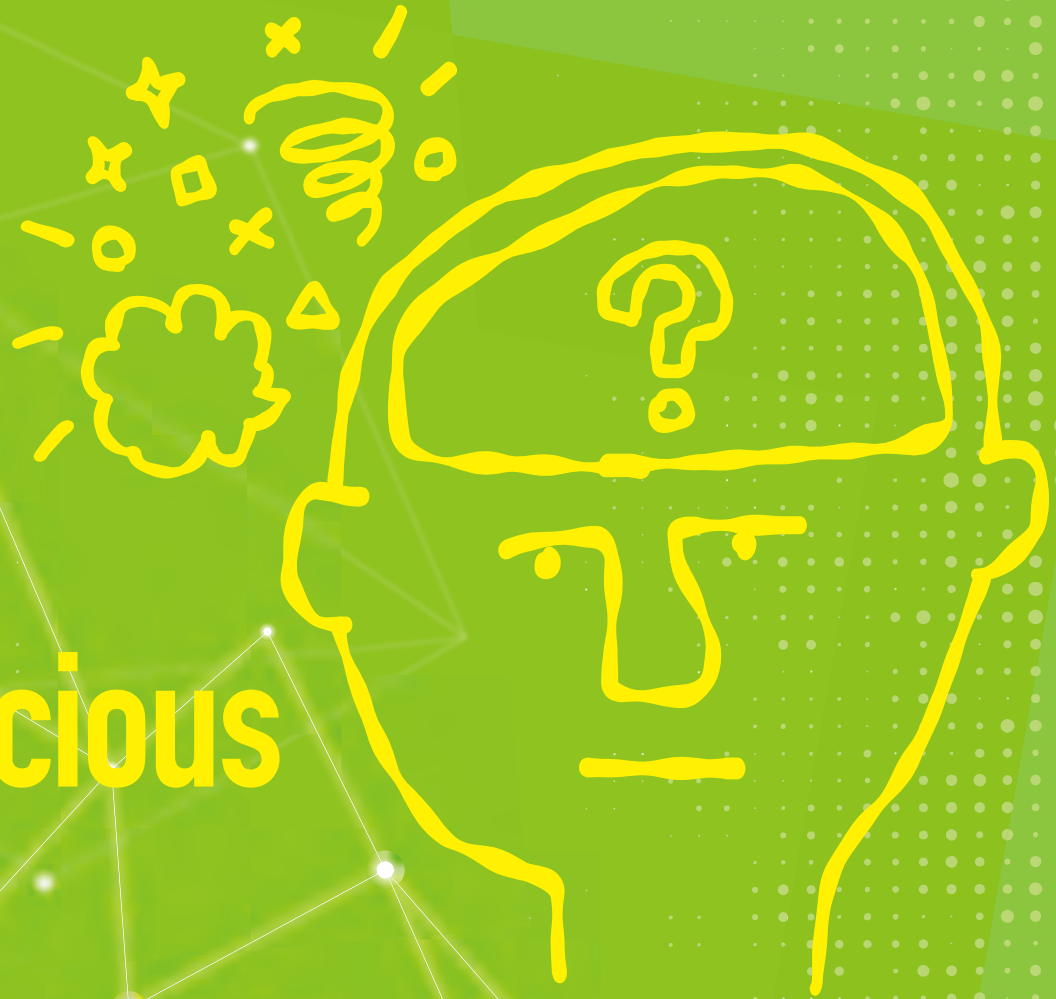




TOHOKU
UNIVERSITY

Strengthening Research Capacity Through Diversity

Ways to overcome the unconscious bias
that hinders fair evaluation



Unconscious Bias

Introduction

Tohoku University has been working to strengthen the quality of its research through diversity.

This leaflet outlines key considerations for minimizing the impact of unconscious bias in the hiring and evaluation of researchers, in order to ensure opportunities for high-caliber talent.



1 What Is Unconscious Bias?

Unconscious bias refers to underlying prejudices that we are unaware of, but which affect our way of thinking and our perceptions. Recognizing that everyone is under the influence of such bias can help to reduce its influence.



2 Diversity in Selection and Evaluation

Eliminating unconscious bias and ensuring that diversity is taken into account in the selection and assessment of candidates, is crucial to recruiting and retaining the best talent. To achieve this, there must also be diversity among the members of the committees involved in personnel selection.

An increasing number of organizations are providing their staff with training to recognize unconscious bias, especially those involved in recruitment tests and appraisals, and members of personnel selection committees.

CHECK!

Here are some basic points that everyone should be aware of, to ensure transparent personnel selection and evaluation:

- Unconscious biases can occur through our tendency to feel closer to people with whom we have things in common (such as gender, birthplace, school), and more wary of those we consider “outsiders.”
- Certain attributes (gender, education, birthplace, affiliation, previous employment, etc.) may evoke representative images (or stereotypes). These can affect our acceptance, or rejection, of a candidate and influence our hiring decisions.
- A person’s physical appearance, facial expression, mannerisms or other attributes that resemble someone we know - even if they are totally unrelated - can influence our opinion of that person.
- Bias can cause us to judge or categorize a person at the start of an interview. The questions we subsequently ask may then focus on trying to verify our assumptions.
- When carrying out personnel evaluations or promotion decisions, we must guard against the influence of attributes such as gender and nationality. The focus should be on ability and achievements.
- Time pressures, fatigue and information overload can exacerbate the impact of bias in decision making.
- Performance evaluation must be based on accurate and pertinent information or data.
- Selection and evaluation criteria should be designed to ensure that evaluation is conducted fairly from the perspective of diversity; and with an understanding that some candidates may have special circumstances at home, such as childcare or elderly care responsibilities.
- To conduct fair evaluations, the selection and evaluation criteria should be determined in advance and shared among members of the personnel committee.
- Decisions regarding the suitability of a candidate or person undergoing evaluation, should be made based on how they may contribute to the organization’s future, rather than only considering the current circumstances of the organization.

3 Selection and Evaluation Founded on Diversity

Friendly relationships between people belonging to different groups have been shown to have the effect of reversing stereotypical beliefs and negative attitudes. In addition, our personal connections with others can help us overcome potential bias when working towards a common goal.

Tohoku University strives to remain mindful of unconscious bias, to ensure that all our personnel selections and evaluations are based on fairness and a respect for equality and diversity. This commitment underpins our efforts to be a comprehensive research university and world-class center for education and research, as outlined in Tohoku University's Vision 2030.

Tohoku University Initiative I

Tohoku University promotes gender equality and actively recruits from a diverse range of human resources. When recruiting for open positions, especially in fields with a large gender gap, we strongly encourage female candidates to apply. Where it is appropriate, we give priority to qualified female applicants.



Tohoku University Initiative II

Tohoku University has established a “1/3 Goal” of placing qualified women in at least one-third of all positions from the assistant professor level upward, in order to increase the number of female researchers engaged in education or research.

Tohoku University Initiative III

The Japanese government's revised laws on childcare and family care leave will take effect from April 2022. Tohoku University plans to implement further measures to encourage male employees to take childcare leave.



Transition of Female Students and Faculty at Tohoku University

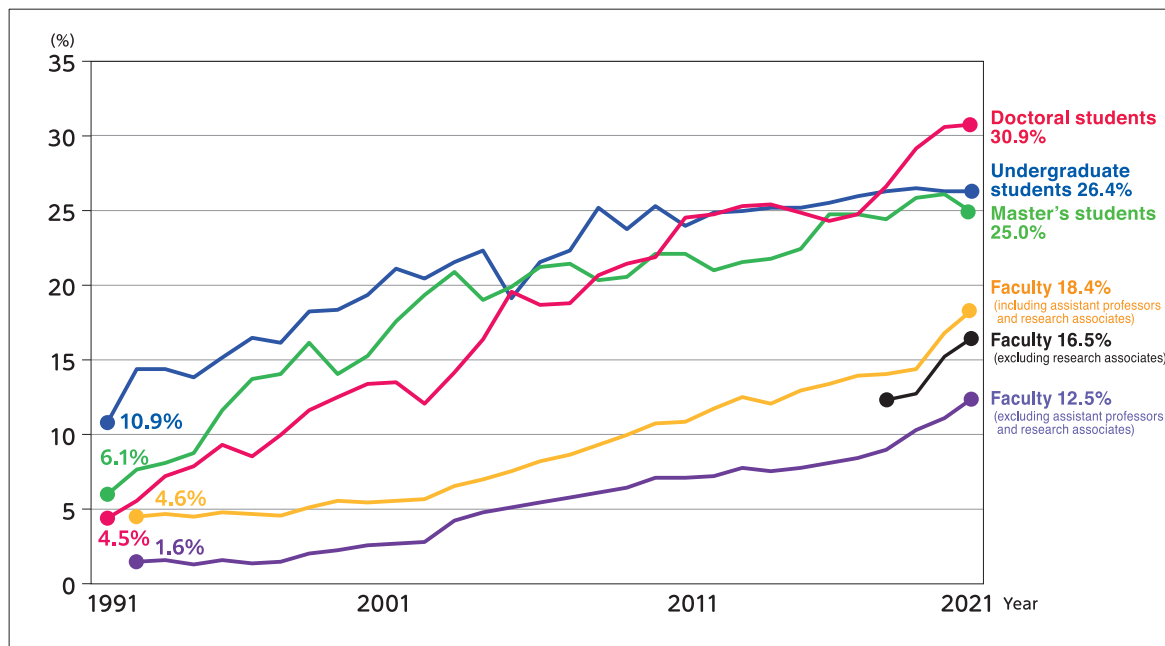


Figure 1. Percentage of female faculty members and students at Tohoku University (as of May 1, 2021)
<http://tumug.tohoku.ac.jp/public-relations/data/>



As shown in Figure 1, the percentage of female faculty members (including assistant professors and research associates) at Tohoku University was 4.6% in 1992 and subsequently rose, reaching 18.4% in 2021. The percentage of female executives (executive vice presidents, vice presidents, auditors) increased to 25.0%. Efforts to encourage female high school students to choose science courses through our open campus initiatives have led to increases in the percentage of female students enrolled in bachelor's, master's and doctoral courses from 10.9%, 6.1% and 4.5%, respectively, in 1991, to 26.4%, 25.0% and 30.9% in 2021.

Gender Gap at Tohoku University

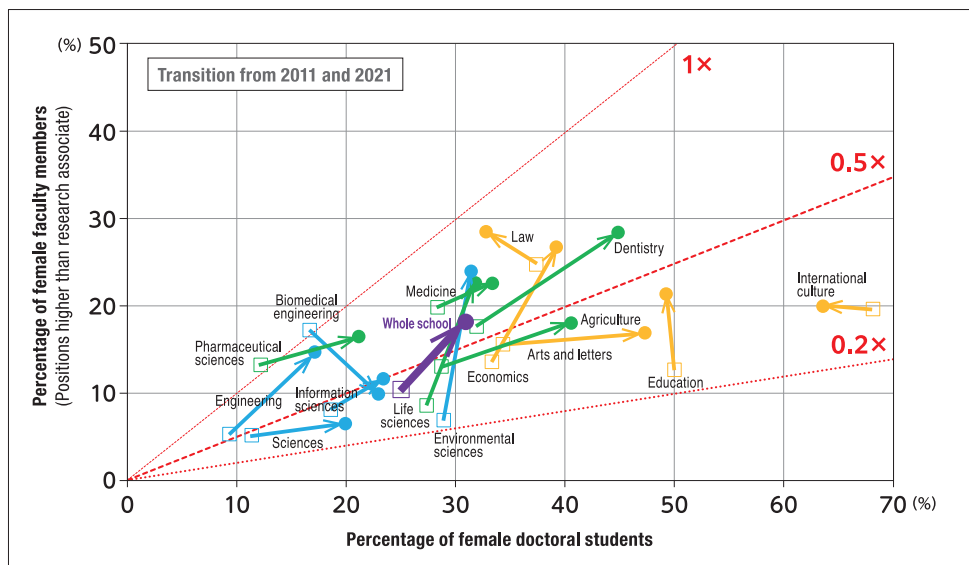


Figure 2. Glass ceiling trend over 10 years: ratio of female faculty members to female doctoral students, by departments (as of May 1, 2021)

<http://tumug.tohoku.ac.jp/public-relations/data/>



Female ratio in doctoral courses and faculty members can be considered the "glass ceiling" in academia. At Tohoku University, this ratio improved from 0.25 (only one in four continuing an academic career) in 2011, to 0.5 (one in two continuing in academia) in 2021. On the other hand, this proportion is greater than 1 among male academics. Looking at individual departments across the university, there is, unfortunately, still a wide gap between the number of men and women who choose to continue in their academic career. So although we have made some progress in the past decade, a lot more work remains to be done.

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This leaflet is available
on the website of
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