Supporting the development of junior faculty is a high priority at many universities; however, the career development needs of associate professors are often neglected. Recent findings suggest that many faculty, especially women, hit a career plateau once they reach the level of associate professor (Buch, Huet, Rorrer, & Roberson, 2011). While women are earning more doctorates and procuring tenure more frequently than female faculty in the past, they may be hitting a glass ceiling at the top of the ivory tower in terms of being promoted to full professor. Men still hold three-quarters of the full professorship in the U.S. and women are 10% less likely than men to attain promotion to full professor, even after controlling for productivity, educational background, institution type, race, ethnicity, and nationality (Misra, Lundquist, Holmes & Agiomavritis, 2011). For those who do get promoted, it takes women several years longer than men to attain the rank of full professor (Buch et al., 2011). The underrepresentation of women at the full professor rank has several implications, including a reduced voice for women in the affairs of the university and their fields, fewer upper level role models for female students and junior faculty, and contribution to the salary discrepancy between male and female academics (Pruitt, Johnson, Catlin, & Knox, 2010).

Misra et al. (2011) found both male and female associate professors worked similar amounts of time overall, but men spent more time on their research. Women associate professors spent more time on teaching, mentoring, and service, and these pursuits hold less value in regard to promotion to full professor. While faculty members realize that service is undervalued and detracts from promotion, they do it because it is vital to the operation of the university (Misra et al., 2011). Associate professors, both men and women, carry a disproportionate service burden because “departments try and shield junior faculty from service, and full professors are usually in a better position to say no” (Misra et al., 2011, p. 4). With so much time during the week allocated to committee meetings, teaching, advising, and administrative work, associate professors often find that research is sacrificed or shifted to time outside of the typical work week. Due to their heavy workloads, associate professors may miss out on potentially valuable career development opportunities offered by their universities.

Another problem in achieving the rank of full professor noted by both men and women is lack of mentorship. Mid-career faculty with mentors were more likely to report that promotion was important, and they were more likely to perceive incentives in place for seeking promotion (Buch et al., 2011). Moreover, studies have found those with a mentor not only received greater compensation than those without a mentor, but also experienced greater career and job satisfaction, were more committed to their career, and were more likely to believe they would experience career advancement (see Gardiner, Tiggemann, Kearns, & Marshall, 2007). There are significant benefits to achieving the rank of full professor. These include a raise in salary, increased prestige and satisfaction of achieving the highest rank in academia, greater power and influence, stronger credentials for administrative positions, and serving as a role model (Pruitt et al, 2010). Nevertheless, there are also a number of pitfalls that make promotion to full professor particularly challenging. Buch et al. (2011) identified six barriers to promotion:

1. Lack of attention to career planning by associate professors.
2. Lack of institutional and departmental attention to and support for the career-development needs of associate professors.
3. Lack of career-development opportunities for associate professors.
4. Disproportionate service demands/administrative duties for associate professors.
5. Lack of transparency and clarity regarding promotion criteria.
6. Need for more flexible and inclusive “paths to professor” that recognize a broader range of contributions.
The panel for this symposium includes both male and female full and associate professors from a number of universities of varying sizes and with different criteria for promotion. The purpose of this symposium is to shed light on this neglected topic of professional development for mid-career faculty. The above barriers will be addressed and insights will be shared on how to progress along the path to full professor.