

# School of Communications

BLACK WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION:  
THE HOWARD UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCE



**SARAH BREYFOGLE**

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**HOWARD  
UNIVERSITY**

CENTER FOR  
**WOMEN,  
GENDER  
& GLOBAL  
LEADERSHIP**



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The GWGGL Working Paper Series examines issues related to women, gender, and sexuality with a particular focus on the Black experience. It provides a platform for scholars working on issues from all disciplines to share research on a broad range of topics such as science and technology, health, politics and public policy, law, social justice, business and entrepreneurship, medicine, environmental justice, and climate, diversity and inclusion, arts and the humanities.

*Black Women in Higher Education: The Howard University Experience is a special edition of the Working Paper Series (WPS) of the Center for Women, Gender and Global Leadership. The reports in this series form part of the Women in Leadership: A Storytelling Project, which uses oral narratives to document the experiences and journeys of women leaders at Howard University. The storytelling project is available on the Center's YouTube page.*



CENTER FOR  
WOMEN,  
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# Black Women in Higher Education: The Howard University Experience

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## **A Special Edition of the Working Paper Series by the Center for Women, Gender and Global Leadership**

The historic launch of the Howard University Center for Women, Gender and Global Leadership on October 4, 2020, was the culmination of many years of women and feminist organizing and activism at Howard University. The Center stands as an homage to the women and men who have advocated for, advanced, and established programs, initiatives, courses and other forms of activism for women and gender issues in the long history of Howard University.

Howard is known as a place of many firsts, yet the history of women remains largely in the archives. For example, women have established or led seven centers in areas ranging from the Center for Sickle Cell Disease to the Center for Women and Global Leadership. The contributors have also identified notable women faculty, students and staff from the Howard University archives that have not received much attention in existing literature on Howard's history.

Howard's administration has made recent strides in cultivating Black women leaders as deans and leaders in critical administrative positions. Still, there has been little analysis of how gender equity is practiced among faculty, the board of trustees, and executive leadership. The election of Kamala Harris, a Howard alumna, as the first woman vice president of the United States in 2020 reinvigorated Howard University's position as a leading Historically Black College and University (HBCU) in the United States and abroad. Howard University has produced several pioneer Black figures and leaders in the United States, including a Supreme Court judge, members of Congress, leaders of big companies and movie stars. Yet, we know little about the women and men faculty who teach, train and develop these leaders.

Black Women in Higher Education: The Howard University Experience is the culmination of a two-year research project designed by J. Jarpa Dawuni, Ph.D., and Anita Plummer, Ph.D., and carried out by graduate students and faculty that documents the past and present status of women faculty, students, and administrators at Howard University. Each working paper provides historical and contemporary data and case studies of women at the institution in areas ranging from their role in leadership positions, faculty rank, salary, retention, post-graduate work, exposure to violence and discrimination, and more. The data reveal a complex story of individuals and groups of women addressing gender inequity spanning the University's over 150-year history.

As a center focused on global leadership, this project draws on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (goal number five) which calls on nations and institutions to work towards achieving gender equality. Equally, goal number four (#4) calls for quality education. Recent efforts to promote diversity, equity, inclusion and access (DEIA) require data and informed research to provide a baseline for assessing where progress has been made and where more work needs to be done. This Working Paper Series (WPS) provides the needed baseline for further research on the topic of women's representation at institutions of higher education—specifically within HBCUs.

Collectively, the working papers document critical areas of women's experiences in different academic departments, colleges, and schools. In 2022, women students comprised 74% of the student body at Howard. It is well documented that women today have more access to education than at any other point in history. *(Continued)*

## PREFACE

Persistent gender inequality and inequity point to institutional failures at Howard and in higher education broadly. In 2019-2020, women comprised 55% of the faculty at Howard; however, when divided by rank, 66.81% of full professors and 53.27% of associate professors are men (College Factual, 2020). Lectureships, assistant professors, instructors, and adjuncts are predominantly held by women. Education is viewed as an equalizer, and this working paper series examines how women at the institution that graduates the highest number of Black professionals in medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, engineering, nursing, law, social work, and education fare in ensuring women are equally represented in those fields at Howard and beyond.

Representation in administrative leadership and faculty is essential in understanding the story of women's evolving roles at Howard University. Each paper focuses on three aspects of women's roles at the institution. It begins with a microhistory of each college or school, followed by an analysis of women's intellectual contributions in their disciplines over the institution's history. The second area focuses on contemporary data (up to the year 2020) on gender in administrative, faculty, and non-faculty teaching positions. The final part of each paper examines the societal and institutional practices and culture contributing to gender inequality and provides policy recommendations that may help address disparities in Black women's representation in higher education leadership.

### **Significance and Contribution**

The role and experiences of Black women in higher education have been documented in the literature, especially in Predominately White Institutions (PWIs).

This WPS extends the literature by highlighting the following areas:

- The historical evolution of Black women faculty, administrators and students at Howard University.
- The formal institutional barriers Black women administrators and faculty encounter and the strategies used to address them.
- The informal cultural challenges faculty and administrators experience.
- Feminist theoretical perspectives that specifically focus on gender and race as critical dimensions to framing Black women in higher education.
- Highlights the broader implications of inequality and inequity on women in underrepresented sectors, especially in science and medicine.

This working paper series is the first project that shines a light on the role of women academics and administrators at Howard University. Each paper provides policy recommendations that can help Howard University and similar institutions advance gender equality and inclusion on campus. This project will contribute to existing scholarship on Black women in higher education by using Howard University as a case study.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful to the many Howard University community members who contributed to this project: Dean Oluwaranti Akiyode, Dr. Mario Beatty, Dr. Helen Bond, Dr. Melanie Carter, Dr. John Cotman, Dr. Emily Cramer, Dean Sandra Crewe, Dr. James Davis, Lakeiya Dulcio, Camryn Edwards, Dr. Earl Ettienne, Dr. Farhana Ferdous, Dr. Ruby Gourdine, Weslyn Harmon, Dr. Kathy Marshall, Dr. Celia J. Maxwell, Anita Schmied, Kobii Spruill and Dr. Grant Warner. We recognize the valuable contributions of the late Dr. Ruby Gourdine, a trailblazer in social work and an esteemed mentor and colleague.



# Black Women in Higher Education: The Howard University Experience The School of Communications<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

Women's participation in the field of communications has been historically complex, in part because of the breadth of the communications field. Women have made significant strides in communications despite historically being underrepresented, particularly at the highest levels. The shift towards a predominantly female faculty at Howard University's communication program signifies a positive change, reflecting the increasing presence and influence of women in this field. However, it's important to recognize that women's participation in communications has been multifaceted due to the changing nature of the field. As communication continues to evolve, it is imperative to celebrate and support the contributions of women in this dynamic and vital profession. This study provides a concise summary of the School's history, an investigation into the experiences of its first female leaders, and a comprehensive examination of gender-related faculty employment data. These sources collectively present a historical pattern showing women's consistent underrepresentation in Howard's School of Communications, which has now shifted to an overrepresentation across various levels. The study also addresses the implications arising from this shift in balance.

## A GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Women's participation in the field of communications has been historically complex, in part because of the breadth of the communications field. However, in fields such as speech pathology, women have dominated the field; as early as 1993, only 6% of certified speech pathologists were male (Matthews and Daniels, 2019). Nonetheless, this has not historically meant that women in Howard's communication program have been historically overrepresented, particularly at the highest level, in any of its departments. On the contrary, while the program has recruited a gender-diverse student body since its inception (see Fig. 5), men have dominated the more advanced faculty ranks, particularly at the rank of full professor. This gender balance has improved in recent years and, if anything, is beginning to

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<sup>1</sup>This work was financially supported by the Center for Women, Gender and Global Leadership.

overbalance in the opposite direction, with all departments now being comprised of predominantly female faculty.

This report offers a brief overview of the School of Communications, an examination of the lives of the first women to hold leadership positions for the school, a general analysis of available data on gender and employment at the faculty level, and a series of snapshots from years where a complete faculty list was available. From these data, a historical trajectory can be constructed that indicates that while women have been historically underrepresented in the School of Communication, this trend is now reversing and resulting in an overrepresentation of women at nearly every level (*See Fig 1-4*). A discussion of the implications of this imbalance is presented.

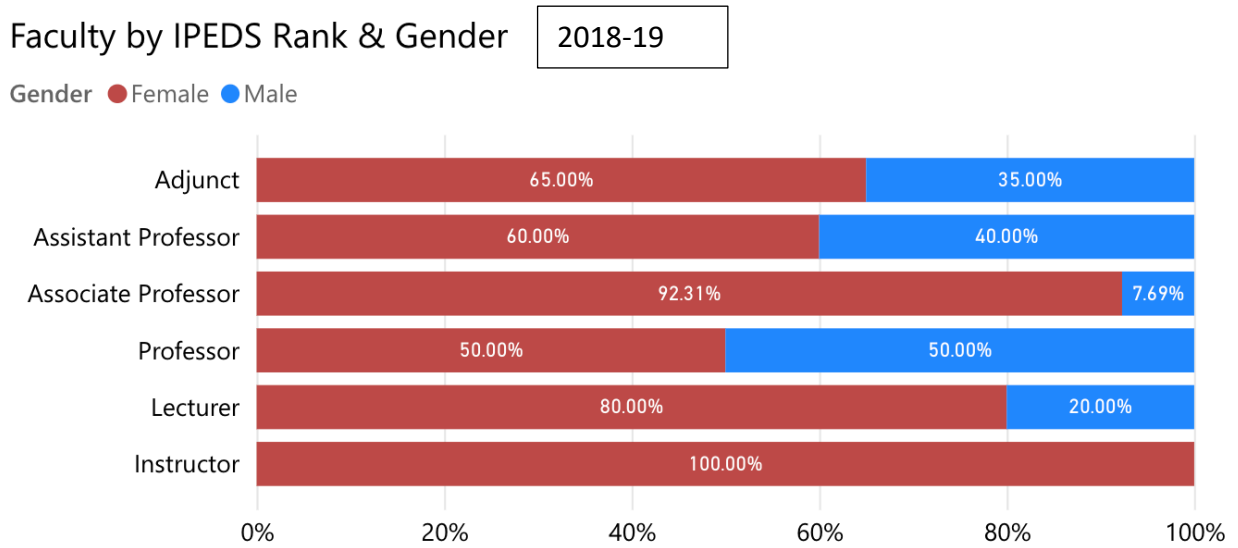


Figure 1.

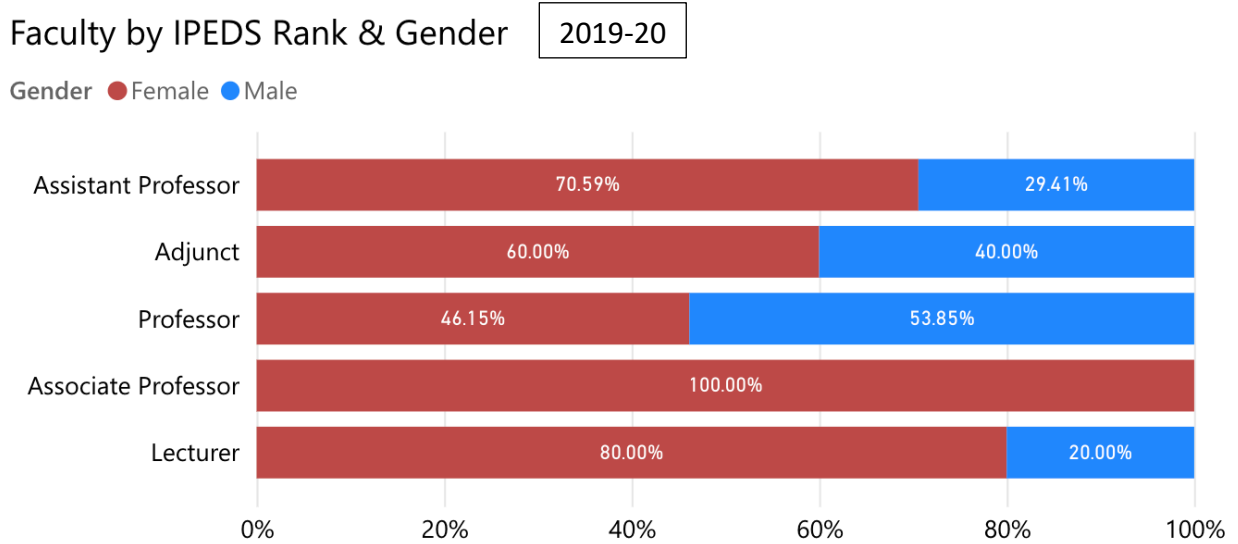


Figure 2.

### Faculty by IPEDS Rank & Gender

2020-21



Gender ● Female ● Male

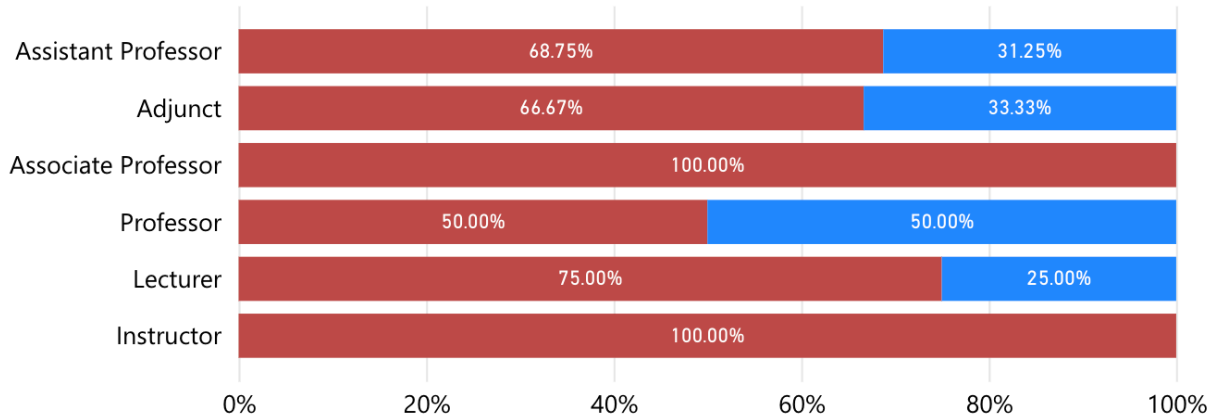


Figure 3.

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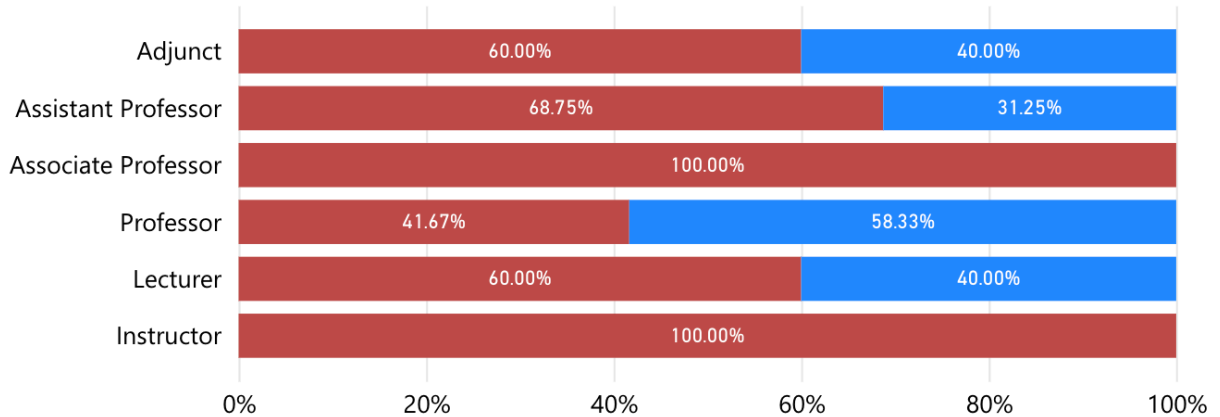


Figure 4.

## A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Shortly after Howard President James Cheek assumed his role in 1968, he appointed a task force to determine the feasibility of a communications school at Howard University. The resulting School of Communications was established in 1971 and began offering classes in the spring of 1972. The only communications program offered at a historically Black university at the time, the school kicked off its first semester by hosting the first of what would

be many conferences and job fairs aimed at increasing the number of African Americans in communications and broadcasting.

The School of Communications received immediate attention as in the *Baltimore Afro-American*, the school's dean, Tony Brown, claimed: "there are approximately 40,000 students studying communications in American universities, 1,000 of which are black. Howard's School of Communications enrollment figure is already approaching 500" (Brown, 1973).

However, the skyrocketing popularity of the school also applied strain on the administration. In December of 1973, Dean Brown abruptly resigned from his position, just one year after the school began offering courses. The response was tumultuous. Students and faculty alike threatened to leave the program if Brown actually left. The administration held that Brown was neglecting the school to focus on his telecast, *Black Journal*, although internal rumors indicated that philosophical disagreements and internal power struggles played a role in Brown's resignation. Regardless, the impact of his resignation would have destabilized the school, and in February of 1974 Brown retracted his resignation to continue as Dean through the remainder of the school year (The Afro-American, 1974). He did depart, however, following that semester, and Dr. Lovenger Bowden took over as the interim Dean and the first woman to lead the school (Fig. 5).

Following Bowden's brief tenure as dean, Dr. Lionel "Lee" Barrow Jr. took over the role, which he occupied for ten years (Bernstein, 2009). During that time, the School of Communications established the first non-commercial television station licensed to a predominantly Black institution, WHMM-TV, later renamed to WHUT-TV (Chesley, 1980). Dr. Johnetta Davis, at the time one of only two women full professors in the school, co-hosted the station's Monday-night programming; the first broadcast featured both President Cheek and Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm (Chesley, 1980).

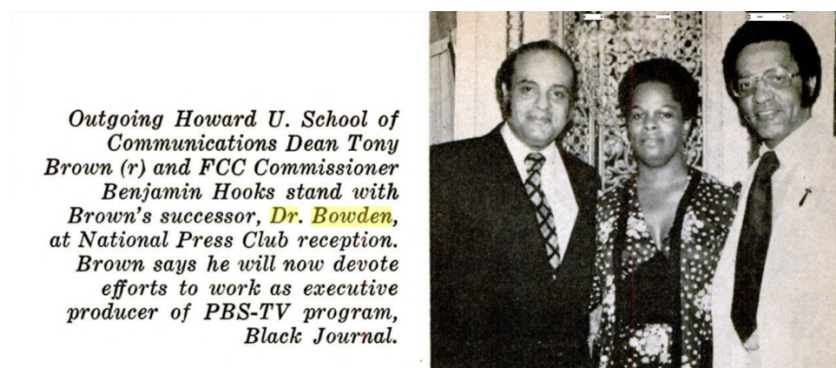


Figure 5.

*Deans Bowden and Brown at a luncheon celebrating Brown's service to Howard, as reported in Jet Magazine, Aug. 29, 1974.*



A decade later, the channel experienced financial struggles: a combination of the cutting of university funds and failures to hit fundraising targets made purchasing new equipment difficult. Nonetheless, the channel trained nearly 1,000 Howard students in technical media production (Prakash, 1990). In 1989, the channel received a \$150,000 grant from Warner Communications to support student programming (Jet, 1989). Nonetheless, financial problems and competition from more mainstream networks continued to compromise the channel, and the role of the general manager changed hands many.

In 1989 Dr. Orlando Taylor took over from Barrow to serve as acting dean. Taylor held the position until 1993, when Dr. Jannette Dates assumed the role. In 1990, the school joined 28 other historically Black colleges and universities to form the Association of Black College Journalism and Mass Communication programs, later renamed to the Black College Communication Association (Gainesville Sun, 1990; Stuart, 2018). The school program truly accelerated under Dates' guidance, receiving significant corporate gifts: in 1996, BET donated \$100,000; in 1999, Warner Corporation gave a \$2 million gift to fund an endowed chair; and in 2003, the school received a \$4 million gift from media giant John. H. Johnson for constructing a new School of Communications (Baltimore Afro-American, 1996; Jet, 1999; Ebony, 2003).



Figure 6.

*Cathy Hughes in the WHUR-FM booth, taken by Jason Miccolo.*

Dates remained the head of the school until 2011. Dean Gracie Lawson-Borders took over in 2013. Under Lawson-Border's leadership, the school has maintained its size and popularity as the third-largest school at Howard University. Additionally, in 2016, the school became the Cathy Hughes School of Communications to acknowledge media executive Cathy Hughes, whose radio career was nurtured at Howard and whose son donated \$4 million to the school in her honor. Hughes was initially hired as a lecturer and assistant (Fig. 6), but became general sales manager of the university radio, WHUR-FM, in 1973. In her first year, she increased the station's revenue from \$250,000 to \$3 million, kickstarting a long and prestigious career in Black radio (Hughes, 2018). When her company, Radio One, went

public in 1999, Hughes became the first Black woman to be CEO of a publicly traded company

The naming of the school has, however, been contentious. In 2004, the school was named the John H. Johnson School of Communications following a \$4 million gift by Johnson himself the year prior. The school began distancing itself from that name as early as 2010, endowing a Chair with Johnson's name instead (Watson, 2013). In 2016, the school was renamed for Cathy Hughes. The Howard University News Service indicated that the reason the Johnson name was dropped was because of financial complications with the donation (Howard University News Service, 2016). It is essential to distinguish the naming of the school from the naming of the building. Johnson's gift was initially intended to fund a new School of Communications building named after him (Ebony, 2003), while the School of Communications is now named after Cathy Hughes and will be housed in the new Chadwick Boseman School of Fine Arts.

### **Women Deans at the School of Communications**

Six deans, both interim and full-time, have helmed the School of Communications, and since its inception 50 years ago, half of those deans have been women. The school instituted its first female dean in 1974 in an interim capacity but did not have a woman as full dean until 1996. Aside from Dean Brown, all full-time deans served for a decade or longer. Dean Dates' tenure was the longest. This section will outline the tenures of Deans Bowden, Dates, and Lawson-Borders.

Few records remain of Bowden's life and accomplishments. She was a popular teacher, receiving commendations in the yearbook on multiple occasions and supervising many dissertations. From 1969-1971, she served as special assistant with ASHA's Office for Urban and Ethnic Affairs, during which time she wrote a report, *Programs for Developing Communication Skills Among Urban and Minority Populations* (Bowden, 1970). She presented her research at the DC Seminar on Communication and Language for the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, or ASHA (Millard, 1972). In addition, she was a member of the Corporation for Blacks in Public Broadcasting (Innovator, 1974). She also served as Director of ASHA for some time and may very well have been the first Black woman to do so (ASHA Facebook, 2019). Prior to becoming Dean, Dr. Bowden had served as the chairperson of the Speech department since the program's founding (Quander, 1971). When Dr. Lionel Barrow Jr. replaced her as the dean of the school in the summer of 1975, she did not return to that role; however, she served as a professor at the school at least through 1989.

Jannette Dates became the second woman to be the Dean of the School of Communications in 1993 and, in 1996 when she transitioned from Acting Dean to full Dean, the first to do so as a permanent appointment. Dr. Dates had served as Associate Dean prior to her appointment as Dean and held the role until 2011. Dr. Dates' research is widely respected; she has co-authored three books on African Americans in the mass media. Furthermore, she has served as the president of the Broadcast Education Association in 2003; the president of the Association for Education in Journalism in Mass Communication, or AEJMC, in 2004;

and as a presidential appointee to the Board of Directors of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting in 2013. In 2015, she was awarded the Distinguished Education Service Award by the Broadcast Education Association (Broadcast Education Association, 2015).

Dr. Dates was followed as Dean by another woman, Dr. Gracie Lawson-Borders, who is the current dean as of July 2021. Dr. Lawson-Borders is a former journalist who shifted to academia and is heavily involved in both the Association of Schools of Journalism and Mass Communication (ASJMC), for which she served as President in 2020-2021, as well as following in her predecessor's footsteps to be heavily involved with AEJMC (Lawson-Borders, n.d.).

### **Women Associate Deans and Chairpersons**

In addition to the position of dean, women have been Associate Deans and leaders of various departments; the exact gender balance in these roles is unclear for several reasons. First, because the departments have been rearranged and renamed at several points during the school's history, determining the exact departmental affiliations of faculty with a reasonable degree of accuracy is difficult up until 2018. Second, many of the sources used did not specify what department a professor worked for at any given time; instead, they specified their specific subject area, which could overlap between multiple departments. Finally, record-keeping gaps make it impossible to get an accurate count of how many women have served as associate deans and chairpersons. However, historical documents do indicate the first women to hold each of these roles with some clarity.

The first female Associate Dean was Jennifer Bailey-Butler in 1979, although it is unclear if the position of Associate Dean even existed prior to 1979. Certainly, there are records of Assistant Deans, all of whom were male. No further records remain of Dr. Bailey-Butler's life and accomplishments, except that her term was short-lived; Dr. Njeri Nuru took over the role in 1980 and held it until 1987 when she left to be Dean of Communications at Gallaudet University. For those years, it appeared that she was the only woman in the school's leadership; the Dean and all recorded department chairs were men. Dr. Nuru, who later took the name Nuru-Holm and has been working under that name since began as a speech pathology scholar researching on Deafness and Black English; following her time at Howard, she transitioned to primarily working in institutional management and student services.

Identifying the first women to serve as chairwomen of the various departments, however, is less clear-cut due to the frequent reshuffling and renaming of the departments. At the School's founding, there were two departments, the Department of Speech and the Department of Applied Communications. Following the success of WHUR-FM, a department of Radio and Broadcast Management was also created. By 1979, these departments had been renamed and reorganized into the Department of TV, Radio, and Film; the Department of Journalism; and the Department of Communication Arts and Sciences. These departments remained both consistently named and consistently in existence for the next decade.

The first woman to chair a department was, unsurprisingly, Dr. Lovenger Bowden, who chaired the Speech Department at its inception. When she did not retake the post following her service as interim Dean, there were no women chairs until 1979, when Mary Luins Small became Chair of the Department of Journalism. Dr. Small was a prolific writer and historian, particularly of educational scholar John Amos Comenius as well as W.E.B. Du Bois. However, she only held the role for a year or two; the records from 1978 are missing, so it is unclear when her tenure began. What is clear is that by the 1980-1981 school year, the position of Chair at the School of Journalism was vacant. The other chairpersons at this time were all men.

In 1989, the schools were reorganized from three to four: the Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders, the Department of Human Communications, the Department of Journalism, and the Department of Radio, Television, and Film. Dr. Noma Anderson became interim Chair and later full Chair of the Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders in 1989 and held that role until 1993 and again from 1995 until 2001. Dr. Anderson was also the second woman from Howard to be president of ASHA, a role she held in 2007.

On the Journalism side, Barbara Hines served as the Chair of the Department of Journalism and then founded the Department of Communications, Culture, and Media Studies when the Department of Human Communications was dissolved and rearranged. Dr. Hines' career spanned over 40 years; she received multiple accolades for her service, including the Distinguished Lifetime Membership Award from the College Media Association and the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Journalism Education Association (Howard University Newsroom, 2015). It remains probable that other women have filled these roles, despite their accomplishments not being recorded.

Presently, all departments in the School of Communications are chaired by women, another reflection of the shift towards a majority-female faculty body. Likewise, the Associate Dean is a woman, Dr. Wei Sun. While determining the first woman to chair each department is challenging due to sporadic records and program reorganization, it is clear that women were underrepresented at the school's inception and are now overrepresented at the leadership level.

## METHODOLOGY

Employment data have been retrieved from the Howard Catalogue, the Howard yearbooks, and the Provost's Bulletin. They have been supplemented by obituaries, biographies, and contemporary news accounts where appropriate. Recorded information includes the name of the person, their gender, the highest degree earned, the position that they held at the university, and the school year for which they served.

Tenure status was only made publicly available beginning in 2018 and is not available by gender. An attempt was made to extrapolate based on titles; however, the Howard Faculty Handbook states, "Tenured faculty *typically* hold the rank of either Associate Professor or Professor" (Howard Faculty Handbook, 2019, emphasis mine). This indicates that title alone

is not sufficient to ensure tenure status. In lieu of further data that would help clarify the issue, tenure status has not been examined due to a lack of reliable information to draw conclusions.

Where the Howard Catalogue record was damaged or missing, data have been extrapolated on the following criteria; first, that the individual in question had been employed by the University for two years prior to the missing data and a year following the missing data; second, that the individual does not have a title or degree change when data resume; third, that the individual was not employed in a part-time, visiting, or adjunct capacity. These criteria were selected to ensure that any extrapolation was as logical as possible. The first ensures that the individual was not a temporary hire; the second to identify when someone receives their degree; the third, to decrease the likelihood that someone is missing from records because they found other employment and only later returned to Howard.

Qualifications and roles held were coded numerically on a scale of 1-3 to attempt to streamline a wide variety of titles and positions. A score of 1 in qualifications indicated a bachelor's degree; 2, a master's or other non-terminal higher education degree; and 3, a terminal degree. Likewise, a score of 1 in role indicated an instructor, lecturer, or adjunct role; a score of 2 indicated an assistant or associate professorship; and a score of 3 indicated that the person was a full professor. Finally, it is important to acknowledge that some of these people may not have identified with a binary notion of gender or with the gender that they were assigned at birth and that the gender descriptors used in this study may not accurately reflect the lived experiences of the faculty members studied. Where an individual's name was gender-neutral and no record of gendered pronouns could be found, they were noted as such and excluded from gender-based calculations. No individual openly identified as non-binary.

Because the data are pulled from so many different sources and saturation of the faculty body was only achieved for a handful of school years, the data will be interpreted in two ways. The first category, described under "Findings," compares individual school years across the decades with each other. The second, described under "Conclusions," supplements those findings with incomplete data from other years. Together, they paint a portrait of women's experiences and contributions as Howard faculty members.

## FINDINGS<sup>2</sup>

The 1979-1980 academic year marks the first time that complete data is available from the School of Communications, which was founded eight years earlier. The information presented in Figure 7 is extracted from the Howard Catalog. Out of the 63 staff members employed by the School of Communications, 40 were male, 21 were female, and for two individuals their gender could not be determined. Amongst these female staff members, thirteen held mid-level degrees while eight possessed terminal degrees; none had qualifications lower than a mid-level degree. In contrast, twenty-six male employees had terminal degrees and only eight held mid-level degrees; six men had bachelor's degrees as well. Additionally, eleven women were in junior roles compared to fifteen men; however, there were only eight women in mid-level positions whereas eighteen men occupied such

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<sup>2</sup> The author presents the limited findings in the form of "snapshots" of data points through time.

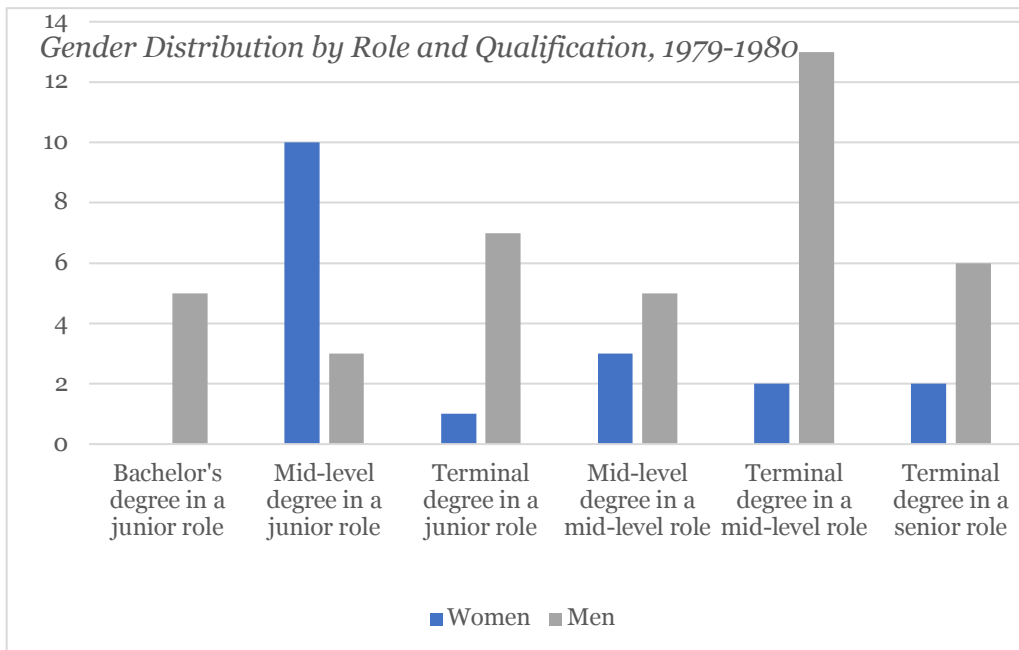


roles. The widest gap was observed at the professor level where seven males and only two females served as professors.

The data from the School of Communications at HU in the 1979-1980 academic year reflects gender disparity in promotion, particularly in the mid-rank and higher. Despite the substantial representation of women across various roles in the school, the number of female employees noticeably declines at the senior level. This points to a trend of decreased female representation as rank increases. This visual representation can be seen in Figure 7.

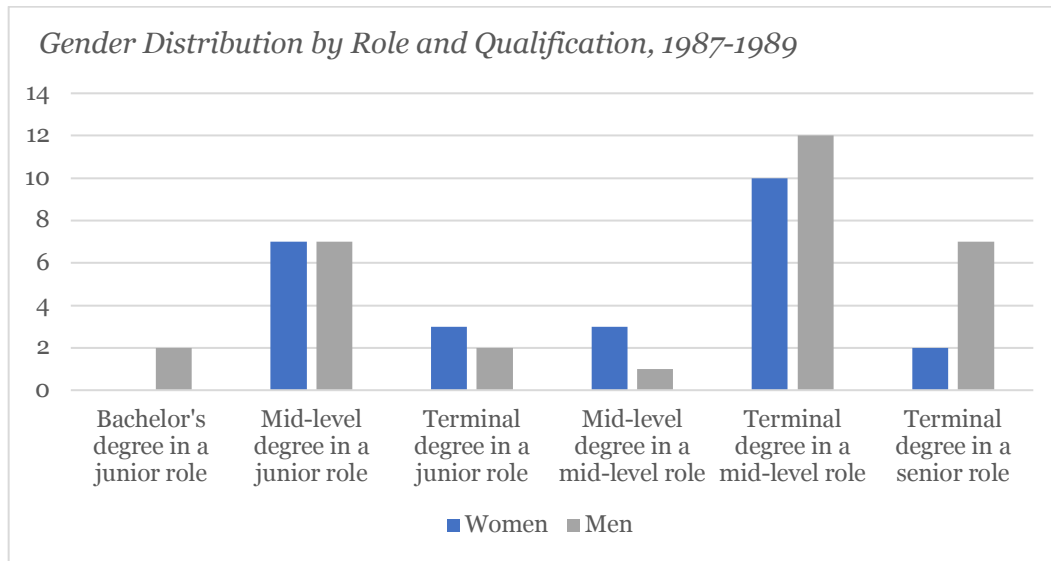
The following snapshot (Fig. 8) is nearly a decade later and pulled from the 1987-1989 Howard Catalogue, which had, by that point, transitioned from an annual to a biennial publication. The department was marginally smaller, with 58 faculty listed; 25 women, 31 men, and two individuals whose gender could not be determined. The gender imbalance in representation had been largely addressed compared to the previous decade, although discrepancies persisted in terms of faculty positions. Once more, no women with mid-level qualifications were employed as teachers, while two men held such positions. Ten women held a master's degree and 13 held a terminal degree, compared to eight men with master's degrees and 21 with terminal degrees. At the top level, there were seven male full professors and only two female ones. The data also shows that while three men had been promoted to professorships and three had left the institution, the same two women remained in their previous positions. This suggests a gender imbalance in advancements beyond a certain point favoring men over women.

Figure 7.



Source: *Howard Catalog, 1979-1980.*

Figure 8.

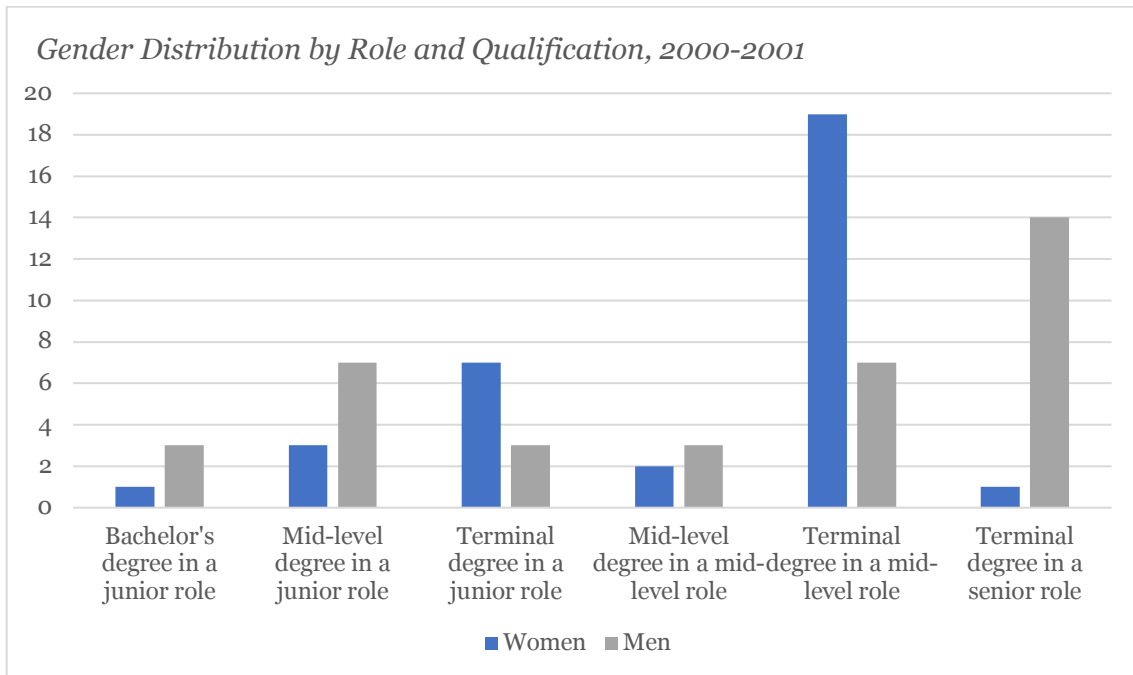


Source: *Howard Catalog, 1987-1989*.

The third snapshot is taken from a webpage from 2001 (Fig. 9); the Provost's Bulletin had moved online and the faculty list from this year was archived; or, at the very least, never modified or removed. It seems likely that 2001 is the year in which this bulletin was last updated, but it is possible that it was published earlier and only maintained through 2001. However, it provides a complete list of faculty, which, following the shift to web-based communications, was rarely recorded. The department had grown to 70 employees; 33 women and 37 men. As seen in previous snapshots, disparities in terms of qualification and role were present. One woman had a bachelor's degree and was serving as a Professional in Residence; by comparison, three men with bachelor's degrees served as part-time lecturers. For the first time, there were more women with terminal degrees than men; 28 and 24, respectively. The remainder, five women and ten men, had mid-level degrees. However, only one woman had achieved the rank of full professor, compared to 14 men. 22 women held mid-level roles, compared to only 10 men; 11 women held junior roles compared to 13 men.

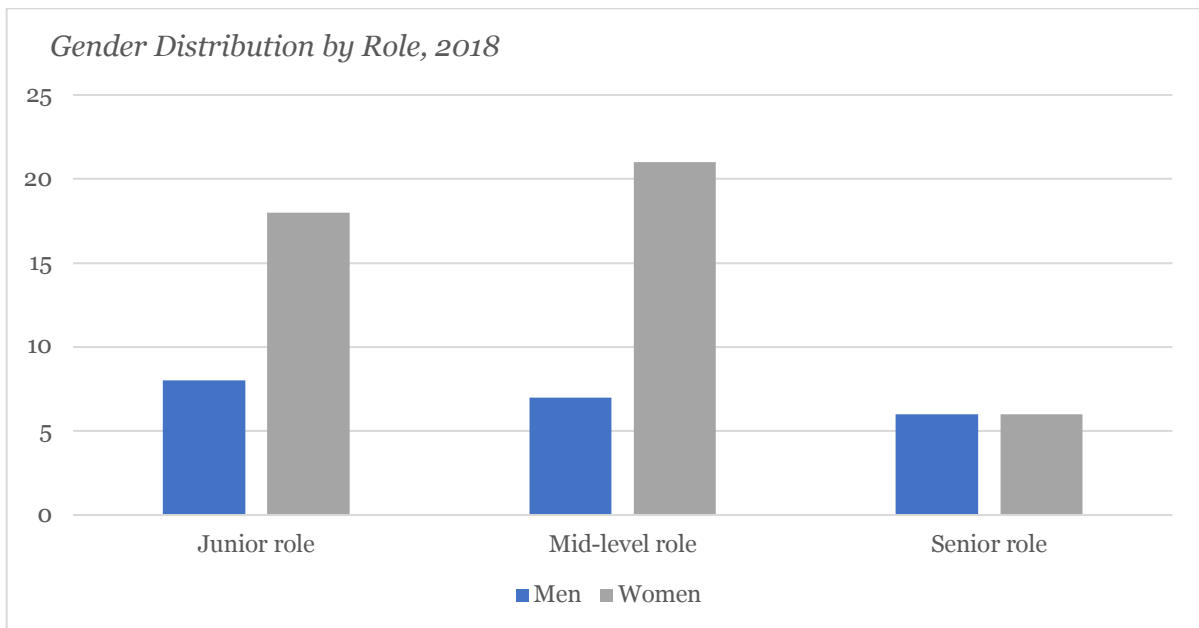
The fourth snapshot is from 2018; records from the mid-2000s and 2010s appear to have been exclusively made available in a digital format and are no longer available to the public. Despite the significant gap in time, these data have the advantage of being recorded by the university itself rather than being pulled from department records. The university did not record the highest degree obtained. Eight men held junior roles, compared to 18 women; mid-level roles were equally dramatically skewed, with seven men and 21 women. Six women and six men held the rank of professor (Fig. 10). Three of those male professors were in the same department, Strategic, Legal, and Management Communication.

Figure 9.



Source: Provost's Bulletin, circa 2001.

Figure 10.



As of the 2020-2021 school year, the department was predominantly female. The Department for Strategic, Legal, and Management Communication has the largest percentage of men, with a staff comprised of eight women and five men. The Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders has six staff, all but one of whom are female; the same is true for the Department of Communications, Culture, and Media Studies. The largest department is the Department of Media, Journalism, and Film, with 19 faculty, three of whom are male. As of 2018, the rank of professor is now evenly balanced between men and women with six male and six female full professors; all other roles skew predominantly female, with all associate professors in the school being female.

## DISCUSSION

Across the 50-year period of study, a total of 204 individuals were examined. Among them, there were 99 men and an equal number of women, with six individuals whose gender could not be identified. Thus, that group was excluded from gender-based analyses. It is important to note that these findings are meant to provide insight rather than comprehensive coverage due to significant gaps in the data. These gaps become more pronounced in the digital record-keeping era (2000s and 2010s), emphasizing the necessity for meticulous and consistent archival record-keeping to monitor Howard's ongoing efforts towards gender equity among its faculty.

The Howard School of Communications has been shaped by women since its origin. From Dr. Bowden to Dr. Lawson-Borders, women have been deans, chairs, professors, and experts. Nonetheless, through the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, women were significantly underrepresented at the highest levels. Even as the gender balance of overall faculty became more equitable, women still were less likely to achieve the rank of full professor as late as 2001. This discrepancy does not appear to be the result of a similar discrepancy in achievement; while the degree earned is only one factor that goes into a promotion to the professoriate, there are numerous instances of men holding equivalent positions with a lower degree.

The late 2010s saw a shift towards a majority-female faculty body; lack of consistent records means it is unclear precisely when this shift occurred. This shift has ensured that women's accomplishments are treated as central to the school's success rather than being minimized, as Dr. Bowden's were. However, this shift has also come with some significant drawbacks. A department that is predominantly female may not have the same patriarchal culture as one that is predominantly male; however, neither can it claim a diversity of thought and opinion. In some programs, such as the Communication Sciences and Disorders department, this gender imbalance is already recognized; ASHA's long-standing effort to recruit more men to the discipline is an example. However, this imbalance is shared across all four departments within the School of Communications, rather than limited to Communication Sciences and Disorders.

While the student body makeup was outside the scope of this study, it is worth noting that of the eleven PhD students who started with the School of Communications in the 2020-2021 school year, only two were men, and neither man continued beyond the first year. This anecdotally implies that this imbalance is a problem that needs to be addressed at multiple

levels – systemically, culturally, and in matters of recruitment – to ensure gender equity at the level of the professoriate.

## CONCLUSION

Overall, the School of Communications has made significant strides across all departments in ensuring women are well-represented at the faculty level. While at the School's founding, there were far more male faculty than female, and as late as 2001 women were still excluded from leadership positions and the position of full professor, the School has since corrected this disparity. These strides have been so significant that they have resulted in a disparity where there are more women than men in every area except for the professoriate, where the gender balance is exactly even. Care must be taken to ensure that the positive qualities of a space that celebrates the accomplishments of women, particularly Black women, are preserved. Nonetheless, the dramatic lack of men in the department at all levels indicates an imbalance that warrants correcting. Efforts should be made to address the gender disparity and promote equal opportunities for both men and women in faculty positions within the School of Communications at HU to create a more inclusive and diverse academic environment.

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