

Career Advancement of Business Faculty in the United States and Czechia

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Abstract: Universities worldwide are analyzing their tenure and promotion processes to redefine the guidelines to be more objective, consistent, and transparent. Guided by a social cognitive career theory and an ecological model of career development, this study examined the differences and similarities in the systems of faculty career advancement in two specific business colleges, one in the United States (Clemson University) and another in Czechia (Czech University of Life Sciences Prague). Using a comparative case study design, this paper utilized a qualitative deductive content analysis of the tenure and promotion guidelines and related documents in both colleges. From a review of existing literature, an unconstrained matrix of different categories was created and used to code the documents. Similarities and differences in the two systems were discussed. The authors conclude with recommendations for future research.

Keywords: content analysis, ecological model of career development, faculty career advancement, social cognitive career theory, tenure, promotion and reappointment guidelines (TPR)

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Introduction

Universities worldwide are analyzing their tenure, promotion and reappointment (TPR) processes to be more objective, consistent, and transparent. As pressure builds for universities to meaningfully increase faculty productivity, it has become critical to understand the factors that influence faculty career advancement (Tien, 2008). As recommended by Witte and López-Torres (2017), to enhance the research of efficiency and effectiveness in education, it is necessary to undertake studies that compare differences and similarities across countries and educational systems. Schimanski and Alperin (2018) synthesized tenure and promotion guidelines in the U.S. and Canada and stressed the importance of better understanding of written guidelines in order to create better processes. Still, most countries lack strategic planning for faculty professional development and there is a need for building an empirical foundation for universities to draw from in establishing ideal guidelines (Crosier et al., 2017). The aim of this study was to examine the differences and similarities in the systems of faculty career advancement in two specific business colleges, one in the U.S. (Clemson University) and the other in Czechia (Czech University of Life Sciences Prague). We focused on two major promotions in the careers of faculty. The first promotion is from assistant professor to associate professor. The second promotion stage is from associate professor to full professor. To provide a comprehensive and complementary understanding of career advancement, two frameworks guided the analysis of factors influencing career development in the present study. An Ecological Model of Career Development (Cook, Heppner and O'Brien, 2002) focuses on the role environmental factors play in career advancement. Additionally, a Social Cognitive Theory (Lent, Brown and Hackett, 1996) focuses on how the internal processes within an individual influence career advancement.

This study was guided by the following research questions: How do the guidelines for faculty career advancement differ between the College of Business (CB) at Clemson University and at the Faculty of Economics and Management (FEM) at the Czech University of Life Sciences Prague? What factors influence faculty career advancement at CB and at FEM?

Materials and methods

In this study, a comparative case study design was used to analyze faculty career advancement. Two specific business colleges, one in the U.S. (CB) and another in Czechia (FEM) were analyzed as single cases.

Data collection

Publicly available TPR departmental and university guidelines, faculty manual, and departmental and university by-laws were collected from both universities' websites. All the documents were coded using the qualitative data analysis software NVivo 12 Plus.

Data analysis

A content analysis approach was used to conduct deductive coding while using an unconstrained matrix that included categories identified from the literature. All the documents were coded line by line by applying the categories from the unconstrained matrix. The deductive coding was followed by principles of inductive content analysis. Accuracy of codes and categories was achieved by consensus between two bilingual researchers. After finishing the coding of the documents from both colleges, cross-case synthesis was used to identify differences and similarities between the two departments.

Figure 1: Number of faculty within the colleges

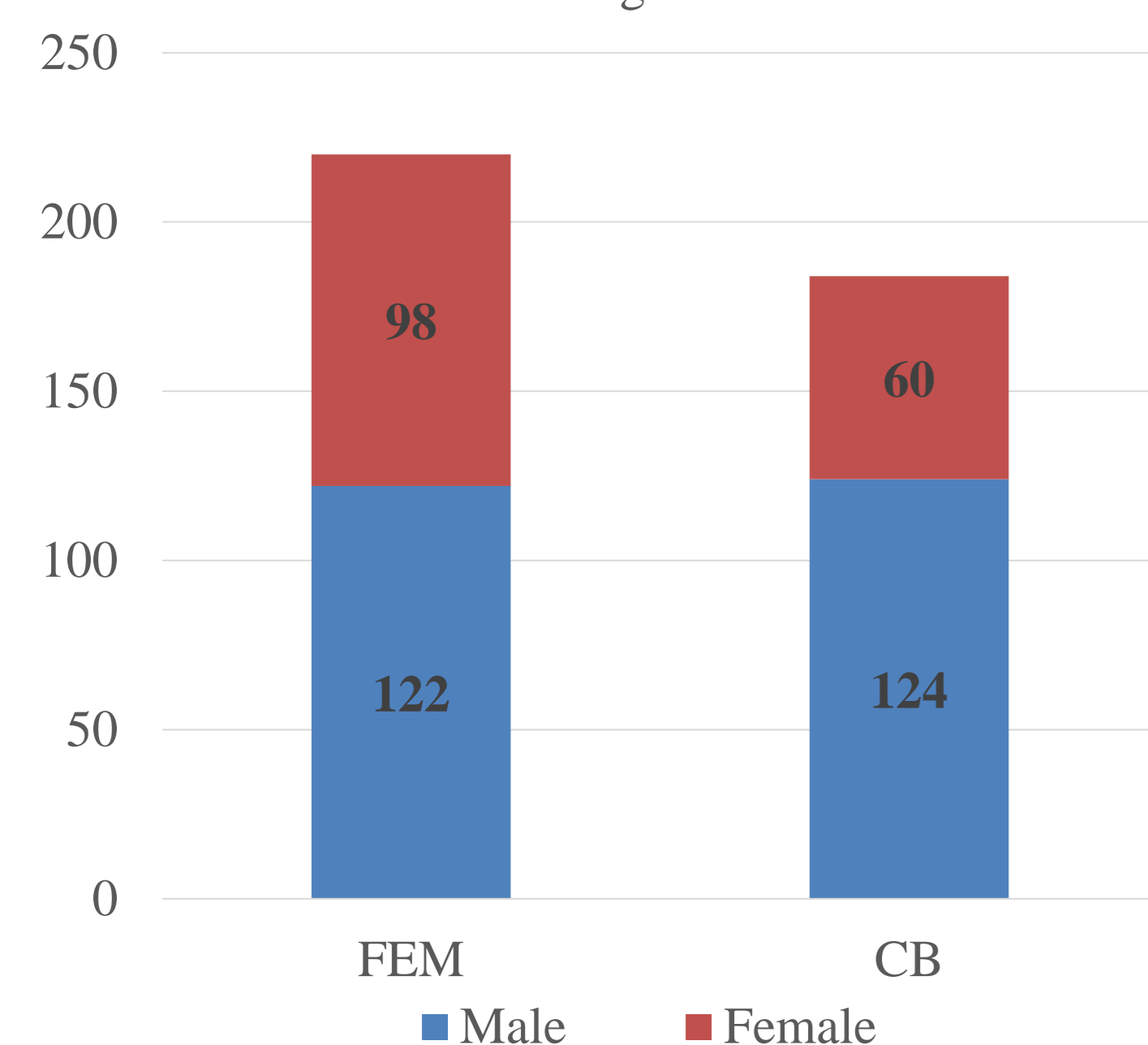
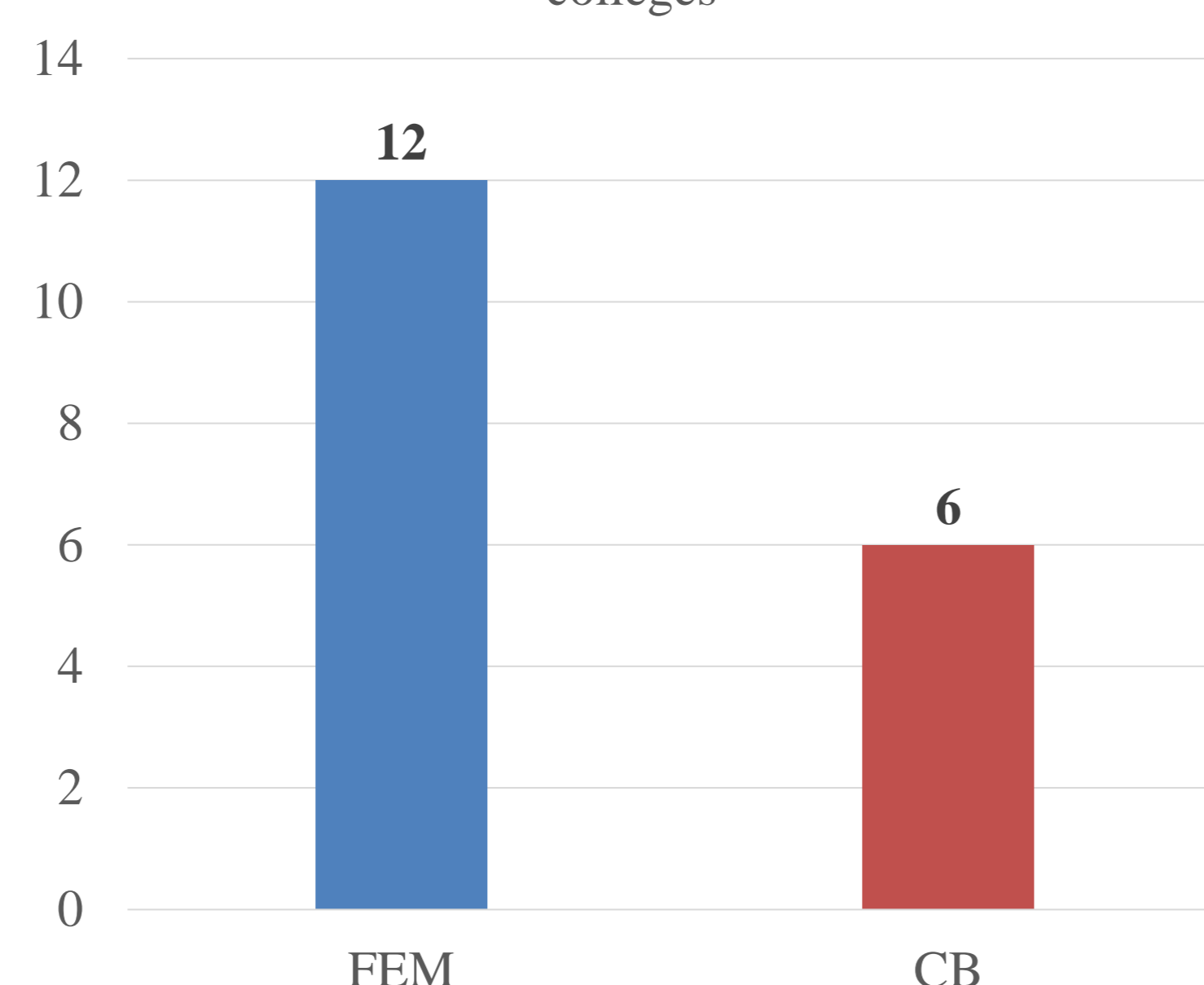


Figure 2: Number of departments within the colleges



Results

Flexibility and transparency in the TPR processes

A primary difference of the guidelines between the two colleges is that minimal promotion criteria are specifically quantified in FEM and every promotion process is required to be publicly available. Therefore, faculty members can easily access the minimal criteria and the standard criteria performed by their colleges who go through the promotion process. The availability of this information about promotion requirements makes the promotion process objective and clear. In contrast, there is more flexibility in the CB's TPR guidelines, both across CB departments in terms of the criteria as well as in the confidential process by which candidates for promotion are evaluated. The form of evaluation differs between the two business colleges. FEM guidelines include quantitative matrices with points assigned to the specific criteria within the three dimensions of faculty performance. On the contrary, CB guidelines include nonnumerical categories.

Factors and criteria influencing faculty career advancement

TPR criteria are created at different levels of the university structure at each institution. CB is decentralized and employs departmental specific criteria while FEM uses minimal criteria that are identical across the entire university. The evaluation criteria for research counted toward promotion are comparable between CB and FEM. Not surprisingly, the research criteria in terms of journal articles, books, funding, and textbooks are generally recognized as the most common criteria of research for promotion in economics departments. However, FEM differs by the requirement of the habilitation thesis and habilitation lecture. The biggest difference in the evaluation of teaching is that CB heavily relied on students' and peer teaching evaluations while FEM does not consider them at all. Finally, FEM undervalues the importance of service in the evaluation criteria. There is a breadth of criteria across departments in the CB compared to the uniformity of criteria at FEM. For example, student evaluations, departmental guidelines, and the influence of the provost are specific to CB. In contrast, the influence of state requirements, the habilitation thesis reviewers, minister, and the president of the country are specific to FEM.

The findings suggest that in a system like FEM, where there are clear environmental cues such as explicit criteria for career advancement, future research might focus on the individual differences which allow some people to flourish. In contrast, in a more undefined and complex environment like CB, future research might focus less on individual research attributes and more on how well people can figure out the social environment given the discretion built into the system.

Conclusion

To advance in their careers, faculty from Czechia and the U.S. have similar categories of activities to accomplish, namely, research, teaching and service. What counts as accomplishments within these categories varies between universities, and at CB, even between departments. Moreover, the process by which activities are evaluated to determine whether they meet standards for promotion also differ in the amount of discretion afforded the reviewers. At FEM, there is little subjective judgment in whether metrics in the numerical matrices are met but perhaps more discretion in how the habilitation thesis and lecture are received. In contrast, CB has discretion built into every independent reviewer (e.g., TPR committee chair, chair, dean, provost) of a candidate's dossier.

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