



Institutional Portfolio
University of Texas at El Paso
(UTEP)

University of Texas at El Paso ADVANCE Institutional Transformation Project
UTEP ADVANCE

Dates of Grant: September 2003-February 2010 (Round 2)

PI: Evelyn Posey

Co-PIs: Elizabeth Anthony, Ann Gates, Christine Reimers, Patricia Witherspoon

Key Elements of the Overall Change Strategy

This project identified the two main barriers to women's representation at UTEP as institutional impediments (especially lack of guidance, role models, and support) and issues in balancing family needs with the demands of an academic career. These barriers are grounded in the literature but reflect locally identified issues of prominence. UTEP tackled these barriers through three strands of activity:

1. Recruitment and policy initiatives to develop a diverse faculty and ensure that all are fairly treated.
2. Faculty development to inform faculty, help them acculturate to the university, and guide them in developing and carrying out a holistic career plan.
3. Collaborative leadership to improve climate, develop faculty leaders, and share best practices by engaging faculty and departments.

The strands were coordinated but separately led. While the set of activities undertaken was not necessarily novel, the three-strand design assigned a rationale and leadership responsibility for each. There was little focus on bias; rather, the focus was on setting a positive atmosphere where all can succeed.

Relevant Elements in the Institutional Context

- Founded as a mining and metallurgy school, UTEP remains strong in STEM fields. Strength in engineering is one factor accounting for low prior proportions of women.
- The campus is a regionally focused research university with a strong sense of mission to its local community and its Hispanic students (75% Mexican-American). It is the only research university with a majority Hispanic population and one of six NSF-designated Model Institutions for Excellence because of its success in graduating STEM students from underrepresented groups.
- An evaluator described the campus as "lean"; salaries are low and teaching loads high. However, pressure to demonstrate research productivity and bring in grant funding has risen in recent years as UTEP seeks to become a Tier 1 institution in the UT system.
- The president, Dr. Diana Natalicio, has served over 25 years, with high interest in the regional mission of the campus and national recognition for her leadership in diversity.

- Carnegie classification: Public RU/H, Comprehensive doctoral (no medical/veterinary).

Scope of the ADVANCE Initiative

The project addressed 18 STEM departments in four colleges, including social science and business fields supported by NSF. Many activities targeted women; some included men. UTEP ADVANCE made a special effort to involve Hispanic faculty and to include international faculty in their gender diversity efforts, noting the relevance of these groups for their local circumstances.

Project Elements

Activities were organized under three main strands. Here we distinguish efforts on recruitment and retention.

- ***Policy and practice around recruitment.*** These activities addressed transparency and equity in institutional processes. Four faculty fellows worked on retention and recruitment issues, one in each college. These positions were formalized as associate deans for faculty affairs, with a counterpart position in the provost's office. A dual-career hire policy was formulated and assistance given to individual couples; this task is now the purview of the human resources office. Some grant funds were used to facilitate dual-career hires. The human resources office also distributes the search committee manual and maintains oversight of search processes and pool diversity. Departments could request extra funds to interview a well-ranked woman candidate. ADVANCE contributions to faculty start-up packages led to a broader examination of these packages for equity issues, and more transparent practices were put in place to ensure equity in start-up when hires are made.
- ***Policy and practice around retention.*** Third-year reviews were instituted in all four colleges, and a tenure-clock extension policy was approved. A brochure was prepared to explain the family leave policy.
- ***Faculty development.*** These activities included a mix of efforts to develop future institutional leaders and to support individual women's career advancement. An intensive career development program enrolled over 50 faculty in multiple cohorts to design integrated career plans and develop leadership skills. Formal coaching reached most pre-tenure women faculty; it was later opened to all pre-tenure faculty. A grants program directed resources to individual faculty for scholarly development and assisted with start-up for new female hires. One-off events (talks, lunches) were used to share information and promote networking.
- ***Collaborative leadership.*** These activities focused on giving faculty ways to have impact, directing conversations toward solutions rather than problems and drawing on people's ideas and expertise. Chair development sessions were offered and chairs' input sought. Focus groups and faculty forums provided input and fostered connections. This program continued through the university's Sam Donaldson Center for Communication Studies.

Collectively, these activities engaged what appears to be a high fraction of the faculty. Project leaders made extensive efforts to communicate with stakeholders, especially internal ones—faculty, chairs, deans, departments, and other units. Substantial data-gathering efforts were carried out, and several of these were institutionalized as long-term institutional monitoring.

Outcomes

- In the grant period, 38% of tenure-track faculty hires in STEM were women. UTEP ADVANCE found that women candidates did well if they were invited to interview: If 33% of a UTEP on-campus interview pool was female, there was a 57% probability that the first job offer would go to a female. A dozen dual-career hires were made.

- The overall proportion of women in STEM fields rose by half since pre-ADVANCE times, when they were quite steady. There were increases in the numbers of women at all ranks in departments served by ADVANCE. Among female hires, 31% were Hispanic.
- Climate survey results indicated positive changes in women's perception of climate and in men's awareness of diversity issues. The survey also indicated positive changes in faculty satisfaction with hiring and tenure/promotion processes. Anecdotal comments suggested the campus was developing a culture of mentoring, where mentoring is seen as being of value to all and not remedial (see also Brief 3).
- Some sustained practices emerged from policy, recruitment, and data collection work. At the end of the grant period, all policies were formalized and in use except the dual-career policy, which was not formally applied because of lack of funding to support it.

Research Team Observations

- The project was thoughtfully constructed and carried out. Key strategies were chosen that reached high numbers of faculty, providing sufficient intensity to enable change for an individual without targeting huge amounts of resources toward a few people. Institutionalization has distributed program aspects to various campus entities rather than keeping them united under the ADVANCE banner.
- Several aspects of the project were attentive to the local culture and demographics, such as a qualitative research study of Hispanic faculty and successful efforts to hire Hispanic women. Efforts to address partner hiring and work/life issues addressed potential hires' concerns about relocating to El Paso; there was also a concerted effort to establish and communicate a welcoming atmosphere.
- Faculty had a high consciousness of the institutional mission and a seriousness about diversity. ADVANCE was described as adding gender to the diversity conversation on campus, a next step rather than an initial step in campus discussions of diversity.
- The project reached out to ADVANCE projects at several other institutions to draw on existing resources or collaboratively develop some activities.

For Further Reading

The program website documents the project's activities under the NSF ADVANCE award.

<http://academics.utep.edu/Default.aspx?tabid=62933>

To cite this document

Laursen, S. L., & Austin, A. E. (2014). Institutional Portfolio: University of Texas at El Paso. In Laursen, S. L., & Austin, A. E. (2014). *StratEGIC Toolkit: Strategies for Effecting Gender Equity and Institutional Change*. Boulder, CO, and East Lansing, MI. www.strategictoolkit.org

This research study and development of the StratEGIC Toolkit and other products has been supported by the National Science Foundation through ADVANCE PAID grant #HRD-0930097. Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations are those of the researchers and do not necessarily represent the official views, opinions, or policy of the National Science Foundation.