members without directly confronting or criticizing senior faculty members.
**V. COOPERATION WITH FACULTY GOVERNANCE**

Faculty members generally prefer policies, procedures, and programs to be developed by the faculty rather than the central administration, so most contacts believe that faculty governance bodies are best suited to address generational tensions among faculty members. In particular, contacts recommend that administrators engage faculty governance in policy review and tenure and promotion procedures.

**Engaging the Faculty Senate to Eliminate Generational Bias in Institutional Policies**

At Kent State University, administrators implemented a policy review process to address gender bias in formal institutional policies, and contacts believe that the process can be used to identify and eliminate generational bias in formal policies as well. The process engages faculty members at all stages; contacts stress that senior faculty members are more likely to support and adopt policy changes if they are faculty-developed. The chart below details the process:

**Reviewing Institutional Policies for Bias at Kent State University**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Groups and Data Collection</th>
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<tr>
<td>Administrators assemble several faculty focus groups to determine faculty members’ primary concerns about institutional policies. For generational conflicts, contacts recommend that administrators convene separate focus groups for junior and senior faculty members; this allows administrators to identify the competing concerns between the two groups, as well as policies and procedures that are of concern to both groups. Focus group participants should be nominated by departmental leadership; contacts recommend that participants have a demonstrated interest in policy development and a strong background of institutional service.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Formation of a Faculty Committee and Policy Development</th>
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<tr>
<td>Administrators establish a committee to review all institutional policies for generational bias and to respond to the focus groups’ concerns. Based on the policy reviews, the committee recommends improvements to the policies to the faculty senate. Administrators should set a deadline for the committee’s policy recommendations. Contacts note that committee membership can be easily developed by inviting the most passionate and dedicated members of the focus groups to join the committee.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Policy Recommendation Review by Faculty Senate Executive Committee</th>
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<tr>
<td>Administrators should submit the committee’s recommendations to the faculty senate’s executive committee for review before submission to the full faculty senate. The executive committee can provide feedback on the recommendations and determine whether or not passage in the full senate is likely. Based on the executive committee’s feedback, administrators can reconvene the policy review committee to revise the recommendations or submit the recommendations to the full senate. Contacts report that this additional review ensures likely passage for the recommendations.</td>
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</table>

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<tr>
<th>Formal Policy Submission to Faculty Senate</th>
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<tr>
<td>Finally, administrators submit the policy revisions to the full senate for approval. Contacts believe that faculty members are likely to approve policy changes that come through this development process, as they perceive the recommendations as faculty-led.</td>
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</table>
V. COOPERATION WITH FACULTY GOVERNANCE

Involving Faculty Governance in Tenure and Promotion Decisions

At most contact institutions, a faculty governance body oversees tenure and promotion processes, which ensures that generational bias in tenure and promotion decisions can be easily identified and discussed. At UCLA, the faculty senate maintains a committee on academic personnel that reviews all tenure and promotion decisions before final administrative approval. Contacts identify this approval process as a particularly effective way to communicate evolving standards for tenure and promotion to senior faculty members for several reasons:

- **Easy Identification of Generational Bias.** The committee on academic personnel includes both junior and senior faculty, so the committee can easily identify, discuss, and resolve generational biases in departmental decisions.

- **Expanded Oversight.** Tenure and promotion decisions are reviewed by academic departments, the committee on academic personnel, and the central administration. Contacts believe that this multi-layered oversight ensures that generational bias does not influence final decisions on tenure and promotion, as each reviewing body can identify the biases of the others.

- **Clear, Public Standards for Tenure and Promotion.** Because the committee on academic personnel oversees tenure and promotion decisions, the faculty senate has easy access to each department’s standards for tenure and promotion. Contacts note that this ensures that standards are made clear and public by each department so that the committee does not question the department’s decisions.

“Any approach to conflict should emphasize accountability, not compliance. Faculty members should feel responsible for their attitudes and behaviors.”

- Council Interview
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