

Empowering potential: Faculty as your key competitive asset

Insights from academic leaders to
enable faculty success and excellence



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Introduction

Faculty have the potential to be your institution's greatest competitive asset.



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While covering faculty salaries is a major financial outlay, engaged faculty repay that investment, bringing in revenue via their research grants and commercial activities. They also help to raise the reputation of your institution through their **research** impact and collaborations. And their **teaching** and guidance produces knowledgeable graduates with the skills to drive economic and societal growth. Importantly, faculty **service** plays an increasingly important role in helping your institution meet real-world impact goals.

But to excel in these three areas, faculty need the right support, tools and information. And, as we will explore in this report, institutions find themselves operating in an increasingly pressured environment. In late 2024, we set out to discover how the challenges institutions face are influencing the ways in which they **hire, retain and develop their faculty**.

To do this, we surveyed two leadership groups with direct input into these activities:

- **Senior leadership:** This group includes those involved in institutional governance and the management of faculty, schools, departments and centers. It also covers heads of functional teams and chief technology officers.
- **Senior faculty members:** These are the established faculty who advise or participate in decision-making teams when their institutions consider new systems or services.

Collectively, we refer to these two groups as **academic leaders** and **survey respondents**.

The 428 survey respondents are from 87 countries around the globe and a variety of institutions.¹ We began by asking them where their current challenges lie in relation to faculty recruitment, evaluation and recognition. They also told us what they want to see improved and how they feel about related areas, such as technology, data, and equity, diversity and inclusion.

As well as filtering their responses by the two roles outlined above, we also looked at them through a geographical lens, with a focus on three regions—Asia Pacific (APAC), Europe, the Middle East and Africa (EMEA), and North and South America (the Americas). While we touch on those regional differences briefly in this report, our plan is to explore them further in the coming months.

Many of the responses we received fit neatly into two broad categories—**people and culture** and **data, systems and processes**, so that's how we've grouped them in the main body of the report. However, in practice, the two are closely interwoven.

What did we learn?

Academic leaders agree that faculty are important to their institutions' success, but many are also concerned that poor data, processes and systems are holding faculty back. And while views and challenges are fairly consistent across regions—and, in many cases, roles—the two groups often disagree on the scale of these issues. We've used charts throughout the report to help highlight some of these variations in views. We also refer to statistics that aren't graphically represented. If you are interested in viewing these in more detail, the complete set of responses is available in our [accompanying databook](#).

In the conclusion, we recap the areas for improvement that respondents have identified. We also suggest potential next steps based on the feedback they've shared with us. We hope that you will find the information in these pages a useful springboard for discussions within your own institution.

¹ The institutions surveyed include colleges, universities and medical schools offering three- and/or four-year courses.

Key insights

Chapter One: People and culture



Academic leaders are dealing with unprecedented challenges around funding. This has consequences for every aspect of academic life, including their priority areas of **attracting, retaining and showcasing faculty and their work**.



For senior faculty members, frustrations over a **lack of equitable career opportunities** are compounded by concerns over **rising workloads and administration**, along with **dissatisfaction about their remuneration and recognition**.



Senior leadership fear that rising pressures are resulting in **faculty errors, a deteriorating research culture** and even **faculty burnout**. They are also concerned they may **lose top faculty**, including those responsible for bringing in the lion's share of funding. This has implications for their existing financial challenges, as well as key strategic areas such as teaching and student satisfaction.



All academic leaders are calling for increased support for faculty. High on their wish lists are **improved professional opportunities and systems, better workload distribution** and **competitive compensation**.

Chapter Two: Data, processes and systems



Fragmented systems and data silos are making it difficult for academic leaders to access the strategic insights they need. Respondents are concerned this is **hindering their ability to make informed decisions for their institutions**.



Poor data and analytical tools, combined with **inefficient and opaque processes**, are impacting **recruitment and review, promotion and tenure**. This has implications for existing hiring and evaluation challenges.



An area that many academic leaders want to see improved is **the equity of their hiring and recognition processes**. They also desire the ability to **look at faculty achievements more holistically**, including their service contributions and societal impact.



Along with **better insights into faculty and research performance**, academic leaders want **improved technology to showcase their institutional achievements** to the wider world, so they can leverage successes to boost funding, reputation and recruitment opportunities.



Respondents have clear ideas about how the challenges their institutions face can be tackled. For example, many would like to see **clearer evaluation criteria and structures, access to integrated, real-time data, enhanced analytical tools** and **better options to showcase faculty research and achievements**.

Chapter One

People and culture

*Nurturing an environment
in which faculty can thrive*



Key insights



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All academic leaders are calling for increased support for faculty. High on their wish lists are **improved professional opportunities and systems, better workload distribution** and **competitive compensation**.

In the increasingly hot house environment¹ in which academic institutions operate today, finding a competitive edge is key. Those that succeed know that **the ability to hire, engage and develop the right people** can give them that advantage.

So, it's not surprising that **attracting and retaining faculty is a priority** for the academic leaders who responded to this survey.

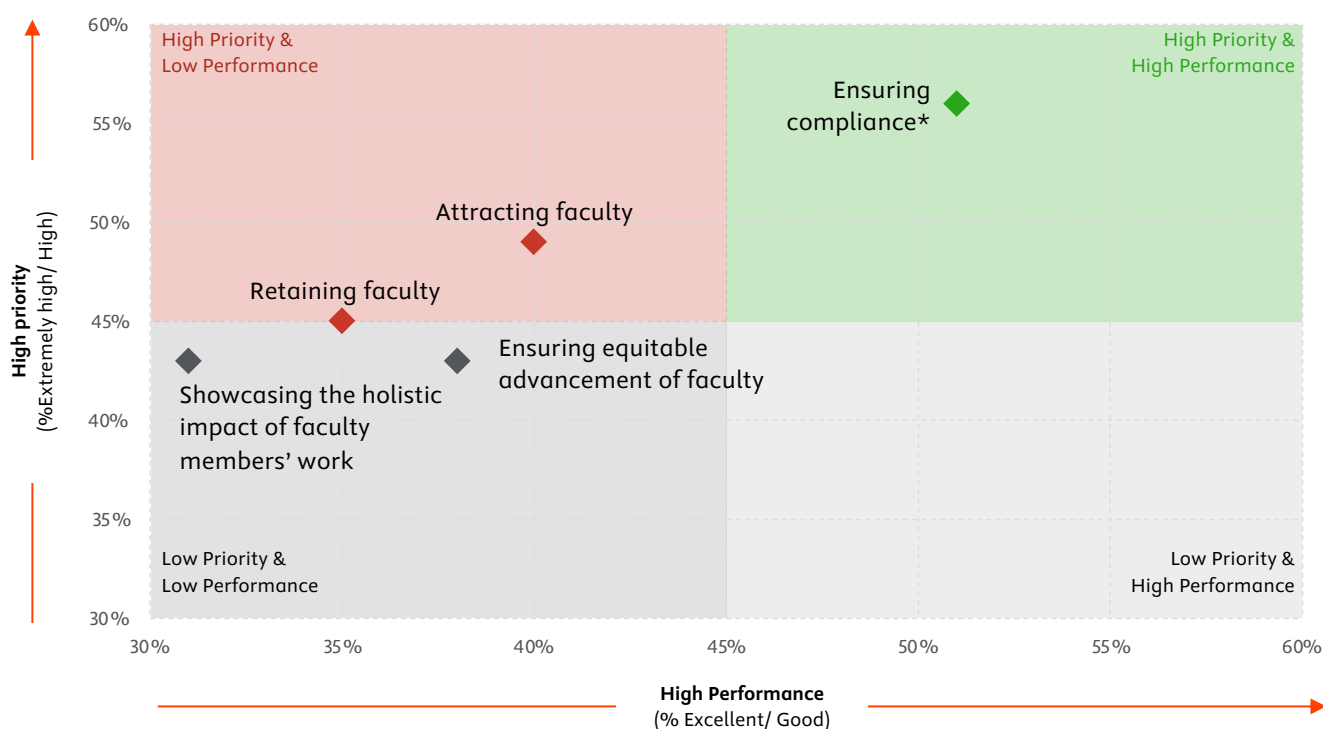
However, our respondents don't consider these areas of strength. For example, as we explore in the following chapter, 72% think that it's time to **rethink the processes around review, promotion and tenure**.

What is perhaps surprising is that, as *Figure 1* shows, academic leaders assign slightly greater importance to attracting faculty than to retaining them (49% and 45%, respectively). They also think they are better at it (40% versus 35%).

72%

of academic leaders think that it's time to rethink the processes around review, promotion and tenure.

Priority vs. Performance in areas of human capital management



*e.g. with discrimination laws, legal policies and procedures in the workplace

Figure 1: Question: What level of priority do you believe your institution has assigned to addressing the following challenges? How do you rate your institution's performance in meeting these challenges? Base: n= 428.

Yet, as Ohio University President Lori Stewart Gonzalez noted in her 2024 State of the University address, "...faculty are the heartbeat of the University...They drive curricular innovation, elevate our research capabilities and ultimately inspire student success and community impact."² Importantly, by investing in retaining faculty, universities can greatly reduce the burden of recruitment.

If we take a closer look at responses to our survey by role (Figure 2), 55% of senior leadership rate their institutions' performance in recruitment as good or excellent. This compares to just 24% of senior faculty members. And while 50% of senior leadership think their institutions are good or excellent at retaining faculty, only 20% of senior faculty members agree. Senior leadership are also more likely to believe that their institutions are prioritizing these areas. This reflects the findings of the 2024 Elsevier report *View from the Top*, in which 75% of the top-level university leaders surveyed pointed to "talent" as a priority challenge today.³

75%
of top-level university
leaders identified "talent"
as a priority challenge

Priority vs. Performance by position—spotlight on attracting and retaining faculty

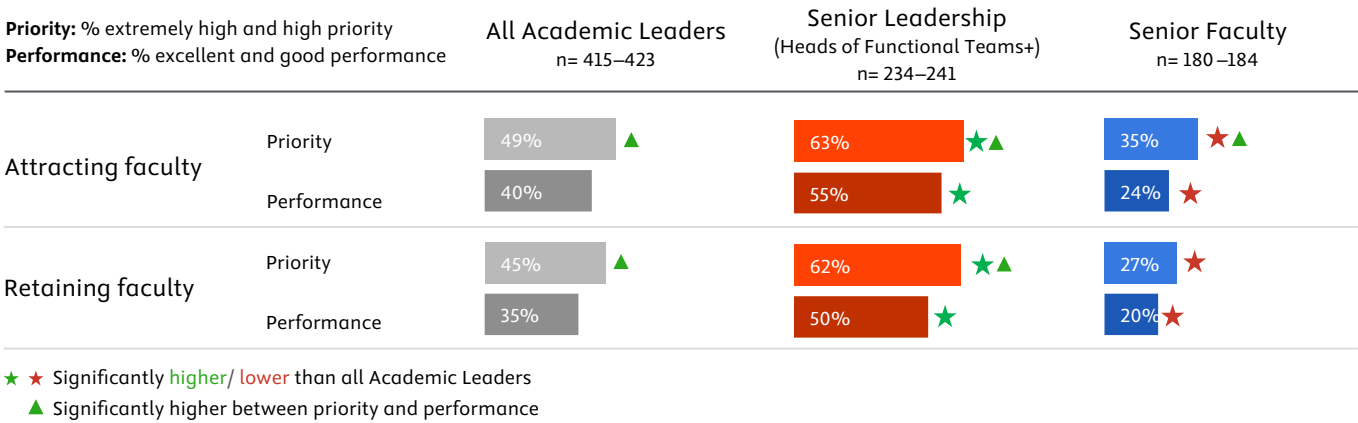


Figure 2: Question: What level of priority do you believe your institution has assigned to addressing the following challenges? How do you rate your institution's performance in meeting these challenges? Base (excluding "don't know"): n= 415–423.

This tension in views between our survey respondents may explain their differing perspectives on the **timeliness of promotion, tenure and salary increases**—an important factor in faculty retainment. When asked to name their top five areas of dissatisfaction, 40% of senior faculty members selected it, putting it in second place. For senior leadership, it's down in fourth place, with 29% considering it a top issue. However, as we explore in Chapter Two, **both groups believe that better integration of data and improved systems and processes could help to address these issues.**

“There were delays in the promotion process because faculty evaluation data was scattered across multiple systems. This made it difficult to get a complete picture of their performance, leading to unnecessary delays in recognizing faculty who deserved advancement.”

Senior leader,
United Arab Emirates

Funding is a shared concern across campus

Decisions around improving processes and systems are largely within institutions' control. But there are also external factors significantly impacting their ability to deliver in strategic areas like recruitment and retainment.

For example, more than half of respondents (57%) identify **funding and grant acquisition** as one of the biggest challenges that faculty face today (Figure 3), with academic leaders in EMEA particularly concerned (67%). But what's striking are the differences we see when we look at the overall responses by role. Senior faculty members—many of whom are involved in applying for those grants—consider it a far greater problem than senior leadership do. This is true both today (71% versus 43%, respectively) and looking ahead to the future (74% versus 43%, respectively).

Current vs. Future challenges for faculty by position—spotlight on funding

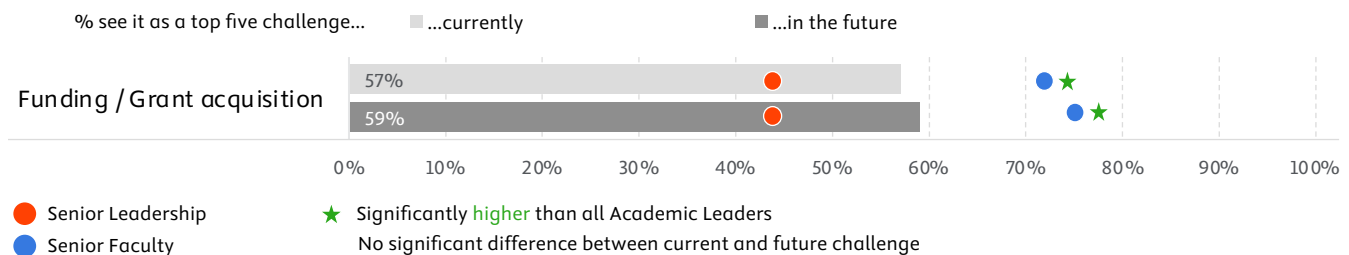


Figure 3: Questions: Which of the following currently are the greatest challenges to faculty? Which challenges, if any, do you think will become a much greater challenge to faculty in the next five years? Select up to five for each. Base: n= 428 all Academic Leaders, comprising 243 Senior Leadership and 185 Senior Faculty.

When we asked academic leaders which financial challenges are a priority for their institutions, **securing funding for research** topped the list, with 70% of senior leadership rating it a high priority, closely followed by **securing funding for education** and **competing for funding and grant opportunities** (both 69%). However, as Figure 4 shows, fewer senior faculty members agree their institutions are prioritizing these areas; in fact, substantial differences of opinion emerge. For example, while 64% of senior leadership claim that **appropriate allocation of resources across programs or departments** is a priority for their institutions, only 35% of senior faculty members agree.

“[My greatest challenges] are resource allocation and equity analysis.”

Senior faculty member,
United Arab Emirates

Level of priority assigned to addressing funding challenges by position

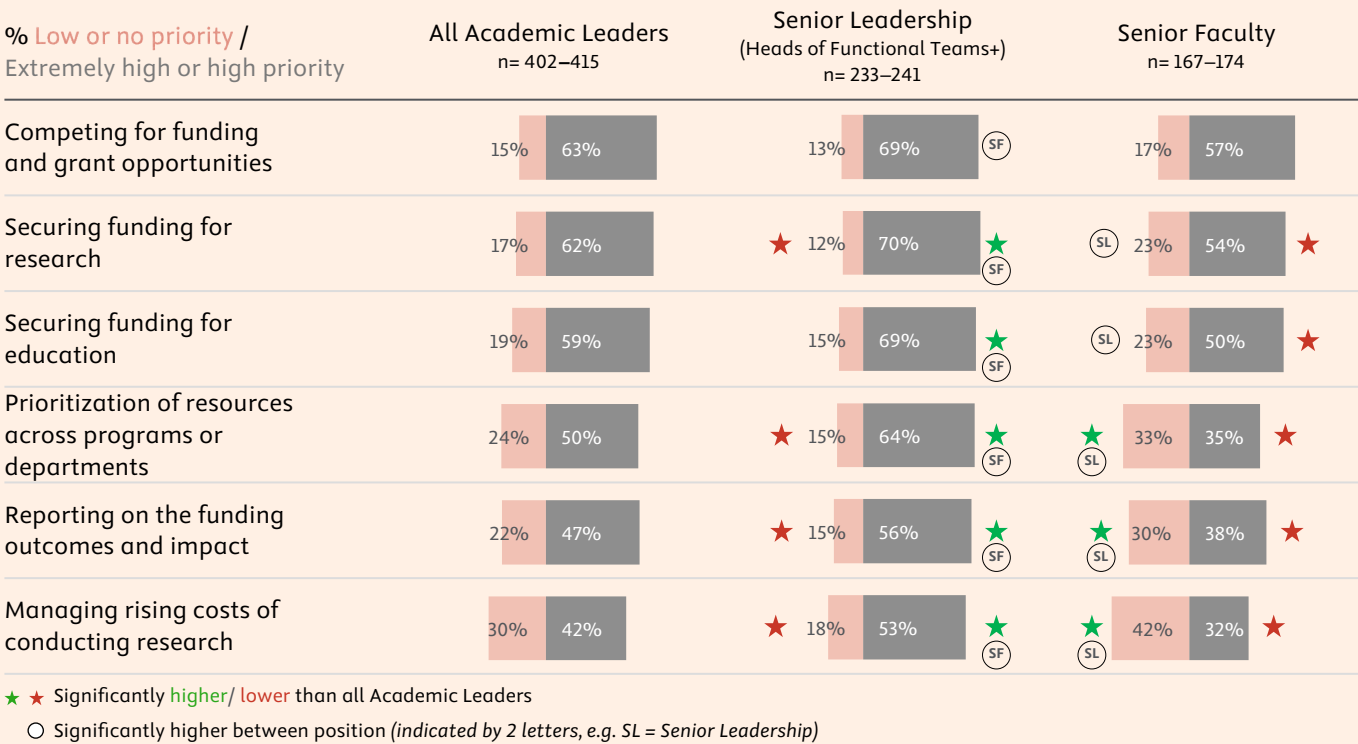


Figure 4: Question: How much priority has your institution assigned to addressing the following funding challenges over the next 12 months? Base (excluding “don’t know”): n= 402–415.

There are also interesting regional variations: APAC respondents are more likely than other regions to consider the areas in Figure 4 priorities for their institutions—in some cases, markedly so. For example, when it comes to **securing funding for research**, 71% of APAC academic leaders think it’s important for their university, compared to 50% in the Americas.

Industry experts believe the tough financial environment universities are facing is the culmination of a perfect storm of socioeconomic factors. Writing for *Forbes*, Michael Nietzel, president emeritus of Missouri State University, puts the blame for US funding issues on “...a decade-long period of sinking enrollments, a global pandemic, unpredictable state funding, a public increasingly skeptical of the value of a college degree, and the temptation at many schools to overbuild and overspend.”⁴

Over in the UK, university leaders have been juggling many of the same issues, along with factors such as tuition fee freezes and falling international student numbers. This has led experts to predict that in 2025–26, 40% of universities in England may only have “enough money in the bank to cover one month at a time of bills including salaries.”⁵

Universities across Europe, Africa, the Middle East and Asia Pacific are facing similar challenges. For example, in the Netherlands, university leaders have labeled planned €1.2 billion cuts to education, culture and science budgets “disastrous.”⁶ Higher education body Universities Australia claims its members are facing an unprecedented financial strain that has brought them to a “tipping point.”⁷ In 2023, state funding cuts led many Chinese universities to drastically increase their tuition fees for the first time in two decades—in some cases, by 54%.⁸

These financial constraints have widespread repercussions for academic institutions, their leaders and their faculty. Many universities are taking bold steps to combat them, including **cutting courses** and **reducing staff numbers**. As we explore later in this chapter, this has consequences for those remaining in their employ.

“We have had a round of voluntary redundancy without replacement of staff, but the same workload teaching-wise.”
Senior leader, United Kingdom

At the same time, faculty are navigating rising workloads and administrative tasks



One of the trickle-down effects of funding challenges is that many faculty are being asked to take on a greater volume and variety of responsibilities—including more administrative tasks.

The **number of staff allocated to manage workloads** was identified as a top source of dissatisfaction by 42% of academic leaders—rising to 50% in EMEA. Some senior faculty members report that they are increasingly called upon to cover unfilled positions.

This is leading to concerns among senior leadership about the quality and accuracy of work being produced.

“This semester I am doing the work of at least two people (if not more). The expectations are too high and the salaries too low.”

Senior faculty member,
United States of America

“Since we have less employees allocated to manage the workload, we sometimes face overloaded work, which increases mistakes, errors and accidents.”

Senior leader,
New Zealand

47%

of academic leaders believe finding and applying for funding opportunities distracts faculty from other tasks

Current vs. Future challenges for faculty by position

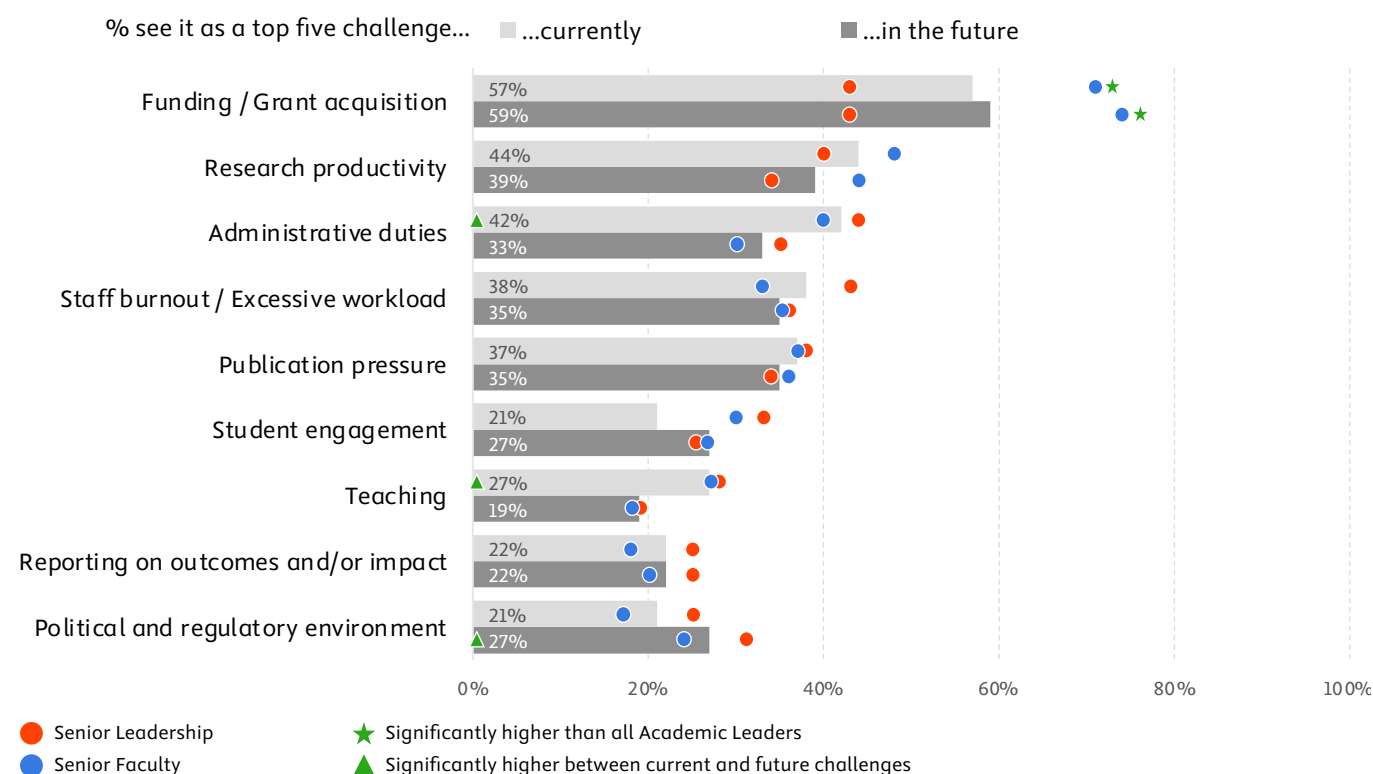


Figure 5: Questions: Which of the following currently are the greatest challenges to faculty? Which challenges, if any, do you think will become a much greater challenge to faculty in the next five years? Select up to five for each. Base: n= 428 all Academic Leaders, comprising 243 Senior Leadership and 185 Senior Faculty.

These factors may explain why, along with securing funding, senior leadership consider the pressure of **administrative duties on faculty** and **excessive workload/staff burnout** the most urgent issues they face today (Figure 5).

Interestingly, fewer senior leaders anticipate these two points will feature among their top five challenges five years from now. This may be because, as we explore in Chapter Two, academic leaders are eager to see better systems introduced to integrate data, automate workflows and streamline processes. It may also be because, as Figure 5 shows, they expect other areas to grow in urgency; for example, the **political/regulatory environment**—a challenge that 65% of respondents to our *View from the Top* survey also predicted will increase in importance.³

Sourcing and managing funding is one of the cumbersome administrative tasks identified by academic leaders. But as we see in Figure 6, although nearly half (47%) agree that **finding and applying for funding opportunities** distracts faculty from other tasks, senior faculty members consider it a far greater burden than senior leadership do (57% versus 38%, respectively). A similar picture emerges when we look at **reporting on funding outcomes**—50% of senior faculty members consider it a time-consuming exercise, compared to 37% of senior leadership.

Attitudes toward funding issues by position

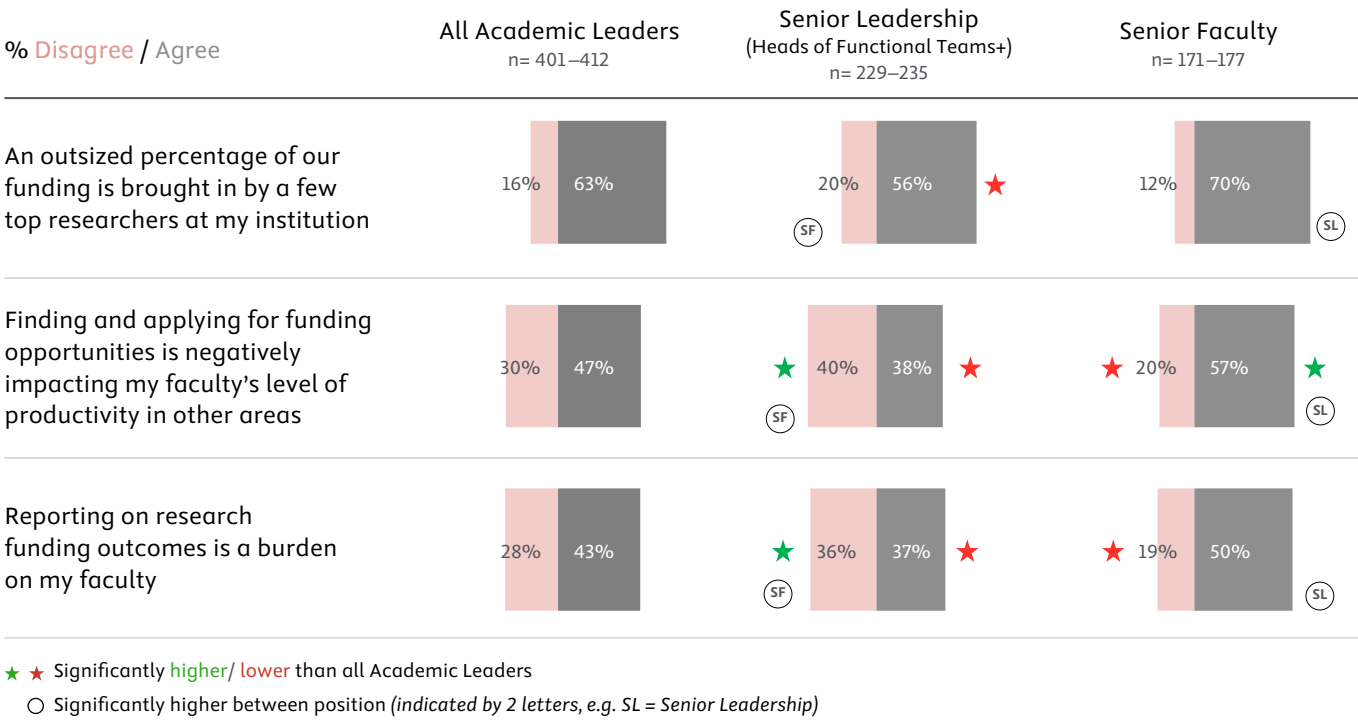


Figure 6: Question: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about funding? Base (excluding “don’t know”): n= 401–412.

According to Ferreira (2022), other factors driving the growth of administrative tasks include the rise in digital communication tools, which mean “the channel is always open, and messages are sent at any time.”⁹ He also points to an issue reported by countries as far afield as Germany, France, Australia, Norway and the US¹⁰—the exponential growth of university administrator roles. According to Ferreira, this “administrative creep” generates extra work for professors, forcing them to focus on activities like reporting at the expense of teaching and research. “Picture this: administrators require a task of faculty, for example filling in a form or writing a report. They are then responsible for processing the results, likely by writing another report...Now, multiply the loop by dozens of inflated departments...The result is death by a thousand notifications: the death of the university.”⁹

Figure 5 suggests our respondents share Ferreira’s fears about the impact of heavy workloads and administration on areas such as **teaching** and **research productivity**—with the latter a particular concern for senior faculty members. Regionally, respondents in the Americas consider **student engagement** one of the major challenges that faculty face today (43% versus the global average of 31%).

In practice, the links between the various challenges selected by our respondents run deep, as recent developments at University of East Anglia in the UK illustrate. **Budget cuts** of £30m—almost 10% of the institution’s annual spending—have led to a 20% reduction in courses. This is impacting **teaching** and **student engagement** with “increased lecture group sizes, less one-to-one contact between academics and students, and fewer staff in student support including in mental health and counseling.”¹⁵

These factors are impacting faculty career paths

Given the funding challenges identified by respondents, it's perhaps not surprising that when we asked them to name their top five areas of dissatisfaction, **budget for faculty salaries and professional development** topped the list (47%).

"We have consistently faced challenges in providing competitive salary increases for faculty, especially in light of inflation and the increasing cost of living."

Senior leader,
Australia

There are interesting regional variations. For example, budget for faculty careers is particularly concerning for academic leaders in EMEA (59%)—the same geographic group that is most likely to see funding/grant acquisition as their greatest challenge. But while budget for faculty careers is also the top area of dissatisfaction for respondents in Asia Pacific, only 40% of them find it a top frustration.

Again, we see variation in answers across university roles, with senior leadership considering it less of an issue than senior faculty members (41% versus 53%).

Obstacles to timely promotion and salary increases, for those who see this as a top five area of dissatisfaction

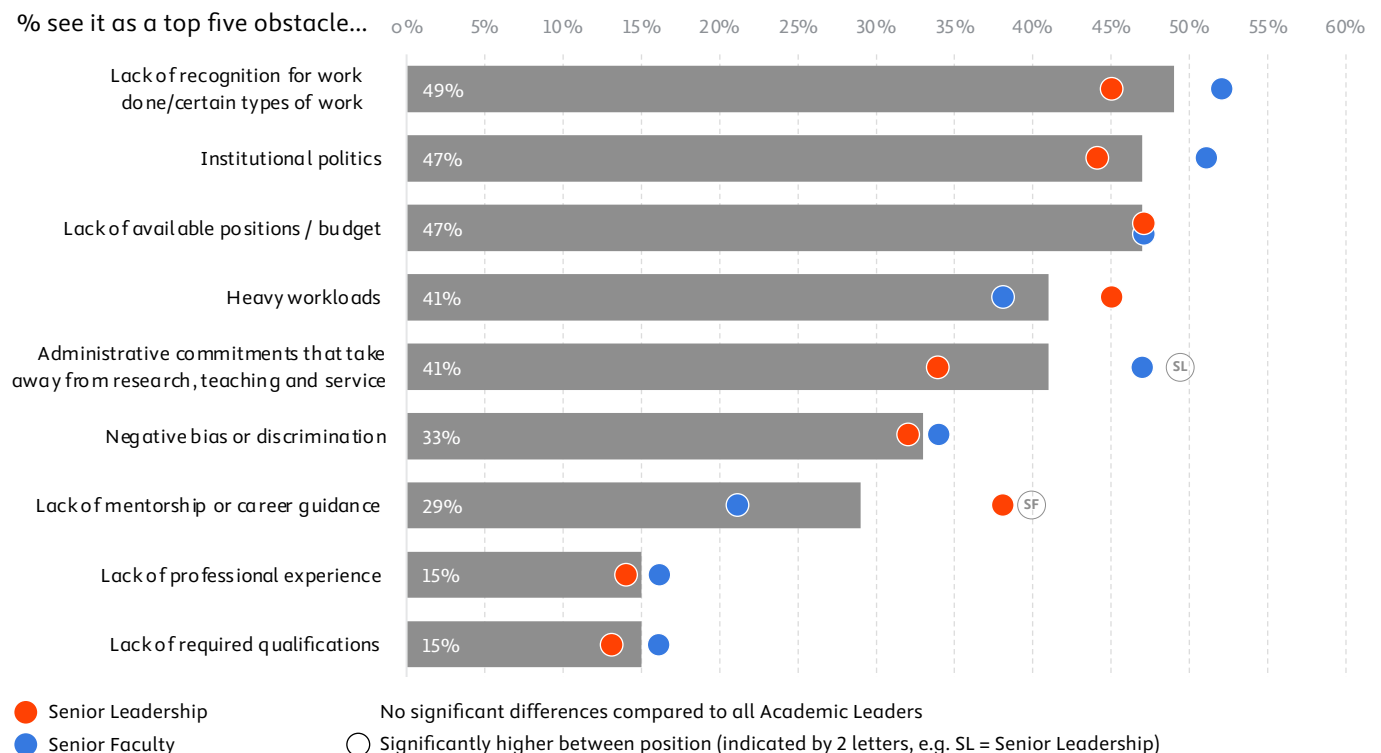


Figure 7: Question: Which of the following obstacles prevent high-performing faculty from achieving timely promotions, tenure (if applicable) and/or salary increases at your institution? Select up to five top obstacles. Base (those who see this as a top five area of dissatisfaction): n= 149 all Academic Leaders, comprising 75 Senior Leadership and 74 Senior Faculty.



As we touched on earlier, **timeliness of promotions, tenure and salary increases** is a top area of dissatisfaction for 35% of academic leaders. Of this group, 41% claim that **heavy workloads** are distracting high-performing faculty at their institutions from tasks important to their career advancement (Figure 7). Interestingly, however, senior leadership are slightly more likely to consider these workloads an obstacle than senior faculty members (45% versus 38%, respectively). While senior faculty members are significantly more likely than senior leadership to see **administrative commitments** as a major obstacle (47% versus 34%, respectively).

Respondents to our survey also want to see the focus on **professional development of faculty** increase. Requests include more budget assigned to training, along with improved recognition and showcasing of their work. As Figure 7 shows, senior faculty members in particular want to see an increase in the availability of **mentoring and career guidance**. This includes better **nurturing of early career faculty**, a group that often struggles more than senior colleagues with areas like job security and funding.¹¹ However, while 38% of senior faculty members feel their institutions are failing to prioritize support for this group, only 16% of senior leadership agree, suggesting that change is unlikely in the short term (Figure 8).

While some academic leaders are concerned over the lack of funding and programs for personal development, others want better tools and systems to monitor its success.

“The institution requests many reports and files with redundant information, and the administrative load requires a lot of time.”

Senior faculty member,
Mexico

“Currently, the data we have is scattered and not easily actionable, making it difficult to identify faculty strengths, areas for development, or the impact of mentoring and professional development programs.”

Senior leader,
United States of America

Attitudes toward hiring, promotion and tenure* processes—spotlight on nurturing careers

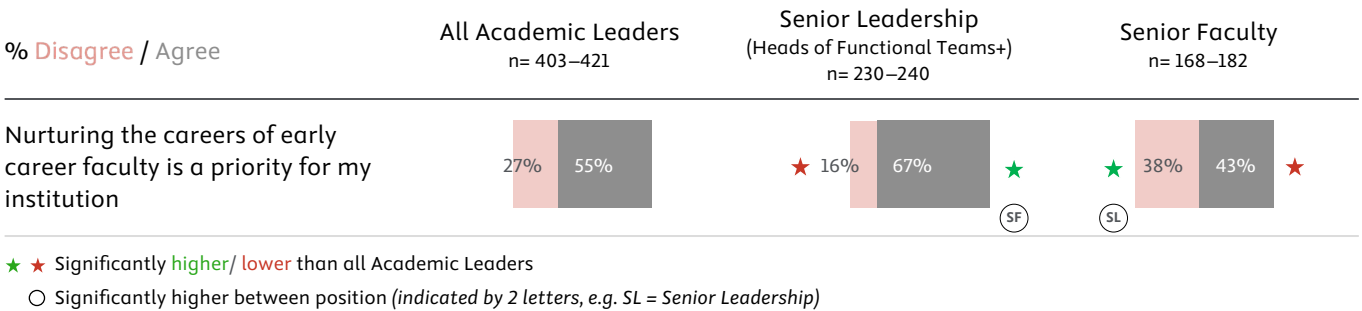


Figure 8: Question: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding hiring, review, promotion and tenure processes at your institution? Base (excluding “don’t know”): n= 403–421.

Action is required to preserve individual and institutional health

In 2020, the funding body Wellcome Trust asked more than 4,000 researchers worldwide for their thoughts on the culture they work in. It found that researchers want an environment that is “collaborative, inclusive, supportive and creative.” They also want time to focus on their research priorities, transparent and open leadership, and “a sense of safety and security.”¹²

Yet, as we’ve seen in this chapter, respondents to this survey are concerned that faculty don’t always have access to the support and guidance they need. In addition, they believe that rising workloads and administration are not only slowing down faculty career progression, they are also impacting their mental health.

Faculty burnout is a particular concern for academic leaders in EMEA today. And a greater number of them expect it to feature among their top challenges five years from now. Reflecting on the culture at Dutch universities, researcher Yarin Eski told the country’s education union, the AOb (Algemene Onderwijsbond): “We scientists see conferences as holidays, get-togethers with the faculty as our social life and we neglect our family. It is now normal for people to....burnout and be away for a while. I then ask myself: what kind of knowledge do we provide if we are so unhealthy?”¹³

This aligns with global reports of rising incidences of stress, burnout, anxiety and depression among academics;¹⁴ a situation made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁵ The working culture at some universities is encouraging key researchers to rethink their careers.

“Quite often, a burden is experienced in meeting administrative requirements in reporting, curriculum updates or student advising, which has led to burnout and frustration amongst teachers.”

Senior leader,
Mexico

“Limited insight into faculty attrition rates and causes makes it difficult to handle the interests of faculty in the department.”

Senior leader,
United Arab Emirates

A rising proportion are weighing up whether to change university or country; for example, 34% of researchers surveyed for the 2022 Elsevier report *Research Futures 2.0*, said they would consider a move in the next two years for career reasons. This was up from 28% in 2020.¹⁶ Others are leaving academia for good to take on “better-paying industry jobs.”¹⁷ In a bid to understand the scale of the problem, in 2024, researchers at Adam Mickiewicz University of Poznan in Poland used Scopus data to examine the attrition rate of a 2000 cohort of scientists. Worryingly, two-thirds had left academic science by the end of the period examined (19 years). Women leavers outnumbered men, further fueling concerns over faculty diversity.¹⁸

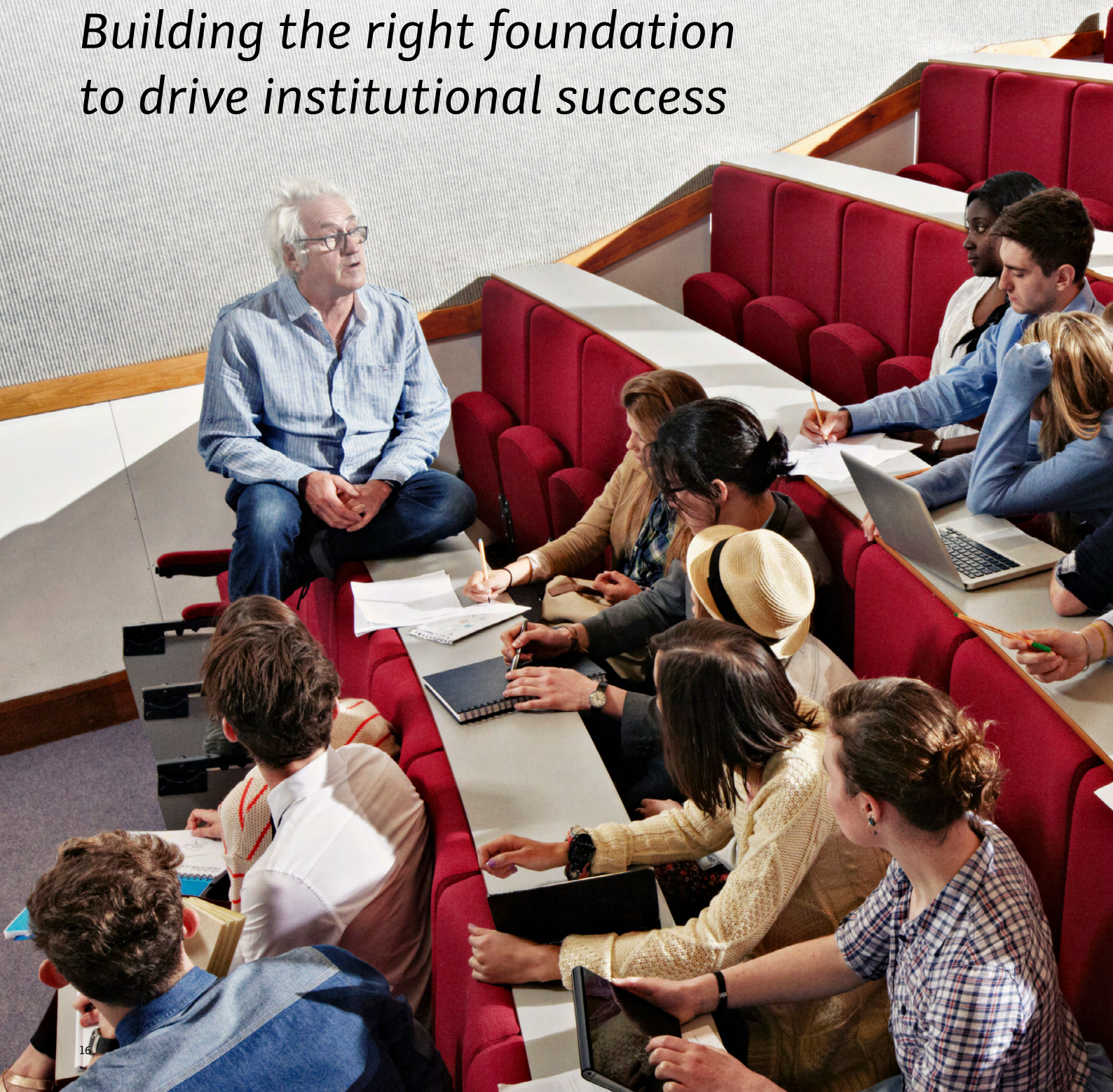
Nearly half (43%) of the respondents to our survey agree with the statement that **top faculty at their institution are considering leaving their positions**. However, views on the severity of the problem vary by role: only 31% of senior leadership agree with the statement, compared with 54% of senior faculty members (who either count themselves among those top faculty or work closely with them).

In addition, 70% of senior faculty members and 56% of senior leadership admit that **an outsized proportion of their institutions’ research funding is brought in by just a few top researchers**. If they step down from their roles, this will further aggravate existing research funding challenges. It will also have consequences for the workload of remaining faculty, impacting their ability to focus on core priorities such as research, teaching, student mentoring and service.

This suggests that senior leadership may have a greater challenge on their hands than they realize, especially as some institutions report that they don’t have the data and systems to properly evaluate the issue.

Data, processes and systems

*Building the right foundation
to drive institutional success*



Key insights



Fragmented systems and **data silos** are making it difficult for academic leaders to access the strategic insights they need. Respondents are concerned this is **hindering their ability to make informed decisions for their institutions**.



Poor data and analytical tools, combined with **inefficient and opaque processes**, are impacting **recruitment and review, promotion and tenure**. This has implications for existing hiring and evaluation challenges.



An area that many academic leaders want to see improved is **the equity of their hiring and recognition processes**. They also desire the ability to **look at faculty achievements more holistically**, including their service contributions and societal impact.



Along with **better insights into faculty and research performance**, academic leaders want **improved technology to showcase their institutional achievements** to the wider world, so they can leverage successes to boost funding, reputation and recruitment opportunities.



Respondents have clear ideas about how the challenges their institutions face can be tackled. For example, many would like to see **clearer evaluation criteria and structures, access to integrated, real-time data, enhanced analytical tools** and **better options to showcase faculty research and achievements**.

As we’ve seen in Chapter One, academic leaders understand faculty are navigating challenges that impact every area of their professional lives. And they are motivated to improve the ways they recruit, recognize and support them. However, it’s also clear that many feel they lack the information, tools and/or processes to do that effectively.

Academic leaders want integrated data systems to fuel decisions

Gaining a **holistic view of faculty careers, activities and performance** is something many of our respondents find challenging. And it’s a problem that’s shared across all roles and locations. One of the key issues they encounter is **fragmented data**, with information on faculty stored across multiple platforms.

In fact, as *Figure 9* shows, nearly two-thirds of academic leaders (62%) agree that disorganized data is causing their institutions to miss out on opportunities in areas such as recruitment, showcasing, collaboration and funding. It is also making it harder to track progress toward goals around diversity and equity.

“Data integration is very difficult...There is a need to manage and compile a large quantity of data from HR, teaching and research output to get a complete review of faculty performance.”

Senior leader,
Ireland

Attitudes toward technology and data by position—spotlight on data

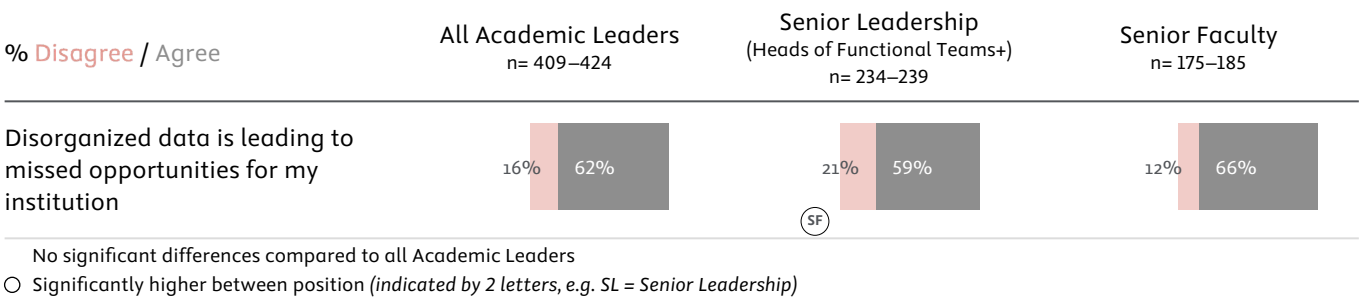


Figure 9: Question: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding technology and data? Base (excluding “don’t know”): n= 409–424.

Other data challenges identified by our respondents include:

- **Data quality and accuracy:** Several academic leaders point to inconsistencies and errors in data capture, along with data conflicts across systems.
- **Data availability:** A number of respondents report a shortage of data on faculty and their contributions, impacting their ability to evaluate and recognize them.
- **Securing real-time data:** This is a struggle for several academic leaders. It's preventing one senior leader in North America from gaining a clear picture of faculty workload, research progress and the effectiveness of faculty teaching. Crucially, it is proving an obstacle to "timely decisions."
- **Accessing data sources:** A senior leader in Iran is frustrated by the lack of equitable access to data tools and systems across departments, while at a Japanese university, access is being impeded by "multiple layers of approvals."

Respondents also want to see improvements to the analytic capabilities of the systems their institutions rely on, including the ability to benchmark performance, understand research trends and anticipate hiring requirements.

Some academic leaders believe that these factors are hindering their institutions' ability to plan strategically. For example, half of our respondents (53%) agree that it's **hard to access the data they need to help determine/support promotions and tenure**. They also miss evidence-based insights to guide planning in areas such as recruitment, resource planning, and teaching and learning.

"The major challenge that we face is analytics for future workforce needs, which involves building predictive models."

Senior leader,
Germany

Systems should ease the burden of data collection and reporting

It's clear that academic leaders are concerned about the scale of administrative tasks that faculty are currently juggling, with some flagging reduced budgets as the cause. However, there are other factors at play; for example, respondents point to outdated systems that require manual data entry or report compilation. These not only eat up researchers' time, they also open the door to data errors and conflicts. There are also concerns over 'data for the data's sake'—poorly-thought-through policies requiring researchers to capture information that will never be analyzed or reported on.

According to consulting firm McKinsey & Company, the **modernization and streamlining of administrative functions** is something universities "often overlook," despite its potential to address many of the challenges that faculty face—particularly in relation to recruitment and retention. For example, McKinsey points to the fact that "for faculty members, the prospect of moving to an institution where they would have a lighter administrative load is a huge selling point" due to the stress that these tasks cause.¹⁹

While respondents agree that making data collection simpler and faster is important, they also see a need for improved communication about the return on investment for faculty; this includes explaining how the data that faculty enter can help their institutions to evaluate, recognize and showcase them.

"Without clear incentives or meaningful outcomes tied to these tasks, faculty may lack the motivation to engage, leading to incomplete or unreliable data."

Senior leader,
India

There is a clear appetite to improve existing processes for hiring, evaluating and recognizing faculty

As we saw in Chapter One, attracting and retaining faculty are priorities for our academic leaders, so it's no surprise that they consider these areas ripe for change.

Two-thirds of respondents (65%) say **the ways in which they carry out recruitment, review, promotion and tenure** differ from those used for other staff, with more steps and factors involved. Yet, despite these added layers of complexity, institutions often rely on standard HR systems, which many academic leaders feel aren't up to the task. For example, more than a third (36%), name the **current mechanisms and systems** their institutions use for faculty evaluation and promotion as a top five area of dissatisfaction. And a quarter are unhappy with the mechanisms and systems used for hiring faculty and researchers (26% name this as a top five area of dissatisfaction).

As a 2017 working paper by researchers at America's Virginia Tech notes, although universities often have dedicated enterprise systems for areas like finance, students and grants, *"they do not have enterprise systems for faculty productivity data...The information is unstructured and decentralized making it extremely difficult to provide aggregated insights into faculty contributions."*²⁰

Many academic leaders feel that the workarounds they are forced to use are hampering their ability to recruit, evaluate and recognize faculty. For example, 42% find **hiring data challenging to report on**, preventing them from driving the improvements that respondents want to see. And only 47% agree they have the systems they need to make **data-driven decisions about faculty careers and research**: In the Americas, this figure drops to just 29%.

Academic leaders believe this lack of infrastructure has implications for the research culture on campus.

"A centralized, accessible system would help us make more informed decisions about faculty growth, retention and promotion."

Senior leader,
United States of America

"Access to real time data on faculty performance is very limited, which often causes delays in their evaluations. These, in turn, can slow down the promotion process, affecting faculty advancement and morale."

Senior leader,
Australia

If we look at this response by role, it's clear that senior faculty members are less happy with the systems at their disposal than senior leadership (34% versus 60%, respectively). This may explain some of the variations in views we saw in Chapter One, including senior faculty members' greater dissatisfaction with the **timeliness of promotions, tenure, and salary increases** (40% versus 29% of senior leadership).

The issues that academic leaders encounter include a lack of data on faculty contributions beyond publications; for example, investments in curricula development, interdisciplinary teaching efforts, student outcomes and service to the community. In fact, **lack of recognition for the full range of faculty contributions** is something that senior faculty members view as their primary obstacle to **timely promotion and salary increases** (Figure 10).

Obstacles to timely promotion and salary increases identified by those who see this as a top five area of dissatisfaction

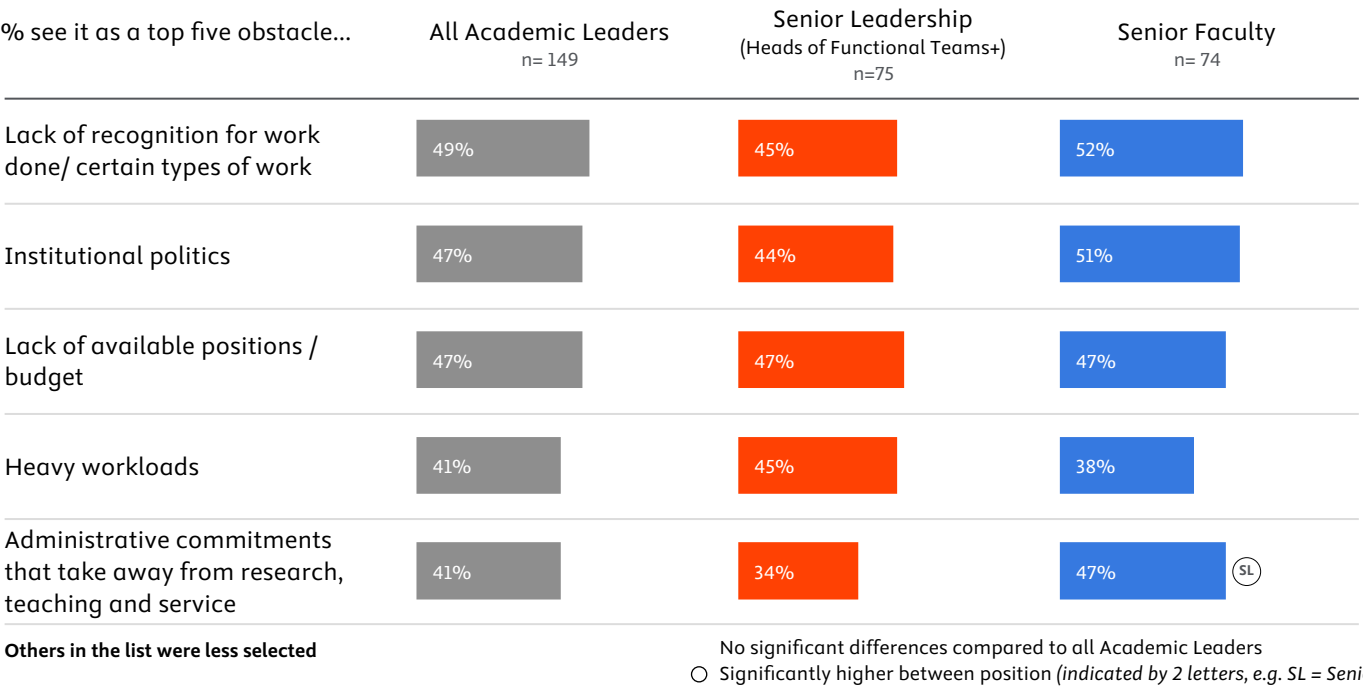


Figure 10: Question: Which of the following obstacles prevent high-performing faculty from achieving timely promotions, tenure (if applicable) and/or salary increases at your institution? Select up to five top obstacles. Base (those who see this as a top five area of dissatisfaction): n= 149.

Some respondents also miss tools to analyze the data that they do have; for example, to benchmark faculty and institutional performance against peers. But, for many, it's the familiar challenge of collating data from multiple systems that is proving most problematic. On the recruitment side, respondents believe that **better integrated data**—and the **systems to analyze it**—could help them understand the current distribution of workload across faculty and the emerging research areas they should target. It could also provide them with insights into the demographics of their existing faculty and flag upcoming changes.

Academic leaders are also hungry for systems that will improve the speed and efficiency of recruitment and evaluation.

They also want better **recruitment and retainment** processes; for example, as we saw in Chapter One, more than two-thirds of respondents (72%) desire improvements to the ways in which review, promotion and tenure are conducted. And there are two key areas they'd like to see changed.

“[There is a] lack of infrastructure for predictive analysis that can assist us in anticipating future faculty workforce trends, future hiring needs and standardized mapping of data circulation of various departments.”

Senior leader,
Mexico

“...qualified candidates withdrew because our outdated systems created delays in communication and decision making. This led to missed opportunities for hiring top talent.”

Senior leader,
Australia

Increased transparency

Attitudes toward technology and data by position

As Figure 11 shows, nearly all respondents agree that faculty review should be transparent (89%). Yet 77% of academic leaders are calling for better visibility into the processes that their institutions use, with voices louder in Asia Pacific than in the Americas (81% versus 70%, respectively). For many, this desire is sparked by what they see as a current lack of consistency in the criteria that evaluators use.

Greater transparency could also help to dispel concerns expressed by some respondents that personal relationships and favoritism play a role in decision making. This perhaps explains why 74% agree **standardized workflows for reviewing faculty** are an important step towards more equitable decisions.

89%

of academic leaders say faculty review should be transparent

77%

of academic leaders want better visibility into review processes

“...recently two professors with similar accomplishments received vastly different outcomes, creating confusion.”

Senior leader,
Australia

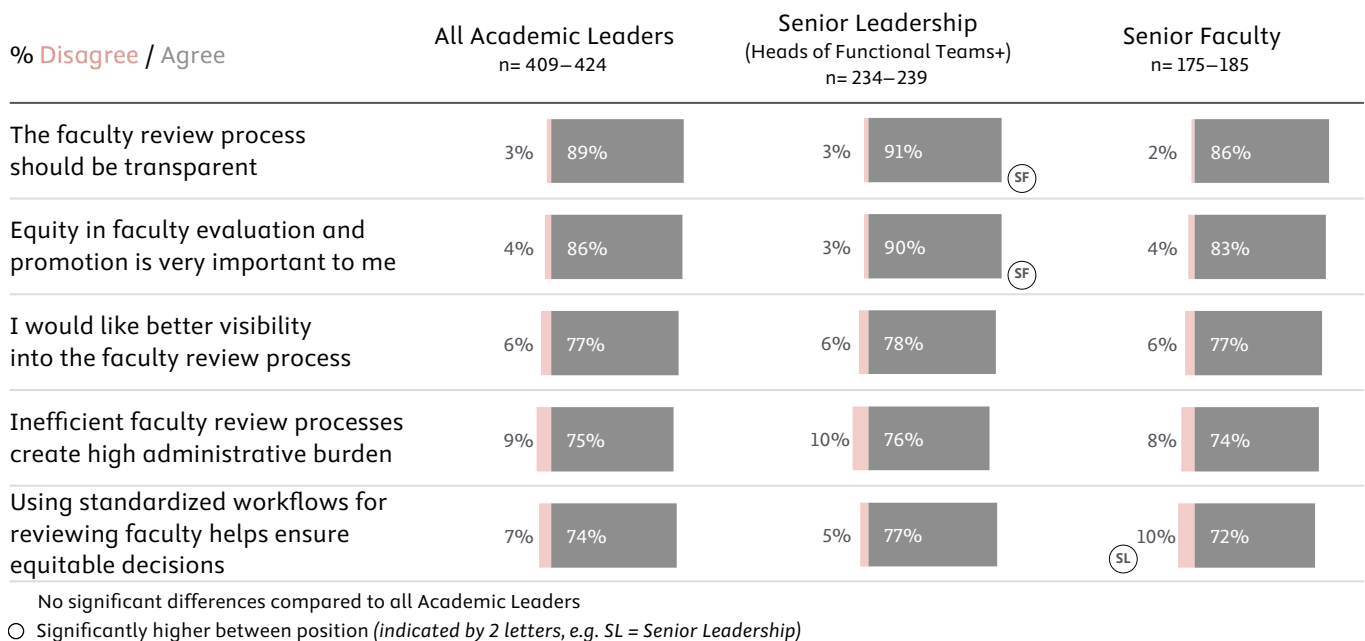


Figure 11: Question: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding technology and data? Base (excluding “don’t know”): n= 409–424.

A more level playing field

While definitions of the term equity vary, most agree that it is about creating a workplace in which everyone can thrive. According to the university alliance Una Europe, this means academic institutions providing “fair access to opportunities, resources and ultimately power.”²¹

To do this, they need hiring, review, promotion and tenure processes that ensure all researchers can progress, whatever their gender, socioeconomic background, race or beliefs. However, studies suggest that many institutions are struggling to meet this goal. For example, the European Union describes current access to equal opportunities in its member state universities as “unsatisfactory.”²²

And this has implications for institutions’ success. As Tabbye Chavous, Chief Diversity Officer at University of Michigan in the US, notes, prioritizing equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) not only makes universities stronger, it also “drives innovation” and “improves decision-making, critical thinking and problem-solving skills.”²³

Nearly half of the respondents to our survey (43%) agree that **ensuring equitable advancement of faculty** is a priority for their institutions (Figure 12). Senior leadership are more likely to think this is the case than their senior faculty colleagues (55% versus 30%, respectively). They are also far more likely to think it’s an area in which they do well (51% versus 24%, respectively).

Priority vs. Performance by position—spotlight on equitable advancement

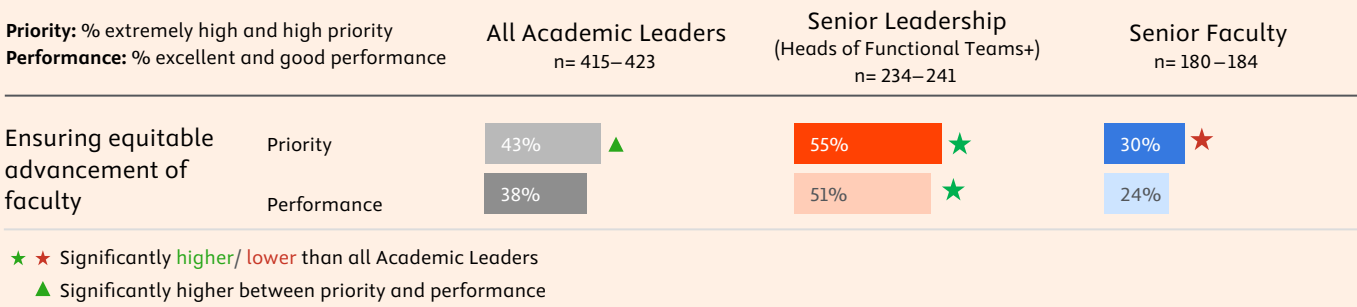


Figure 12: Question: What level of priority do you believe your institution has assigned to addressing the following challenges? How do you rate your institution’s performance in meeting these challenges? Base (excluding “don’t know”): n= 415–423.

Similarly, a greater proportion of senior leadership agree that **equitable faculty evaluation and promotion** is important (90%, versus 83% of senior faculty members).

This variation in views may reflect the fact that senior leadership in some parts of the world are under increasing pressure to ensure their institutions can demonstrate their commitment to EDI. For example, organizations applying for the European Union’s Horizon Europe funding program must show that they have a gender equality plan in place. And, since 2019, only Irish universities with accreditation from Athena Swan (the Scientific Women’s Academic Network) are eligible to apply for public funding.²⁴

When it comes to improving gender equality in university leadership, some female heads of universities see the faculty evaluation process as a great place to start. In a 2024 Science Business report, they claim it’s time to reduce the focus on traditional metrics, which often tend to overlook women’s achievements. Instead, they recommend developing a more narrative approach.²⁴ This is something that several of the senior leadership who responded to our survey suggest they would welcome.



And it's a view shared by more than half of the 400+ faculty members surveyed for the 2024 Interfolio and Hanover Research report, *Illuminating Faculty Impact*: 56% agreed that their institutions use oversimplified metrics to evaluate the total impact of their work.²⁵

However, despite 90% of the senior leadership who responded to our survey agreeing that **equity in faculty evaluation and promotion is very important** to them, just under half (48%) feel that their institutions have the **tools to show that they are equitably promoting faculty**. Even fewer senior faculty members think this is the case (36%). When it comes to **tools for demonstrating the equitable hiring of faculty**, we see a similar picture—just 45% of senior leadership and 33% of senior faculty members are happy with their current systems. And 39% of academic leaders believe they lack the tools necessary to **show that they are meeting equitable recruitment goals**.

A review by Blatch-Jones, Lakin and Thomas (2024) flags the potential pitfalls for universities that fail to prioritize EDI. Interestingly, many of these reflect the challenges raised by respondents in this report, including: *“individuals leaving academia, low job satisfaction, increased stress, burnout and mental health problems, and decreased productivity.”* The review also found that poor EDI can lead to a lack of diversity in leadership roles.²⁶

Dangers like these have led some universities to develop best practice guides on EDI with a view to encouraging their faculty to stay. Recommendations include:

- Greater transparency around evaluation processes
- More professional development opportunities
- Streamlining of administrative tasks
- Improved mentoring programs
- Better monitoring of decision making and outcomes²⁷

Here again, our survey respondents see a role for improved data to help guide their decision making.

“[I would like to be] able to see the holistic faculty member and not rely solely on things that appear readily measurable.”

Senior leader,
United States of America

“...we have limited resources to improve faculty diversity through data-driven strategies.”

Senior leader,
United Arab Emirates

“Data on faculty diversity in the institution has to be the top priority as by doing that we can make hiring and retention strategies effectively.”

Senior leader,
India

Demonstrating and reporting on faculty and institutional success is a high priority

Most academic leaders (80%) agree that they want the ability to **showcase their institutions' research, data, track record and expertise** to the outside world.

Yet, as *Figure 13* shows, 22% of academic leaders consider their current ability to **showcase their institutions' research outputs** a top area of dissatisfaction. And it's proving more problematic for senior leadership than senior faculty members (25% versus 18%).

Top areas of dissatisfaction by position

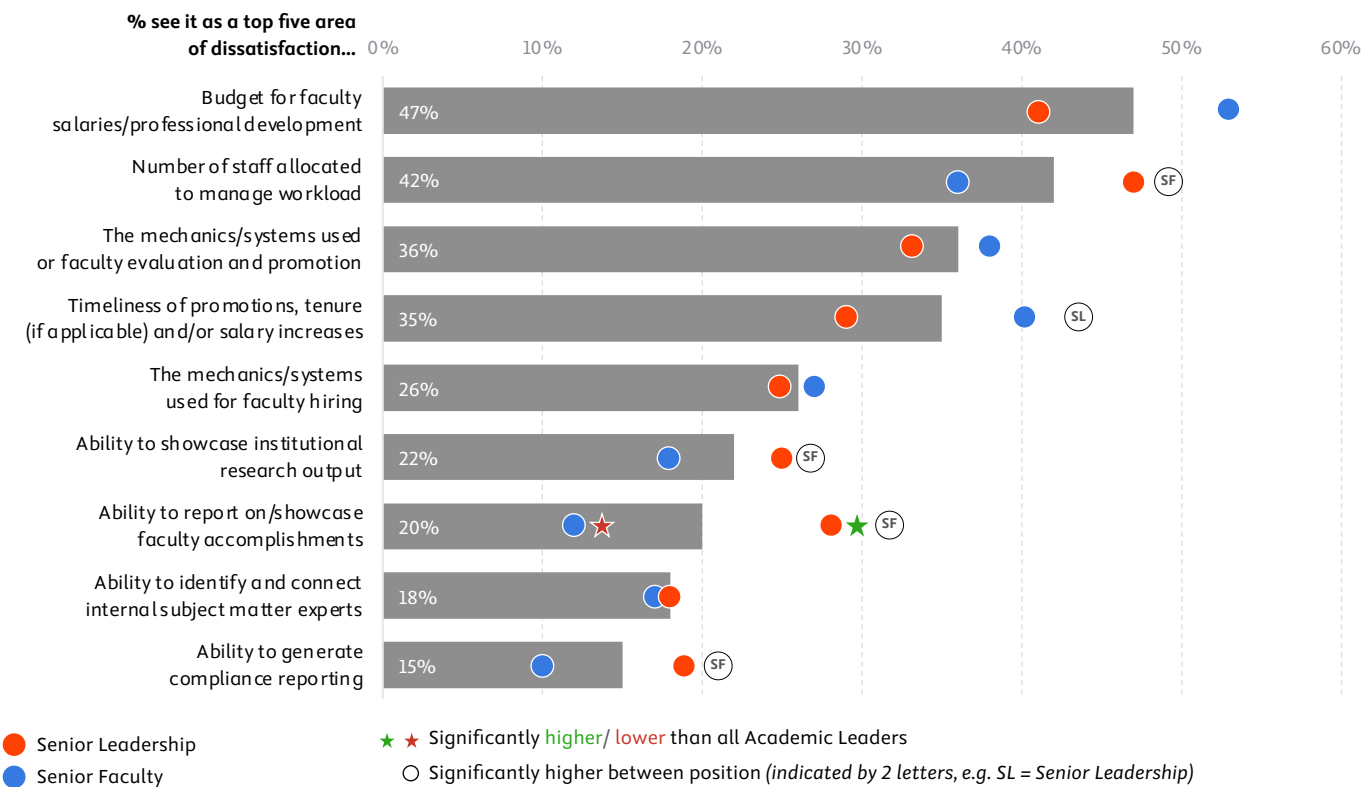


Figure 13: Question: Which of the following currently are you most dissatisfied with at your department or institution? Please select up to five top areas. Base: n= 428 all Academic Leaders, comprising 243 Senior Leadership and 185 Senior Faculty.

80% of academic leaders say agree that they want the ability to showcase their institutions' research, data, track record and expertise to the outside world

“While we produce a significant amount of high-quality research, we lack a centralized, user-friendly platform to effectively highlight these achievements to external stakeholders, such as potential collaborators, funding agencies and the public.”

Senior leader, Ecuador

Senior leadership are also much more unhappy than senior faculty members with their institutions' ability to **showcase and report on faculty accomplishments** (28% versus 12% see it as a top area of dissatisfaction).

These results aren't surprising given that responsibility for improving institutional reputation rests chiefly on senior leadership's shoulders. In addition, they appreciate the role that showcasing can play in addressing the challenges they face. For example, as we saw in Chapter One, 70% of senior leadership see **securing funding for research** as their institutions' top funding challenge. And several studies show that research funders want evidence of applicants' previous experience and impact.²⁸ Highlighting faculty achievements can also contribute to another priority area for senior leadership—recruitment—helping to attract new talent to the university. And it's a cost-effective way to improve faculty recognition (and retention) when budget for salaries and development is limited. But, here again, data and systems are proving an obstacle.

Academic leaders believe that better systems to highlight faculty achievements could also help them address an area that 84% of respondents consider important—the ability to **identify people in their institution with specific expertise**.

When it comes to **demonstrating the holistic impact of faculty's work**, 43% of respondents consider it a priority for their institution. This is particularly true for academic leaders in Asia Pacific (55%). When we look at responses by role (*Figure 14*), senior leadership not only consider it a greater priority than senior faculty members (58% versus 29%, respectively); they also think they are better at it (43% versus 19%, respectively).

“Several faculty members in our college secured major grants but without a centralized system to showcase these achievements we missed chances to share the news with potential collaborators and funders.”

Senior leader,
Australia

“Showcasing faculty members' achievement easily allows other departments to look for desired candidates that can assist them in completing important heavy tasks and enable more strategic implementation of support.”

Senior leader,
Mexico

Priority vs. Performance by position—spotlight on holistic showcasing of faculty work

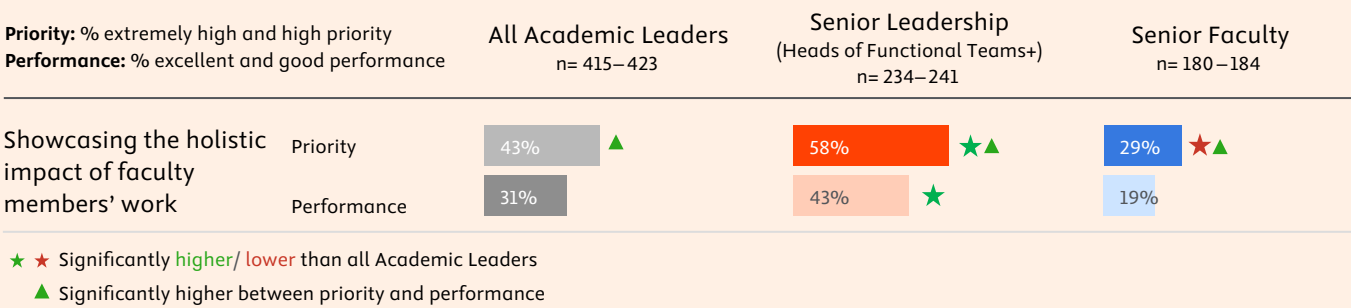


Figure 14: Question: What level of priority do you believe your institution has assigned to addressing the following challenges? How do you rate your institution's performance in meeting these challenges? Base (excluding "don't know"): n= 415–423.

This may explain why only 38% of senior leadership think that their institutions need **better tools for reporting the full range of faculty impact**. This contrasts with 54% of senior faculty members.

It's a similar story when we look at **reporting on faculty's contributions to their institutions and communities** (Figure 15): While 62% of senior leadership think that the systems they have are suitable, only 42% of senior faculty members agree.

Senior leadership are also more optimistic about their institutions' tools to **report on faculty teaching, research and service**. And they are more satisfied than senior faculty members with the tools their institutions use to **network and collaborate** with academia and beyond. Although, interestingly, senior leadership in the Americas are less happy than colleagues in Asia Pacific (51% versus 66%, respectively).

38%

of senior leadership think their institutions need better tools for reporting the full range of faculty impact.

54%

of senior faculty members agree.

Attitudes toward systems at their institutions by position

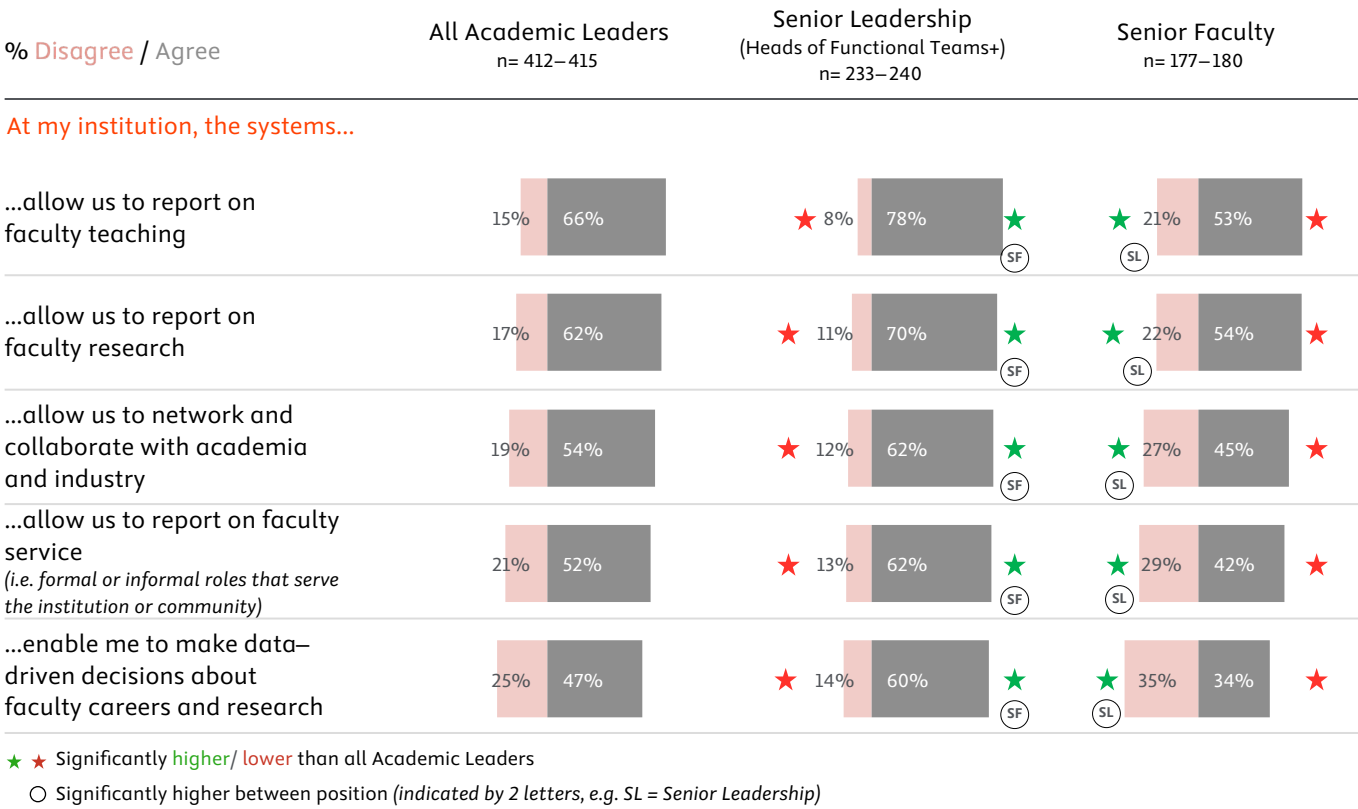


Figure 15: Question: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding the systems at your institution? Base (excluding “don’t know”): n= 412–415.

When it comes to **generating reports on faculty's compliance** with things like open access policies and funder mandates, three-quarters of academic leaders (75%) want to be able to do this.

This reflects the fact that both groups consider ensuring compliance a high priority for their institutions (Figure 16).

“A significant issue occurred when we needed to submit a compliance report on faculty research activities. Since the data was scattered across various sources it took weeks longer than expected...this delay caused a lot of stress for the team and ultimately led to missed deadlines.”

Senior leader,
India

Priority vs. Performance by position—spotlight on ensuring compliance

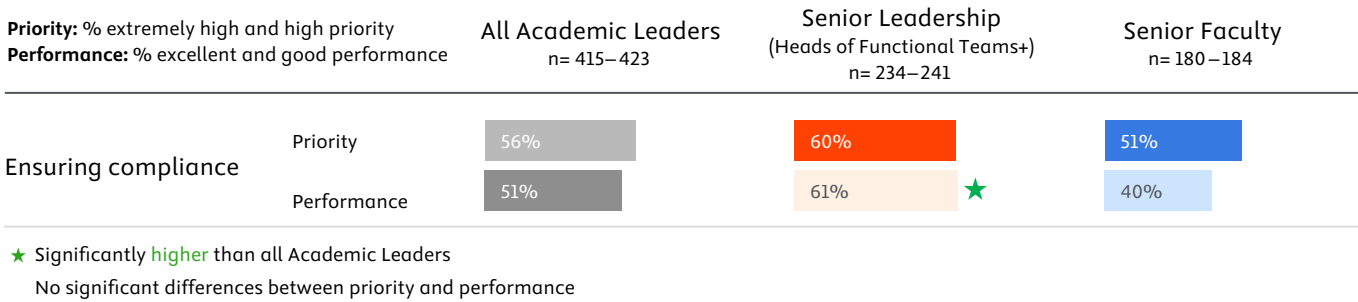


Figure 16: Question: What level of priority do you believe your institution has assigned to addressing the following challenges? How do you rate your institution's performance in meeting these challenges? Base (Excluding “Don't know”): n= 415–423.

This is particularly true in the Americas (65%). Senior leadership are also more likely than senior faculty members to want to **track activities for compliance** and **collect and share academic data** for purposes such as:

- Career evaluation
- Departmental, institutional and annual reviews
- Recognition and honors



Conclusion

In this report, we've heard from academic leaders about the challenges they face and the points that frustrate them. They've also outlined core strategic goals for their institutions, from boosting impact, reputation and revenue to creating a better research culture.

But what's become clear is that achieving these aims will require some institutions to take bold steps. And chief among these is the pressing need to improve alignment around their people, processes and decisions. Here are the top strategic recommendations shared by the academic leaders we surveyed.

Academic leaders' recommendations

1

Modernize systems

Academic leaders feel that upgraded evaluation and reporting tools will improve transparency and efficiency. These modern, integrated technology systems also have the potential to support better decision making in areas important to faculty careers and engagement.

2

Improve data integration

Academic leaders want a unified system that will streamline decision making, track faculty performance and ensure equitable practices in performance reviews. They also want data collection to be simplified, further reducing the administrative burden on faculty. And they want measures introduced to improve the quality—and usefulness—of the data captured.

3

Increase faculty support and resources

Respondents believe their institutions will benefit from improved resources that streamline administrative tasks and reduce the time required for activities like grant writing and activity reporting. Their hope is that this will free up faculty to focus more on teaching, service and research.

4

Revisit processes for hiring, retaining and recognizing faculty

Faculty attraction and retention remains a struggle for most institutions. Academic leaders believe there should be a greater focus on competitive compensation, professional development, staff allocation and addressing mental health needs.

5

Promote equity and diversity

Ideally, academic leaders want standardized criteria for promotions that are consistently applied, along with leadership pathways that will improve diversity and representation.

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Methodology

When: October–November 2024

What: 10-minute online quantitative survey

Who: Global study with 428 responses from 87 countries, comprising

- 243 senior university leaders
- 185 senior faculty members

Results: To ensure the results were representative, we weighted them based on OECD researcher population figures by region, and to equally represent senior leadership and senior faculty members in the totals. Base sizes included in the report are unweighted.

In late 2024, Elsevier sent a survey to a sample of academic leaders from a variety of sources, including:

- Those who had published recently—selected from a database of published authors across journals and books from various publishers.
- A third-party panel provided by Jasper Colin Research (voluntary sign-up).
- Users of Elsevier solutions and registrants in Elsevier's marketing databases.

Many of these academic leaders had recently completed another survey for Elsevier and had given us permission to contact them again. Participants were recruited using an email invitation containing a link to an online survey. Those answering via a panel provider took part using an assisted online methodology i.e., using screenshare with an interviewer.

A total of 428 people from 87 countries completed the survey. Results are weighted based on OECD population figures for researchers by region, and to equally represent senior leadership and senior faculty members in the total. Base sizes shown in the report are unweighted. Please refer to the [accompanying databook](#) for base sizes broken down by the two position groupings, by the 87 countries, and by the three regions.

Despite the weighting, the study is not without limitations due to self-selection, non-response biases and a low response rate, typical for online surveys of this nature. Therefore, there will be some non-sampling error associated with the study, as we cannot be sure responses accurately represent the population for any given sub-group. Statistical differences shown in this report should be interpreted within this context, and while showing notable differences between groups, results are not necessarily generalizable. Given the non-probability sampling methods, these tests are indicative.

[Download the databook >](#)

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