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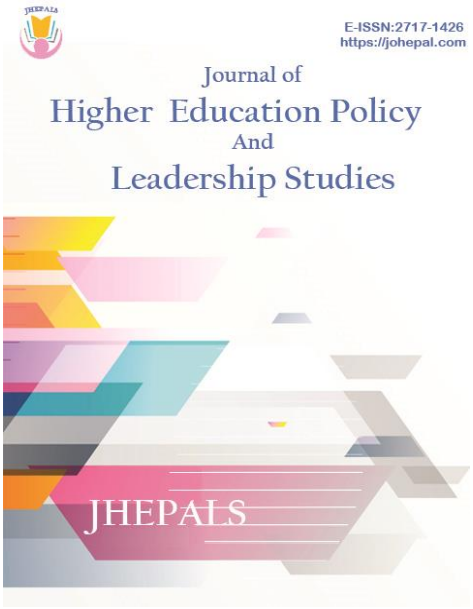
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"It's as Long as a Piece of String!" Definitions of Canadian U15 Faculty at Midcareer

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of how midcareer should be defined in academia. To determine when academics enter and exit midcareer, we sent out an open-ended survey to deans, directors, and chairs in research-based universities across Canada (N=242). The survey findings revealed an understanding that the midcareer phase starts immediately or shortly following the tenure award (and, usually, promotion to associate professor), and one stays in the midcareer phase past the promotion to full professor. Our survey data also showed good agreement that one exits midcareer when one winds down research or achieves a notable recognition for careerlong work. Within midcareer, most respondents agree that there is an expectation for enhancement of one's research and service profile and to lead formally and informally in the university, the scholarly profession, and the community. Although increase in research output is an expectation, in the domain of research, there is a requirement that faculty recruit, retain, and mentor upcoming researchers (graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, and junior faculty). These achievements are not measured finely but constitute important milestones in the midcareer phase.

Keywords: Midcareer; Faculty; Higher Education; Universities; HR Trends & Policies; Canadian Higher Education

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Midcareer

There is no clear definition for something as vague as 'mid-career.' It's like asking how long is a piece of string! This quotation was a response on a survey we sent to chairs and deans in Canada, asking when they think the stage of midcareer begins and ends. The response indicates that, like a piece of string, one can make the length of one's midcareer phase as long as one desires.

When early career faculty receive tenure and promotion, this period is often considered a marker that one has moved from the early academic career phase to the midcareer phase. While the pre-tenure years are probationary with policy outlining the duration of probation in most, if not all, institutions of higher education in Canada (and in many other jurisdictions) there is little, if any, policy on the duration of midcareer. Within the literature, little attention has been focused on the midcareer phase, and even less attention has been focused on defining when one enters midcareer and exits midcareer. The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of how midcareer should be defined in academia with respect to entering and exiting.

Study Background

This study arose out of a prior research project, which aimed to investigate why midcareer academics often experience the phenomena of plateauing. Our initial literature review focused on understanding why being at the associate professor/lecturer stage can be a troublesome stage for academics, with research showing high levels of dissatisfaction and a rather large number of academics getting stuck in their rank, never reaching Full Professor (Kanuka & Anuik, 2021; Matthews, 2014). We discovered at the onset that there is a considerable amount of literature on the post-tenure/promotion period in the academy, most often referred to as 'midcareer' in the literature.

We searched ERIC, Scopus, Google Scholar, Web of Science, EBSCO, ProQuest Central, Worldcat, the International Bibliography of the Social Sciences, and Project MUSE, which returned over 3,000 books, monographs, and articles. As we reviewed the literature it became clear that not all researchers defined midcareer in the same way (e.g., post tenure and/or promotion, length of time, mid-life, middle age). Even more surprising was that in many of the articles there was no operational definition of midcareer at all; rather, only an assumption that we all understand what midcareer is, and we all agree on that understanding. A coherent understanding of the literature on midcareer requires a working definition for midcareer; in the absence of a definition, building on the existing literature poses a significant problem. Table 1 provides an outline of the literature we reviewed, revealing the ways in which the literature defines midcareer, and the midcareer stage.

While only 10 of the articles reviewed provided definitions, Table 1 shows the inconsistency in definitions on midcareer, illustrating the diversity of the way midcareer has been defined. Table 1 also shows that much of the literature describes (or assumes) one is in midcareer at the associate professor/senior lecturer period, or the middle part of an academics' career, which is distinct from the early and late career years. Some of the literature also attempts to depict qualitative and chronological traits of academics in the midcareer stage (e.g., Baldwin, 1990). Of the 3,022 search returns on midcareer, academia, and post tenure, 77 articles were related to midcareer in academia. Of these search returns,

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the articles related to burnout, stress, equity, diversity, inclusion, gender, and faculty development were considered outside the scope of our literature review, leaving 36 articles to review. The literature we reviewed included peer reviewed research articles (qualitative and quantitative), reflective and conceptual papers, and book chapters. Most of the literature on midcareer in academia is from the United States (n=50), followed by Canada (n=5), Australia (n=4), China (n=3), and India (n=3). The remaining articles (where n=12) were from Pakistan, Iran, Ireland, Portugal, South Africa, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Turkey, Germany, Hong Kong, Sweden, and Mexico.

Table 1.
Ways in which the literature has defined midcareer

Article	Definition Provided	Comments
Baldwin and Chang (2006)	Yes	Refers, abstractly, to "… faculty in the long, ill-defined phase after their probationary years and before retirement emerges on the professional horizon." (p. 28)
Baldwin, Lunceford, and VanderLinden (2005)	Yes	Defined as faculty in the middle of their career with two different definitions (p. 98). First definition: "… mid-career comes after the distinct hurdles that characterize entry to an academic career and before other challenging periods when aging and looming retirement". Second, "… no clearly visible hallmarks or boundaries define mid-career the way that tenure decision and retirement define the two extreme polies of academic life: early career and late career." (p. 98)
Baldwin, DeZure, Shaw, and Moretto (2008)	Yes	"Mid-career is the lengthy period between the end of professors' probationary years and their preparation for retirement." (p. 48).
Bentley and Kyvik (2013)	No	Assumption: after tenure
Berdanier (2019)	Yes	Definition: an associate professor
Boice (1986)	No	Refers to disillusioned faculty as "middle aged" and conflates mid-career with middle age. (pp. 115-117)
Boice (1993)	Yes	Defines mid-career as "… 12 yrs. or more post PhD" (p. 34). Also, uses mid-life and mid-career interchangeably.
Brew, Boud, Crawford, and Lucas (2018)	No	Implied: purposive sampling was used. Academics having 5–10 years' post-doctorate experience.
Byström, Given, Lopatovska, O'Brien, and Rorissa (2016)	Yes	"'Once junior faculty transition to a relatively more experienced mid-level status, they enter an ill-defined and largely unexamined portion of the academic career'" (as cited by Baldwin et al., 2005, p. 97)
Buch, Huet, Rorrer, and Roberson (2011)	No	Assumption is that one is in mid-career when one is an associate professor. They also refer to mid-career faculty as those who have not been promoted to full as the "13+ club" (p. 39)
Campion, Bhasin, Beaudette, Shann, and Benjamin (2016)	Yes	"… mid-career faculty members, defined as late assistant (7+ years at rank) and associate professors." (p. 50)
DeFelippo and Dee (2022).	Yes	"Mid-career was defined…as having attained the tenured rank of associate or full professor and having no self-reported intention to retire within the next five years." (p. 571)
Golper and Feldman (2008)	No	
Helitzer, Newbill, Cardinali, Morahan, Chang, and Magrane (2016)	No	Authors assume one is in midcareer when one is at the associate professor rank.
Jaschik, (2012)	No	Author assumes that faculty at the associate professor rank are in midcareer
Jellicorse and Tilley (1985)	No	The assumption that receipt of tenure marks the beginning of midcareer.
Kalivoda, Sorrell, and Simpson (1994)	No	The assumption is that an: associate professor is in midcareer. The stage is also age-related (i.e., the terms mid-life/mid-age are used interchangeably with midcareer). (p. 269)
Karpiak (1997)	No	Assumption: based on participant selection, it is assumed to be the "mid-level" rank and middle age (all participants were associate professors)
Kenyon (2020)	Yes	"I am using 'mid-career' to mean, roughly, faculty members who have held tenure for between two and 12 years–I recognize that this is an imprecise category." (para. 1)
Lawrence and Blackburn (1985)	No	Focus is on age rather than rank/career stage
Ludwig (1985)	No	Assumption: one is in midcareer post tenure.
Lumpkin (2014)	No	A quotation by Baldwin et al. was provided (p. 202).

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Mann (1989)	No	There is no definition provided, but this article notes: (1) no significant differences in career goals in ranks; and (2) no evidence of stuckness. This article also conflates age with midcareer stage.
Maranville (2014)	No	Refers to the "maintenance stage" and mid-life; some references to tenure and promotion. Also notes that academic careers are "protean" (defined by the person not the institution). There is also mention of "transition to Associate prof," assuming that this is mid-career.
Maree (2017)	No	
Mathews (2014)	No	No definition; assumption is that one is at the rank of associate professor and is tenured
Nottis (2005)	No	No definition; the assumption is that one is "post tenure." Also conflates mid-life with mid-career.
O'Meara (2004)	No	Assumes we all know and agree what mid-career is (which is referred to as deadwood repeatedly)
Pastore (2013)	Yes	Uses Baldwin et al.'s (2008) definition: the lengthy period between the end of professors' probationary years and their preparation for retirement.
Porter (2019)	No	No definition; assumption: 10 years of being a professor and tenured
Romano, Hoesing, O'Donovan and Weinsheimer (2004)	No	Vaguely talks about when "… the days are no longer driven by the tenure race and plans for retirement can be put off until tomorrow" (p. 21). Also refers to faculty who are "… no longer new" and have achieved tenure. And, those who are "no longer at the early stage of their careers," … as well as "well beyond the early state of their careers." (p. 22)
Stortz (2005)	No	No definition; refers to middle-season, mid-career, and mid-field.
Strage and Merdinger (2014)	No	No definition; assumption is tenure,' and not expecting to retire for 10-15 years or is in the "middle stages".
Strage, Nelson, and Meyers (2008)	No	There are several different statements: " … when major professional hurdles are behind them and possibly twenty or more years before they retire", (p. 71). In their interviews they selected tenured and fully promoted professors.
Van Miegroet, Glass, Callister, and Sullivan (2019)	No	No definition; the assumption is that it is an associate professor.
Wilson (2012)	No	No definition; assumption it is associated prof

When investigating midcareer in academia, an operational definition, or an agreed upon understanding of what midcareer is, is essential prior to gaining a fulsome understanding of what the literature tells us about this stage of an academics' career. To achieve an operational definition, we enquired further to understand (RQ_1) When does midcareer begin?; and (RQ_2) When does midcareer end?

Method and Data Analysis

To answer these questions, we surveyed professors in Canada who have the responsibility of evaluating academics after they receive appointment with tenure and, usually, promotion to the rank of associate professor (or senior lecturer): chairs, deans, and directors of departments, units, schools, and faculties in universities. Given that we were not able to design a survey with a set number of definitions for midcareer that the respondents could agree or disagree with, we designed the survey with open ended questions (text boxes), asking for their opinions on when midcareer begins (RQ_1) and when it ends (RQ_2), as well as demographic question about their disciplinary orientation. For the survey, we used the language/terminology that most Canadian institutions of higher education use to describe the employment category for academics; we know this description differs across universities outside of Canada, as well as within some Canadian institutions. Similarly, we proceeded with the assumption that all the respondents were faculty members in institutions that organize academics according to the ranks of Assistant, Associate, and Full Professor.

To address our research questions, we designed the open-ended survey in a google form and added a closing question that asked the respondents if they had any thoughts or

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insights to add. We restricted the survey to department chairs, directors, and deans of universities that belong to the U15*. We asked respondents to report only those faculty members who have teaching, research, and service responsibilities. Thus, we excluded teaching fellows, Librarians, Postdoctoral Fellows, and others who contribute to teaching, research, and service from the data, even if respondents mention them.

Participants

We targeted chairs, directors, and deans in our survey because they read and review midcareer faculty members' annual reports, (ideally) meet regularly with them, and understand the overall career progression of academics. We based this target on the assumption that these administrators read faculty members' annual reports and make recommendations to the evaluation committee where decisions are made on merit recommendations, as well as tenure and promotion. Thus, an assumption underpinning the survey was that the participants know, due to their administrative roles, the progression of the academic career in the context of their respective academic units.

Data Collection

After receiving institutional ethics approval, we distributed the online survey by email in the Fall semester of 2022 to 1,278 chairs, deans, and directors in the units of Canadian U15 institutions (N = 242 with 72 unusable surveys), for a response rate of 20%. Based on the results of a meta-analysis by Wu et al. (2022), response rates for online surveys most often fall around 40%. While the literature is rather disparate on acceptable response rates for online surveys, our response rate is considerably lower than 40%, and as such the probability of response bias is high. Alternatively, we did have remarkably equal representation among discipline orientations, minimizing sampling error. Perhaps as importantly, the survey was not an attitudinal investigation, where minimizing response bias is imperative for reliable results. Rather, the aim was to determine if there was agreement about when academics enter and exit the midcareer stage. The sample was both large enough and representative of the disciplines to gain a good sense about whether there is consensus about when midcareer begins and ends in the Canadian context.

We did not ask the participants to provide their name or their institutional affiliation. We did ask the respondents to identify the research council to which they and members of their respective department, school, or faculty apply as principal or coinvestigators for funding to identify their disciplinary and interdisciplinary orientations. Responses from those who apply to the three main research councils are: (1) The Canadian Institutes of Health Research (n = 72); (2) the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (n = 74); and (3) the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (n = 79). Seventeen respondents did not identify their research council orientation.

In addition to the tri-council orientation question, the survey asked the following questions: When does midcareer begin? When does midcareer end? These questions were followed by an open-ended text box, asking for anything further to add. The survey results were exported to an excel spreadsheet with the data organized according to consistency of responses. This step was followed by segmenting the data into tri-council responses. Most

* The U15 are the top 15 research intensive medical-doctoral universities in Canada [https://u15.ca]

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responses were short, limited to one or two sentence statements in response to first two questions. There were 62 substantive responses for the last question (comments such as luck for your survey', 'thanks', etc. were not included in the analysis). For the additional comments we coded and grouped into categories, based on patterns and relationships within the categories. We then refined the categories into themes, ensuring they were coherent, distinct, and relevant to our research questions.

Results

The outcomes of our analysis revealed many similar responses. Tables 2 and 3 provide a summary. The disciplinary (i.e., tri-council) fields that the respondents represent were marked as social sciences and humanities (SSH), natural sciences and engineering (NSE), and health sciences (HS).

Table 2.
RQ_1: When does a Faculty Member enter midcareer?

Thematic Category	*n*	Discipline
Tenure and Promotion • When they receive tenure and promotion to associate professor • The post-tenure years	72	Represents respondents from SSH; NSE; and HS.
Associate Professor • When they receive promotion to associate professor.	44	Represents respondents from SSH; NSE; and HS.
Years of service • Ten-20 years after their first appointment to a tenure-track faculty position with research, teaching, and service responsibilities.	31	Represents respondents from SSH; NSE; and HS
Years of service after tenure and promotion • Up to five years after receipt of appointment with tenure and promotion	19	represents respondents from SSH; NSE; and HS.

As table 2 illustrates, there was good agreement among respondents across academic fields that the receipt of tenure and promotion is when academics enter midcareer. For this response, we identified respondents who understand the tenure award and promotion to associate professor as a single decision (i.e., there is only one vote at a faculty evaluation committee on the single file, and a majority vote in the affirmative results in both outcomes). This tenure and promotion vote does not occur at every U15 institution (i.e., one can hold tenure and serve at the rank of assistant professor). This award, whether for tenure or both tenure and promotion, changes the direction of academics' careers; specifically, they are no longer junior academics or new scholars. This finding conforms with much of the literature we reviewed for this study that provided a definition or made this assumption (see Table 1). It is here or in the ensuing years (i.e., up to five years after the tenure award and promotion) that there appears to be agreement with the literature and our survey data (Table 2) that midcareer begins. Specifically, while it can be up to five years, most respondents estimated the post-tenure early career period as being as short as one-two years but not longer than five years, which is consistent with most tenure track hiring contracts in Canada. Given the differences in promotion and tenure procedures it is possible to combine the first two

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responses (n = 116), with the other responses also stating (with timeline caveats) that tenure and promotion are markers for entering into the midcareer stage.

There were a few respondents (n=3) who suggested that when a colleague returns from the first sabbatical leave, which is often in the year that follows the tenure and promotion award, or a few years after the award, the midcareer period starts. There were several respondents (n=42) who mentioned age as a defining component of midcareer. Of those who mentioned age, no respondents stated that a faculty member is at midcareer before 35. Similarly, no respondents mentioned that one can be in midcareer after age 55. Several respondents noted in the additional comment boxes that age should not be a factor. For example, two respondents (one in nursing and one in education) shed light on the reason for the two-decade age range of a midcareer faculty member. One respondent stated, for example, that nurses:

> "…often practice for several years…until around age 28-30 before starting a master's degree, and…people may practice for several years before returning for the doctorate.… [Consequently, if] one is 40-50 when completing the PhD, which is not uncommon in nursing, then midcareer may be shorter, as one may have only 15-20 years for a full academic career."

In response to our question about anything to add, a respondent who identified an affiliation with education and sociology did not mention age to describe any career phase for the reason that,

> "… in professional fields like Education and Nursing….[I]ndividuals come…after teaching/administering in the K-12 system….[They] will typically be older when they start in a tenure-track position and then their entry to and exit from the mid-career stage will be delayed compared to their colleagues who lack extensive professional experience."

Thus, age may not always be a relevant characteristic to depict the composite of a midcareer faculty member.

Mentions of research outputs were most nuanced in the responses. Respondents that included outputs inferred that an expectation of continuous publication is warranted. One respondent commented that "there needs to be evidence of new work arising out of the sabbatical" (Political Science, SSHRC). Another respondent suggested that one must be publishing "their second major research project," which in a humanities field is "usually…their second book." Likewise, a respondent in political science noted that seeing a successful midcareer faculty member as one with at least two books published. A department chair in forestry also noted that recognition of midcareer comes from a high number of publications, stating that one's midcareer period as a scholar yields at least "40 papers…[or] 4 authored books."

Significantly, only a small number of respondents (n=3) considered specific publication counts an accurate measure of proficiency as a midcareer faculty member. There is agreement that these outputs are an indication of a faculty member who "has established a

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career as an independent researcher" (Biomedical Research/Physiology, CIHR) with "a significant amount of independent momentum" (NSERC). One who is "no longer eligible for early career awards" (NSERC) and one that a chair can "stop seeing…as my responsibility" (Molecular Biology, CIHR). However, respondents also noted the contributions of the midcareer faculty member to the research infrastructure of the academy, within and outside the university. For these respondents, there needs to be demonstration that one is not only independent but capable of leading research through effective supervision, mentorship, and leadership.

Relatedly, the ability to supervise and to lead was stressed in the survey responses with respect to being a successful midcareer faculty member. As one respondent noted, midcareer faculty are expected to "graduate [their] first PhDs," establish their "research team," and ensure there is a network of supportive colleagues (Electrical Engineering, NSERC). Mentoring graduate students and serving "as a solid facilitator of early career researchers" show one's mastery of the midcareer phase (NSERC). Although publications are necessary, one also needs a track record of "grants [and]…grad students." (Environmental Science, NSERC) to show one's independence and establishment in the institution and the academy at large.

Only a few respondents (n=4) noted leadership as an indicator of midcareer. A respondent in the sciences for example mentioned leadership, saying that ideally midcareer faculty members volunteer to serve as "associate head, grad chair" and other types of roles at the departmental level. The expectation for leadership is a segue to responses that we received to the next question, which was: when does a faculty member exit midcareer?

With respect to when a Faculty Member exits midcareer, there is good agreement that the midcareer period makes up the majority of an academics' career in the U15 institutions in Canada, as Table 3 illustrates.

Table 3.
RQ_2: When does a Faculty Member exit midcareer?

Thematic Category	Number	Discipline
Fifteen or more Years of Service	105	Represents respondents from HS; NSE; and SSH
Promotion to Full Professor	65	Represents respondents from HS; NSE; and SSH
Forty Years of Age or Older	36	Represents respondents from HS; NSE; and SSH
Retirement • Awareness of Time to Retirement • Consideration of Retirement • Approximately five-15 Years before Retirement	22	Represents respondents from HS; NSE; and SSH

The survey data for RQ_2 reveal that most respondents are consistent in their definition of faculty transitioning from the midcareer stage to the late career stage after 15+ years of service. A notable number of respondents also believe that midcareer ends with promotion to Full Professor. While generally respondents did not refer to age at entering midcareer, we found it surprising the number of respondents (n=44) who defined midcareer as being middle aged (40 or older). There were also a few respondents who stated midcareer ends when a faculty member begins to consider retirement or is close to being eligible for retirement (e.g., 15 years or less to eligibility for full pension and benefits).

The survey comments also noted several indications of faculty members entering the late career period. For example, one respondent mused that faculty members exit

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Definition of Midcareer in HE

midcareer "when the wrinkles can no longer be ignored" (Molecular Biology, CIHR). On a more serious note, one respondent noted that midcareer happens when faculty members reach a point "[w]hen they could care less about what happens at FEC [faculty evaluation committee] [and/or] about their [merit] increment" (Education, SSHRC) recommendation.

Survey comments also included the topic of faculty disengagement when exiting midcareer. According to some of the comments, faculty demonstrate disinterest when they are demonstrating a reduction in the pace of their research activities. For example, one respondent stated that faculty have exited midcareer when they are "within sight of applying for their last grant" (Experimental Psychology, NSERC) and are "ramping down research activity" (Biology—Molecular Ecology, NSERC). One respondent noted that "reducing the research team size" (Electrical Engineering, NSERC) was also an indicator of the late career phase. A respondent from history noted that faculty exiting midcareer and moving into late career "stop having 'future projects.'" Another comment stated when exiting midcareer there is a recognition that "it's time to slow down and not be actively engaged in research and scholarship" (Education, SSHRC). These actions, it seems, are demonstrations that the "…member's reputation has grown to its fullest extent" (Physics, NSERC), shown sometimes by "achievement of major awards or accolades (for example, election to the Royal Society of Canada"* (Earth Sciences, NSERC).

But respondents also provided a counterpoint: a reduction in research activity and output does not, necessarily, indicate an end to a career. Some respondents also saw faculty exiting or near exiting midcareer whereby they still have a period where they can contribute, albeit in late career. Respondents in the natural sciences and humanities were aligned on this point. A respondent in history suggested that faculty moving into late career have the potential "…of entering a senior administrative post (Assoc Dean or higher) at the institution." Service in such a role shows faculty, "Gradually take more difficult or complicated responsibilities" (Atmospheric Science and Environment, NSERC). This quote is notable because it suggests that while senior administrative positions are valuable ways to demonstrate one's abilities, there are also other less visible but valuable ways for a late career faculty member to demonstrate the abilities they honed in midcareer.

In the additional comments section, there was some indication from respondents who identified mentoring as necessary in the middle to later years of the faculty career. For example, a hematologist observed that faculty exiting midcareer "…are dispensing more mentorship than they are receiving." An NSERC respondent who leads a unit in the sciences expects to see faculty, "Engaging heavily with junior colleagues to build research groups and to bring junior colleagues into research groups." Other faculty look to them as "leaders within the unit" (Environmental Sciences, NSERC). We see that the end of midcareer "…is more related to experience than timing or milestones" (Rehabilitation Sciences, CIHR). These responses show that chairs, deans, and directors see a faculty member in the later career years as one who leads in research and can respond to the challenges that a unit faces. Those with less experience can look at the professor as one who can help, mentor, and/or direct, sometimes without a formal title. One can infer that publications and research funding, the more visible indications of career success, may diminish in value when evaluating faculty exiting midcareer.

* Information on the Royal Society of Canada is available at https://rsc-src.ca/

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Discussion

The survey responses reveal there is agreement in some areas; not so much in other areas with respect to defining midcareer. A key finding in this study is that respondents agreed that faculty members enter midcareer at or shortly after the tenure (and, usually, promotion to associate professor) award. In the latter case, the delay is no more than five years and can coincide with the completion of the first sabbatical leave.

While the respondents in general noted age influenced their definition of midcareer, there were differences across the disciplines with respect to what that age is. Respondents from professional fields such as business, education, engineering, and nursing highlighted the fact that in many/most cases a can have at least one prior career that precedes PhD study and as such entry into academia can be delayed, with entry into academia happening in ones 40s and 50s (see also Chambers et al., 2020). Whereas in the natural, applied, and health sciences, postdoctoral fellowships frequently follow doctoral study; increasingly, this is also happening in the humanities and social sciences fields. And, thus, the length of midcareer can be as long as a piece of string if one does not take age into consideration in the definition. For faculty who pursue all their graduate studies in the years that follow their undergraduate degrees and enter the professoriate immediately after completion of the doctorate, the midcareer can be a lengthy period of several decades. However, those for whom academia is a second or third career, midcareer can be as short as a decade.

The results of the survey also revealed differences in scholarly fields. In disciplines where research is conducted in teams, the respondents expect midcareer faculty to serve as leaders and recruiters. They pursue funding to support their research initiatives. However, in fields where scholars work either alone or in smaller groups, there was an expectation that one increases substantially one's research output (i.e., writes a second book). In all contexts, increased service is an expectation when one enters midcareer.

Respondents noted that faculty begin to exit midcareer when they start to contribute less to research. In fields where there is a reliance of funding to sustain research, faculty leaving the midcareer phase are either applying for their last grants or carrying out the work in their remaining grants. There is also recognition by peers of distinguished accomplishments across the career span and not just for a single publication. There was also a belief by a few respondents that there may be more substantial service contributions such as ascension to chair, dean, and director roles.

Conclusion

We began this paper on the premise that we lack a clear definition of midcareer faculty. The survey data revealed an understanding that the midcareer phase starts immediately or shortly following the tenure award (and, usually, promotion to associate professor), and one stays in the midcareer phase past the promotion to full professor. Our survey data also showed good agreement that one exits midcareer when one winds down research or achieves a notable recognition for career long work. Within midcareer, most respondents agree that there is an expectation for enhancement of one's research and service profile and to lead formally and informally in the university, the scholarly profession, and the community. Although increase in research output is an expectation, in the domain of research, there is a requirement that faculty recruit, retain, and mentor upcoming

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researchers (graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, and junior faculty). These achievements are not measured finely but constitute important milestones in the midcareer phase.

Limitations and Further Research

There are several limitations in this study, making further research on this topic warranted. As noted in the methods section, our return rate was low. Further research might consider a building on our results with a likert-type survey targeting a larger sample size. Our survey also asked three questions, requesting short responses. Further research could build on our results with a qualitative methodology and the use of semi-structured interviews.

The survey results provided good data with respect to agreement on when an academic enters midcareer, and when they exit midcareer. The data also provided several contextual factors for consideration, especially with respect to differences among the disciplines.

However, other questions arise from the data, indicating a need for further research in certain areas. For example, further research should examine how midcareer academics define their experiences to see if they dovetail with the expectations that chairs, directors, and deans set for them. It would be especially interesting to learn if the chairs, directors, and deans identify for their colleagues when they see midcareer beginning. Additionally, do such leaders communicate clearly to faculty the expectations that they have for accomplishments in the midcareer? A great deal of the literature we read believe there is a lack of clarity on the expectations for their performance after tenure and promotion (Buch et al., 2019; Eason, 2002; Gardner et al., 2014; Macfarlane, 2007; Miller, 1988; Romano et al., 2004; Schimanski & Alperin, 2018; The Modern Language Association of America, 2009; Wolfgang et al., 1995; Youn et al., 2009). However, this literature does identify exactly what administrators have to say about midcareer expectations and accomplishments. Future research is an opportunity to explore the expectations as administrators communicated in their responses.

The end of the academic career is also fertile ground for further research. For example, we know that many faculty continue to research, teach, and serve after retirement. Our survey findings revealed that higher education leaders hold rather consistent beliefs about when a faculty member is nearing the end of midcareer and moving into a late career or end of career period. There is less known about how the late and end of career period looks for the faculty member who experiences it.

Contract professors and those whose main responsibility is to teach were mentioned occasionally by respondents. We chose not to include these comments in our data reporting or analysis as they fall outside the scope of our study. Nevertheless, it is a worthy pursuit to understand the structure of contract professors and/or teaching professors' careers in all their phases to see if they follow the trajectory of early, middle, and late career, or if there are different phases. Similarly, a view from both those who evaluate them is a worthy pursuit.

There are also those faculty who struggle to make it to late career or never reach it (Surgery, CIHR; Engineering, NSERC), which is a finding we did not anticipate when we designed the survey. As one respondent stated, they "struggle to find a strong exit point"

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(Engineering, NSERC), and another respondent noted that they "may still have something to prove, while the late career one would not" (Atmospheric Science and Environment, NSERC). However, one can end one's career as an associate professor. Future research needs to untangle the full professor and associate professor ranks from the midcareer phase to understand the impact of rank on the definition of the midcareer period. Existing scholarly work has reported that faculty feel unprepared for the application for full professor because they lack knowledge of the expectations for promotion (Berheide et al., 2013; Buch et al., 2011; Buch et al., 2019; Eason, 2002; Helitzer et al., 2016; Terosky et al., 2014; The Modern Language Association of America, 2009). After completing this research, we are left to wonder how those who evaluate faculty promotion, and tenure, communicate not only the requirements for a successful midcareer but also the role of being a full professor.

In subsequent research there are also opportunities to investigate the findings on the faculty themselves, to ask at a minimum how long the career string is. As of this writing, most of the literature reports on faculty at midcareer in programs or other types of interventions. Further research can explore with faculty about their day-to-day lives in midcareer. Additionally, we know that not all faculty took their degrees one after the other; how do gaps between degrees and preceding careers affect definition of the midcareer phase? Or, in what ways do careers outside academia have an impact on the understanding of an academic's life?

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Definition of Midcareer in HE

Originality Note

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