

# Gender Gap in Academic Wages Is Linked to Type of Institution, Researcher Says

By [DAVID GLENN](#)

New York

It's where women teach, more than what they teach, that accounts for their poorer earnings in the academic work force, a researcher from the University of Iowa suggested at a conference here on Monday.

For decades, scholars have tried to sort out how much of the gender gap in wages is caused by raw discrimination and how much is driven by mediating factors. Female faculty members have sometimes been found, for example, to have fewer and less-prestigious postgraduate degrees, on average, than their male colleagues. Some studies have also found that women are concentrated in fields or institutions that attract relatively little external research money, or where faculty members publish less frequently.

Those mediating factors do not necessarily excuse the gender gap, because they might themselves reflect various kinds of past and present sexism. But they complicate efforts to understand and remedy wage disparities.

On Monday afternoon, a scholar suggested a way to clarify the question. During a panel discussion at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Paul D. Umbach, an assistant professor of higher education at the University of Iowa, offered a new statistical technique for assessing wage inequalities. He argued that his method—known as a cross-classified random-effects model—offers a richer and more accurate picture than scholars' previous analyses of the gender gap. The method is described in his [paper](#), "Gender Equity in College Faculty Pay: A Cross-Classified Random Effects Model Examining the Impact of Human Capital, Academic Disciplines, and Institutions."

Mr. Umbach chewed over data concerning nearly 8,000 faculty members at 472 four-year colleges and universities who were surveyed in 2003-4 by the National Study of Postsecondary Faculty, a project of the National Center for Education Statistics. He used

a "nested model" that attempted to isolate the effects of colleges' characteristics, scholarly disciplines' characteristics, and individual scholars' characteristics.

The bottom line: Mr. Umbach found that the salary gap is more strongly driven by women's concentration at certain institutions (public, master's-level institutions where faculty members tend to teach more sections and draw less outside research money) than by their concentration in certain disciplines, like education and anthropology.

### **Part of Gap Still Unexplained**

Even after controlling for women's concentration in disciplines and institutions, Mr. Umbach found an unexplained salary gap between men and women—the sort of gap that might be caused in part by sheer discrimination on the part of administrators—of roughly 4.2 percent.

That gap is smaller than many other scholars have found, but Mr. Umbach stressed that it is not trivial. "That's roughly \$3,200 per year, in this sample," he said.

"Women may take a double hit, or even a triple hit," Mr. Umbach continued. "They're taking a hit, first of all, of roughly 4.2 percent. And then they take a further hit depending on where they're nested, and they tend to be nested in places where they're rewarded less."

Tatiana Melguizo, an assistant professor of education at the University of Southern California, praised Mr. Umbach's paper during the panel discussion. But she also wondered whether his model adequately accounts for women's self-selection into fields and institutions.

Mr. Umbach's focus was gender, but he also found that—all else being equal—Asian-American faculty members earn approximately 5 percent less than their white counterparts, and faculty members with children earn 3 percent more than childless faculty members. In an interview after the panel, he said that both of those findings should be viewed cautiously and will require further research.

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