

# NEGOTIATING AN OFFER

Even slight differences in salary and other resources at the outset of one's career can make a significant impact over the course of time. While women are generally paid less than men, for the same work, women in academe are impacted in ways that are both similar and different from counterparts in industry. Insights and observations from those already in the trenches can help newly minted graduates position themselves for better outcomes.

By Kacey Beddoes, Ph.D., and Alice L. Pawley, Ph.D.

**D**espite recent findings that, on average, engineering is an “equal pay field” for industrial positions (Corbett and Hill 2012), the same has not been found for academia; indeed, on average women in the United States are paid less for the same work than men. It has been shown that initial lack of negotiation of offers is largely responsible for these and other resource differences because women are less likely to negotiate offers (Babcock and Laschever 2003). Moreover, the same negotiation tactics used by men can be detrimental to women because of stereotypes that ascribe certain attributes to women, namely, that they are non-self-interested and nice. There is also a need to be liked that conflicts with women's perceptions of negotiation. Thus, it has been suggested that women need to be aware of these stereotypes and modify negotiation strategies even while recognizing how problematic that is for reinforcing those very stereotypes (Babcock and Laschever 2003). In addition to these stereotypes, it has been documented that women tend to have less confidence than men when it comes to being hired and often feel like they are lucky to get a job. As Tierney and Bensimon (1996) explain,

**The custom of individual salary negotiations has been shown to place women at a disadvantage, particularly those who had not been mentored as graduate students and instructed on negotiation rituals and courtship customs that are common in hiring practices in the academy. Women often receive starting salaries that are lower than those of their male peers because they don't know what to ask for or how to negotiate. A white woman at a research university told us, 'I didn't think about negotiating. I felt lucky that I was getting a tenure-track job.' (79)**

Therefore, increased attention to issues of negotiation could benefit female graduates in particular. This article grew out of ongoing research on the career pathways and experiences of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) faculty members at a large, public research institution in the United States. The aim is to provide insights

and advice on the job offer negotiation process. We hope that female graduate students, and those who should be preparing them, can learn from the experiences and mistakes of others. Furthermore, hearing the fears and doubts of others could potentially help students deal with their own doubts, and realize that feelings of inadequacy stem from larger social forces that lead many women to feel that way. Our findings are not unique to academia, and others have reported similar findings across a range of professional contexts.

## Dealing with doubts

Our interviews revealed that female faculty did not feel confident in their abilities to get a job or in their preparation to perform well in that job. Participants linked those feelings to wider social phenomena in which women tend to have less confidence than men overall vis-à-vis many situations. One said,

**When I finished my Ph.D., I really, I felt very despondent. I did not think that I had any worthwhile training. I didn't really feel like, I could do anything. And ... I certainly didn't think I could**



# What Graduate Students and Mentors Can Learn from Others' Experiences





**get a faculty position ... It's not rational. I know. So it was like, I did not feel like, I had anything to offer.**

She went on to explain that she believed this is common among women, and that men tend to have much more confidence in their professional abilities. Another interviewee likewise reported that she was surprised to end up getting a faculty position at this institution, saying,

**I kind of thought that was out of my league at the time. I didn't have enough confidence to believe that I was worthy of it. You know that's (what) the problem is, the worthiness. Feeling like you're (not) worthy of certain things when you really are, but you don't see it because it's all your own, you know, perceptions and judgments.**

The lack of confidence, and consequent feelings of being lucky just to have a job offer, led many female participants to not negotiate their offers. Even those who did not discuss confidence specifically still wished they had negotiated for more before accepting a job. One lamented, "(The) biggest thing women don't do is negotiate salary. I did not negotiate; I should have. I mean I have a decent salary, but I could have gotten more if I had spoken up I'm sure. Or at least attempted to negotiate." Another said,

**I think space might have been one thing I would have negotiated for, so some kind of research lab space. I think space is important for kind of developing community, so different grad students, undergrad students, postdocs, etcetera working with me, for them to have a space to form a community, as well as space to consistently have available for meetings, or to store things, and whatnot.**

Yet another expressed this regret: "I wish I would have negotiated a much larger startup package. I was fairly conservative in what I asked for but didn't realize that until, you know, several years later when I got to hear about what other people's startup packages tend to be."

### **Many points to negotiate**

When we asked participants what they wished they would have negotiated differently at the time of hiring, responses included: salary, lab space, office and lab space for graduate students and postdocs, startup packages, equipment, software, professional memberships, travel, student support, teaching load and schedule, and partner hiring. Other resources for new hires to consider negotiating include additional lab expenses such as remodeling costs for power, data, gas, water, air, fume hoods, or other technical requirements; lab phone and Internet charges; and other work expenses such as retirement rates, vestment period, and initial teaching expectations, as well as how those change over time.

Often participants discussed not just particular items or points of negotiation, but also nuances associated with them. For example, a story from one participant emphasized the need to be specific about details and not make assumptions. Upon arriving to start her new position, she discovered that her labs were a mess, not ready, and filled with trash and dust, and she had to clean them herself. It took almost a year and a half before the renovated labs she had negotiated for were ready. She went back and looked at her offer letter and realized there was nothing in there about when the labs were going to be ready. Another participant emphasized the importance of negotiating *before* you accept an offer, speaking specifically about spousal hiring and stressing how much more willing the university is to work with you before you accept an offer than after. A third stated, "I wish I would have been clearer on some of the actual implications ... like I negotiated a lot of the equipment money, while the fact is I didn't have to use that for equipment, so I wish I had a clear

understanding of what I negotiated or of the true expectations after I started."

Several interviewees offered advice echoing the need for women to stand up for themselves, take care of themselves, and know their own worth. One said, "I think probably I should have done some (negotiating) with them, to change my status a little. Because nobody will speak for you except yourself." Likewise, another participant said, "I wish I had had more experience with negotiating and maybe even had a better sense of my own ... the strength of my position ... which I felt was nonexistent ... but in fact that's not true ..."

Another learned from mistakes in her current position and said,

**Next time around ... I'm going to be very particular ... Women have a hard time saying 'No.' I think we do as a gender, but we have to say 'No.' We have to be firm. If you don't like what they're going to pay you, just walk away from it. You can walk away. You can ask for more money. You can tell them, 'I don't like what you're offering me; pay me more.' It works for men; why can't it work for women? ... Know your worth, know your value as a woman. Very important.**

Unfortunately, the truth behind the comment that "it works for men, why can't it work for women" is more complicated than the participant may have realized. Research shows that women cannot as successfully use the same negotiating strategies in the same ways as men. Because of societal gender roles, women are expected to be selfless and a particular kind of gender-acceptable "nice"; they can't and don't ask for things, and aren't perceived in the same way as men when they do ask for the same things in the same way as men. For example, when negotiating, women need to be seen as nice, friendly, and cooperative in order to get what they ask for. "To be 'nice,' a woman must seem friendly, act concerned about the needs and feelings of others, and avoid

being confrontational” (Babcock and Laschever 2003, p. 105). Men do not need to be seen in this way to get what they ask for.

Missed opportunities to negotiate for salary can have significant consequences in the long run. One interviewee discovered that she made less than all the men in her department and recognized the long-term implications of even a modest difference in starting salary. She said, “I don’t feel discriminated against mostly, except for the part where they pay the women less ... I discovered that all the women in my department make less money.” She described going to a public website that reported the salaries of all faculty in her department and noticing that a male colleague hired at the same time was making more than she was. Her initial thought was to chalk it up to the fact that he had a little more experience than she had. Then, she noticed that another male colleague hired at the same time was making the same as the other male colleague, and he had less experience than she did. Upon further investigation, she learned that “of all the recent hires, all the women make less money than all the men,” including the fact that a woman three years their senior was making less than the recently hired men. She continued,

**And it’s not a lot of money ... it’s like, \$2,000 a year difference, but it is a difference, and a problem is that your salary when you start at a university pretty much determines everything from there on. Because it’s always percentage raises. And so it’s very difficult to make up for a starting lack. And so ... if we’re all here ... 20 years from now, they’ll be making \$20,000 a year more than I make. Which is a significant difference.**

Indeed, the significance of starting salary on lifetime earnings has been discussed by others (Babcock and Laschever 2003).

## Worth fighting for better lab space

In addition to the significant long-term consequences of salary negotiations, negotiations on points such as lab space and support for graduate students or postdocs can have significant impacts on one’s career. For example, in ADVANCE research from Georgia Tech, faculty reported that quality lab equipment was one of the most important resources for faculty success (Fox, Colatrella, McDowell, and Realff 2007, p. 173). The potential for productivity and research quality should not be overlooked.

Other studies have found that there are gender biases in lab assignments, but there is a tendency to dismiss lab inequalities as one-time accidents with rational explanations (Tierney and Bensimon 1996, p. 81). We saw this in our own interviews as well. Therefore, women should be aware that unequal lab spaces are part of a larger trend, not isolated incidents, and better lab space is worth fighting for, not to be written off because they don’t have “proof” of bias.

## Prepare to negotiate

Our research participants suggested a variety of topics they wish they had known more about before negotiating for their faculty positions, many of which are relevant for students going into industry as well. Our data suggest some immediate things graduate students interested in any type of position should consider:

- Talk with mentors about your offer and ask for advice on items to negotiate — not only *what* to negotiate, but a calibration on them (e.g., not just higher salary, but *how much* higher?).
- People will encourage you to think about what you need to do your research. You may not know; so ask colleagues and mentors what they use in their everyday research, and then create your “best scenario” list. In other words, think about “need” as “best scenario” rather than “bare minimum.”

For faculty advisors and mentors who prepare graduate students, we recommend the following:

- Talk about the entire job application process, including negotiation associated with a job offer.
- Become familiar with the literature on gender differences in negotiation so that you can better advise female students.
- Encourage women to attend negotiating workshops, such as those given at SWE conferences, and webinars on this topic.

Advice on negotiation techniques and strategies specific to women can be found in books such as *Ask For It*. While our research focuses on faculty hiring negotiations, the confidence and general negotiating findings are also relevant to all female students and their mentors, regardless of the type of position they seek after graduation. The experiences reported here are common; we hope that by highlighting them, female graduate students and their mentors can better prepare. Seeing their own concerns reflected in others’ experiences may help them realize low confidence and discomfort with negotiating are not solely personal problems and can have significant impacts.

Below we provide a list of recommended reading that includes some general negotiation books as well as ones specifically for women. It is important to note, however, that general negotiation books do not focus on the challenges expressly faced by women. In particular, they may be silent on issues related to work/family balance, which is consistently identified as one of the biggest challenges for female faculty members. Therefore, we suggest women (as well as men) may also want to consider negotiating around issues such as parental leave, course releases, and tenure-clock extension if these policies are not already well-established or automatic at an institution or within a department.

## Recommended reading

- *Women Don’t Ask: Negotiation and the Gender Divide*. Linda Babcock and Sara Laschever. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003.
- *Ask For It: How Women Can Use the Power of Negotiation to Get What*

*They Really Want.* Linda Babcock and Sara Laschever. New York, N.Y.: Bantam, 2009.

- *After the Offer, Before the Deal: Negotiating a First Academic Job.* Chris M. Golde. AAUP, 1999: <http://careers.ucsc.edu/grad/pdf/AfterTheOffer.pdf>
- *Job Search in Academe: Strategic Rhetorics for Faculty Job Candidates.* Dawn M. Formo and Cheryl Reed. Sterling, Va.: Stylus, 1999.
- *Dual-Career Academic Couples.* The Clayman Institute for Gender Research, 2008: <http://gender.stanford.edu/dual-career-academic-couples>

### Acknowledgments

This work was funded by the National Science Foundation, grant number HDR-0811194. The findings and recommendations are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect the views of the NSF.

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