



Strategic Intervention Brief #12

Visiting Scholars

Strategies for Effecting Gender Equity and Institutional Change

About half of the ADVANCE IT¹ projects in Rounds 1 and 2 organized visiting scholar programs designed to provide benefits both to women STEM scholars and to the broader university community. As one institutional leader asserted, visiting scholar programs offer considerable benefits for low cost and are “win-win across the board for everybody.” This Brief delineates different approaches to using this strategy.

Two related Briefs will interest readers also. Some institutions organize their visiting scholars programs through individual grants to faculty members, and Brief 2 discusses ways to organize individual grants. Visiting scholars programs can be used as a form of mentoring, which is more fully discussed in Brief 3.

Rationale

Inviting visiting scholars has both institutional and individual benefits. Visiting scholars for ADVANCE are often senior STEM women whose work is highly respected. Thus, their presence on a campus symbolically highlights the ADVANCE project and raises the visibility of successful women STEM scholars. Their public presentations can frame issues concerning the work, challenges, and successes of women STEM scholars in ways that open new conversations on a campus. Their visits also can further institutional momentum for change through frank conversations with senior leaders about the importance of institutional commitment and strategies for moving forward this agenda. University leaders often do not want their institutions to follow too far behind their peers—nor run too far ahead. Information shared by visiting scholars can help university leaders gauge whether their institution is competitive with others on matters of recruiting and supporting women colleagues, and institutional movement toward significant cultural and policies changes can sometimes be aided by examples of what other institutions are doing.

Individual female faculty members also benefit from the presence of visiting scholars. Senior scholars are exemplars of accomplishment and possibility for peers and early-career faculty. The relationships they forge with colleagues as part of their campus visits can serve as a form of individual mentoring. Especially for women scholars in situations with few women colleagues, interactions with visiting scholars can offer a form of mentoring that is not otherwise available.

Purpose

While all visiting scholar programs are designed to make an impact on the institution and enhance the work and lives of women STEM faculty, the specific purposes, formats, and target audiences vary across institutions, depending on institutional goals. The purposes of visiting scholar programs typically include some combination of the following:

- To provide campus-wide visibility for the goal of increasing the recruitment and success of women STEM scholars and, specifically, to provide visibility for ADVANCE as a program serving this overall institutional goal
- To provide occasions for discussing critical factors and institutional issues relevant to the recruitment and success of female STEM faculty

- To showcase distinguished women scholars in STEM fields whose presence models possible career routes for women scholars, inspires women faculty, and reminds the campus community of the contributions and career successes of women scholars
- To provide individual mentoring for women faculty members and/or graduate students, including support to advance their research and opportunities for discussion about career paths and strategies for managing personal and professional responsibilities
- To enhance institutional cross-disciplinary connections among STEM scholars and members of the campus community who are concerned about issues pertaining to women scholars
- To provide opportunities and occasions for supporting institutional linkages with STEM-related colleagues in schools and other groups within the local community

Audience

Visiting scholars offer benefits for the institution and for individual faculty members. Some programs provide opportunities for women across career stages to invite, interact with, and benefit from time with visiting scholars. Other programs focus their programs in ways that specifically benefit the research development and professional socialization of their early career women faculty. For example, they may enable an early-career faculty member to invite a senior colleague for the explicit purpose of helping the junior scholar create relationships with advanced scholars who may offer opportunities for collaboration and introductions to other researchers with like interests. Such programs often seek to help pre-tenure faculty members develop relationships with senior scholars who can serve in later years as external reviewers for tenure and promotion decisions. Also, as the host of a visiting scholar, the early-career scholar's visibility and connections on her own campus are enhanced.

Models

While some institutions are fairly informal in the organization of their programs, offering grant support as interest occurs among their faculty, other programs are more formal and purposeful. Key issues to consider in designing visiting scholars programs include the following:

- ***Organization of visits.*** The organization and structure of visits to campus vary, depending on campus priorities. Some programs focus on inviting visiting scholars to participate in a major campus event, such as a symposium, while other programs use their visiting scholars for more individual interactions with STEM faculty and institutional leaders. Generally, however, visits may include one or more public talks, colloquia, presentations, or lectures to the university community at large or to specific departments. Programs often also include opportunities for visiting scholars to interact one-on-one with STEM women faculty. Visits may also include special seminars with doctoral students, visits with local K-12 schools or teachers, and/or meetings between the visitor and key institutional leaders about supportive and inclusive institutional cultures conducive to the success of women STEM faculty. When programs are intended to support the work of a specific faculty member, the invitation may make clear that the visiting scholar is the guest of that faculty member, a message emphasizing to all involved that the visiting scholar's time with the individual faculty member is as important as the large public events.
- ***Invitations to individuals or groups of scholars.*** Scholars may be invited individually or in small groups. Individual scholars may each visit for several days, with programs tailored to their areas of scholarly focus, while groups of scholars may be invited to participate together in a major institutional symposium or conference.

- *Women scholars only.* Universities often stipulate that the visiting scholars should be women; however, in some cases, either men or women may be invited as long as they meet the criterion set for visiting scholars at the institution (e.g., doing research relevant to women scholars on campus, being highly distinguished in their field of expertise).
- *The importance of emphasizing prestige.* Some universities have found that creating a prestigious title, such as Distinguished Visiting Scholar, attracts the attention and interest of nationally known scholars. How an invitation is extended to a potential visitor also can convey prestige. For example, some programs extend invitations through a committee in order to clearly convey institutional interest in the scholar. At other institutions, the department chair of an early-career STEM faculty member extends the invitation, explaining to the invited scholar that the invitation is considered to be a prestigious honor and includes the special responsibilities of mentoring an early-career colleague—that is, the invitation is more than a typical request for a research talk.
- *Honoraria.* Typically, institutions provide funding for travel, lodging, and food, accompanied by a modest honorarium (\$400-\$500). Overall, this is a modest investment relative to the benefits that institutions report.
- *Decision or selection process.* Decisions about whom to invite depend on the purposes and structure of a program. The ADVANCE leadership team may make the decisions, or committees may be designated to choose visiting scholars. Institutions that use their programs to bring in colleagues to work with specific faculty members typically use an application process whereby faculty members submit proposals for approval. Application criteria will relate to the purpose of the visiting scholar program. If the program intends to support the research of a faculty member, for example, one part of the application will request information about how the proposed visit will advance a faculty member's research program and career or request evidence that the proposed visiting scholar is a national or international leader. Attracting highly distinguished scholars is one factor that adds prestige and enhances the impact of visiting scholars programs.
- *Advertising process.* Brochures that announce the program annually and describe the application process are one way to advertise. *Kansas State* holds a spring luncheon funded by deans and department heads, to which are invited all eligible early-career faculty members from across campus and their department heads. The luncheon is an occasion to celebrate the awards made the previous year and to provide a panel of three or four previous grant recipients who discuss their experiences and lessons learned about effective visiting scholar activities. Since some early-career faculty are initially nervous about inviting a highly regarded senior scholar, the luncheon is intended to provide information about all aspects of the process and alleviate any concerns.

Examples

Below we offer a few examples of institutional approaches to grants for visiting scholars:

New Mexico State University intentionally organized its visiting scholar program to have an impact on NMSU women STEM scholars, graduate students, and undergraduates, as well as on K-12 students. The program was intended to enhance the visibility of women scholars and to affect the pipeline of women in STEM fields. To achieve these goals, every ADVANCE Visiting Professor visited K-12 classrooms or interacted with K-12 educators in order to be a role model and affirm the place of women in science. The visits of several days' duration also involved public seminars, research colloquia, and luncheon talks.

Following the great success of a visit in 2003 by Virginia Valian, WISELI at the *University of Wisconsin-Madison* hosts a major event and talk by a high-profile speaker each year, rather than multiple smaller events.

The event is designed to bring together women faculty from throughout campus to promote cross-departmental networking.

At *Columbia University*, the ADVANCE Program organized a Science of Diversity Lecture Series that brought in distinguished visiting scholars to give major, highly publicized talks about the social science research that sheds light on gender-related issues. Including highly regarded scholars in research-focused, prestigious events, which are organized to have national visibility, conveys a strong message to the research community and university about the critical importance of the issues addressed.

Kansas State University's Advanced Distinguished Lecturer Award is a signature feature of its ADVANCE project, lauded by institutional leaders and faculty members as the program's greatest success and a "huge return on investment." The primary purpose of the program is to support and advance the careers of pre-tenure STEM faculty. Early-career STEM faculty women can propose to host a distinguished nationally recognized visitor (female or male) once a year for up to 5 years. The visitor spends time visiting the lab and discussing common research interests with the hosting early-career colleague, gives a talk open to the university community, and participates in a dinner with the host and her department chair and/or dean. This dinner serves to help the early-career faculty member become more visible and to highlight her research to institutional leaders. The program has had significant long-term results for early-career faculty participants, leading to ongoing and long-term collaborations, joint grant proposals, invitations to visit the senior scholars' campuses, the development of wide collegial networks, and publications. One institutional leader explained, "I just can't say enough about that program and the small amount of money it takes to make a huge impact on the individual faculty member and on the campus."

Evaluation

Most institutions have not provided evidence of careful evaluation of the process and impact of their visiting scholars programs. The basic metric listed in annual reports tends to be the count of attendees at talks done by visiting scholars. *Kansas State* asks grant recipients to report how the grant has contributed to their careers, which has resulted in reports of benefits to the early-career faculty. *Kansas State* also surveys those who have served as visiting scholars to learn about their views of the program. One finding of such surveys is that the prestige and distinguished name of the program is attractive to invited scholars.

Affordances and Limitations

The benefits discussed here are reported by the institutions we have studied that offer visiting scholar programs. We are not familiar with other research on the impact of this strategy for supporting women faculty and encouraging institutional change.

Benefits for the scholars who interact with visiting scholars

- Advice, mentoring, and the opportunity to interact with a role model who can describe experiences and offer guidance concerning professional and work/life issues
- Reviews of manuscripts and advice about research
- Reciprocal invitations to visit and speak at the institution of the visiting scholar
- Offers to collaborate with the visiting scholar on research, grant-seeking efforts, and projects
- Introductions by the visiting scholar to a broader group of colleagues and networking opportunities at scholarly and professional conferences
- The opportunity to interact with an advanced scholar who becomes knowledgeable about the early career scholar's work and can be called on as an external reviewer
- Visibility among department and university colleagues based on hosting the visiting scholar

Benefits to the institution that invites a visiting scholar

- Enhancement of the institution's intellectual vibrancy
- Heightened visibility of women in science and issues concerning gender in the workplace
- Visible benefits that may attract future applicants for faculty positions.
- Widened national visibility of the institution
- Visiting scholars may recommend the university to their undergraduates for graduate study

Benefits to the visiting scholar

- An opportunity to be generative while also being honored
- Enriched knowledge of other institutions' programs and expanded collegial networks

Limitations

- If a visiting scholar program is targeted to early-career female faculty, male colleagues may feel left out or resentful. Careful explanation of the purpose of the program can preclude or diminish this problem.

To cite this document

Austin, A. E., & Laursen, S. L. (2014). Strategic Intervention Brief #12: Visiting Scholars. In Laursen, S. L., & Austin, A. E., *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.