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Abstract

The system of academic promotion provides a mechanism for the achievements of staff to be recognised. However, it can be a mechanism that creates or reflects inequalities, with certain groups rising to the top more readily than others. In many universities, especially in the global North, white men are preponderant in senior academic ranks. This leads to concerns about sexism and racism operating within processes of promotion. There is a global sensitivity that academic hierarchies should be demographically representative. In this study, we examine the data on eleven years of promotions at the University of Cape Town (UCT), a highly ranked, research-led university in South Africa. Its historical roots lie in a colonial past, and despite substantial increases in the number of black scholars, its academic staff complement is still majority white, driving the intensification of its transformation efforts. A quantitative analysis using time to promotion as a proxy for fairness was used to examine patterns of promotion at the university. Although international staff, those in more junior positions, with higher qualifications and in certain faculties enjoyed quicker promotion time, no

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association was found between time to promotion and gender. There were some differences in time to promotion associated with self-declared ethnicity (taken as synonymous with race), but these associations were not consistent. Although our findings provide some quantitative evidence of UCT's success at creating a fair system of academic advancement, broader demographic transformation remains a priority. However, this cannot be addressed in isolation from the wider higher education enterprise. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)