



Strategies for Effecting Gender Equity and Institutional Change

Strategic Intervention Brief #6

Equitable Processes of Tenure and Promotion

In this Brief, we focus on interventions that address institutional processes and procedures for faculty advancement through promotion and tenure (P&T). Because candidates' understanding of and attitudes about these evaluative processes are as important as those of the evaluators, we include interventions that inform and advise faculty as they go through these processes. We do not cover here interventions that address individual faculty members' development of professional credentials, skills, and capacities needed to obtain tenure or promotion (instead, see Briefs 1 and 2). Separately, Brief 8 on Flexible Work Arrangements addresses policies that adjust criteria and timelines for tenure and promotion to accommodate faculty responsibilities in both personal and professional domains.

Rationale

As formal mechanisms for the evaluation and retention of faculty, P&T processes are crucial in maintaining the intellectual excellence, creativity, and scholarly reputation of the faculty. When these processes are biased in subtle and often invisible ways, or when they fail to provide equal protection and transparency for all faculty, they may result in inequity that serves to maintain the status quo. As Marschke and coauthors (2007) point out, increased effort to hire women faculty does not lead to growth in women's overall representation unless attention is also paid to their advancement through the ranks. Relatively few ADVANCE IT projects in Rounds 1 and 2 focused directly on gender equity in institutional P&T processes, but many institutions addressed more generally the ways in which evaluation of faculty may be biased.

Careful analysis of institutional data is required to determine whether and where there are gendered differences in the rates of tenure or promotion from assistant to associate professor and associate to full, or in time at rank. For example, in their analysis of one institution, Marschke et al. (2007) found that women and men who applied were awarded tenure at equal rates, but women were somewhat more likely to leave the institution prior to a tenure review and substantially more likely to depart at mid-career. Fuzzy criteria for advancement and unspoken departmental expectations may impede a faculty member's success, and this may be exacerbated if women are excluded from informal networks where advice and information are shared. Thus, attention to transparency and equity in preparing for tenure or promotion can ensure that male and female candidates alike are well prepared for and well advised through each advancement process, and that candidates feel confident in facing this professional hurdle.

On the side of those evaluating P&T dossiers, research in cognitive science has identified the importance of subconscious or "implicit" mental processes in making decisions. Though we may like to think of ourselves as guided by explicit beliefs and rational thinking, research shows that people often hold unconscious assumptions that influence their judgments, including assumptions about physical or social characteristics associated with race, gender, and ethnicity, as well as stereotypes or expectations of certain disciplines, institutions, and job descriptions (Valian, 1999). Research also shows that these implicit biases are pervasive; many studies find, for example, that similar associations with gender are held by both men and women. Thus, establishing equitable P&T processes requires that people in evaluative roles know how to identify

these unreasoned distortions of judgment, guard against expressing them, and have ways to respond when their own or others' biases arise during deliberations.

Other issues arise due to gendered differences in the professional interests and activities of scholars. The literature suggests that women scholars may be more likely to pursue applied, interdisciplinary, or community-based scholarship; they may publish fewer but more significant papers compared to male peers (Rhoten & Pfirman, 2007; Demb & Wade, 2012; Duch et al., 2012). Women in departments with low female representation may face high formal and informal advising loads because women students consult them or choose them as advisors; they may be asked to serve on committees in well-intended but sometimes burdensome efforts to broaden committee representation; and they may receive more invitations to conduct outreach to members of underrepresented groups. These challenges are similar in nature but even more keen for faculty of color (Bellas & Toutkoushian, 1999). All of these factors may affect the number, nature, and authorship of scholarly publications that faculty produce, as well as the nature and number of other activities they present in their advancement portfolio, in ways that must be recognized when departments seek to value diversity and uphold fair standards of excellence.

Because the pre-tenure phase often overlaps with the years during which faculty members are starting families and raising young children, work/life issues are especially relevant to the tenure process and transition from assistant to associate professor (Mason & Goulden, 2002). Work/life concerns may also be factors in promotion to full professor, when women may have caretaking roles for older children or for ill or aging family members. While women's attrition or failure to advance is often explained as a matter of choice around work/family balance, such explanations tend to ignore systemic and gendered constraints (Beddoes & Pawley, 2013). Thus, work/life policies that allow for flexibility in individuals' job duties over time are highly relevant to equity in advancement. Due to their importance, such policies are discussed separately in Brief 8, but any consideration of equity in P&T processes should also attend to work/life issues so that, across the institution, policies and practices are mutually supportive and not in conflict or negatively reinforcing.

Moreover, promotion from associate to full professor may be a particular bottleneck for women's advancement. Data often show that women's time at the associate rank is longer. Issues raised in the literature include women's tendency to take on significant service roles that may not be valued in advancement decisions (Misra et al., 2011) and perceptions of vagueness, subjectivity, and lack of clarity about the timeline and criteria for promotion (Fox & Colatrella, 2006; Gardner & Blackstone, 2013). One of our interviewees hypothesized that, "Women wait for the fairy to tap them on the shoulder and tell them it's time to go up for Full Professor."

Purpose

Broadly speaking, ADVANCE projects sought to improve equity in tenure and promotion through several approaches. Efforts to increase the transparency of advancement processes aimed to inform all participants about formal P&T review processes and criteria. Changes to policy and procedure might put in place checks and balances to ensure that these formal processes were equitably applied. Goals of "transparency" targeted both applicants and reviewers, although different interventions were used to target the junior faculty who were candidates for tenure and the senior faculty who would review their cases.

In some cases, formal processes of P&T required adjustment in response to other institutional changes intended to address gender equity. For instance, enhanced institutional policies for flexible work arrangements, such as a policy on tenure clock stoppage for a faculty member with a new baby (see Brief 8), might also necessitate refinements to review procedures, such as developing standardized language for communicating the tenure clock stoppage to external reviewers.

A few ADVANCE projects targeted women's advancement of associate professors to full professor, through workshops or coaching that supported associate professors to reflect on whether and when to apply for promotion and advised them on preparing the portfolio.

While some institutions addressed issues related to formal P&T processes, rather more common among ADVANCE IT projects was explicit attention to informal sources of bias in evaluation more generally, including in hiring, awards, and recommendation letters, as well as advancement. Many projects made use of a growing body of literature on the psychological reasons for implicit bias and ways to combat it.

Audience

Educational efforts about implicit bias and how to detect and combat it in evaluating faculty were targeted at various groups of influential faculty, such as deans, chairs and heads, and faculty members of committees involved in hiring new faculty or selecting faculty for institutional awards. In a few cases, P&T committees were explicitly targeted. More often, tenure and promotion processes were not directly addressed, but because training was expected to reach many faculty over time, individual faculty might transfer and apply their knowledge of implicit bias in their evaluation of P&T cases (and even graduate admissions). We hypothesize that project leaders found it easier to present and discuss implicit bias in contexts where it was more hypothetical—consideration of candidates for faculty positions who were as-yet unknown—than in the setting of tenure or promotion, where the candidates are specific individuals already known to the reviewers.

Efforts to ensure that faculty approaching a tenure decision were well informed about the tenure process and criteria were generally targeted to all pre-tenure faculty as a group or by cohorts (e.g., all faculty preparing for a third-year review), perhaps depending on the size of the group. Some projects made special efforts to encourage women in STEM to participate.

Models

A variety of approaches were used to address equity in P&T processes. Broadly speaking, interventions were either structural, making adjustments to policies and formal procedures around P&T, or educational, seeking to influence the knowledge, skills, beliefs, and self-awareness of individuals about their P&T-related roles.

Structural interventions are designed to increase the fairness of formal advancement processes by establishing clear procedures, formalizing them across units, and ensuring that all candidates receive comparable advice and preparation. Policies and procedural guidelines might set in place checks and balances, assign oversight roles, or build in a standard timeline for initiating review processes so that faculty members are not left out and so that they receive accurate signals about their progress prior to major reviews. By clarifying and standardizing aspects of advancement processes that can vary from unit to unit or person to person, such interventions can also increase both real and perceived transparency and accountability in the P&T process. Structural interventions were less common among the ADVANCE IT projects we studied than were educational activities. Another type of structural intervention—policies that affect faculty duties (such as tenure clock stoppage)—is addressed in Brief 8 on flexible work arrangements.

Educational interventions seek to ensure that all participants in P&T proceedings are well-informed about the process and their own role. They aim to influence the culture, behaviors, and norms around advancement decisions by informing participants of requirements and expectations so that procedures can be applied equitably, educating them about potential sources of bias in evaluating candidates for advancement, and providing structures by which deliberations can take place and questions or concerns can be raised.

Structural and educational interventions were occasionally combined; for example, when certain types of training or preparation for P&T committees were required as a condition of committee service.

Examples of Structural Interventions

Georgia Tech established a new Office of Faculty Career Development Services, charged with processing all personnel transactions for academic faculty, including appointments, reappointments, promotions, tenure, post-tenure reviews, leaves of absence, and salary adjustments. Centralizing these activities was intended to reduce disparities from college to college and ensure that procedures were equitably applied.

Utah State University established the position of ombudsperson for each college and provided training to help those individuals carry out the ombuds duties. As non-voting members of each P&T committee, they monitor P&T activities and ensure that policies and procedures were uniformly applied. The ombudsperson uses a checklist to ensure that committee members are present and procedures are followed and has the power to stop a meeting if due process is violated; a signed copy of the checklist is included with the final decision letter. This policy was moved through the faculty senate and incorporated into the faculty code, the academic handbook defining faculty governance procedures. ADVANCE leaders observed that the ombuds process helped to catch and avoid procedural errors, dispel rumors of procedural abuse, and reduce the number of grievances filed.

Utah State also instituted a policy that a promotion committee be established for each faculty member 3 years after his or her promotion to associate professor, thus ensuring that faculty and their departments consider and periodically review each faculty members' progress toward promotion to full professor.

The *University of Texas at El Paso* instituted a third-year review, requiring all colleges to carry out a formal review of the progress made by untenured, tenure-track faculty toward tenure and promotion no later than the fall semester of the fourth year. This policy sought to provide faculty with a clear picture of their progress toward successfully achieving P&T and to give departments a chance to review accomplishments and provide assistance to their colleague prior to the tenure review.

Kansas State included a review of P&T documents for clarity and transparency as one requirement for departments funded in its ADVANCE initiative. In this highly decentralized institutional setting, documents did not have to be standardized across departments but were reviewed by the ADVANCE team for areas of potential bias, and advice was given to departments as to how they could improve their P&T processes and communications. Project leaders reported that, once given guidance, faculty could look at their policy documents and identify potential issues and ways to improve them. This can be viewed as a process of both education and improvement to formal P&T structures.

Examples of Educational Interventions

Here we separate examples of educational interventions by the audience and purpose of the educational activities. Recommended practices for all types of education included engaging faculty in active learning through role playing, analysis of problem-based scenarios, panel discussion, small group tasks, small-group breakouts, or whole-group discussion. Providing food and beverages helps to attract participants and foster informal conversation.

1. *Education and training on implicit bias*

At *Georgia Tech*, the ADVANCE program developed an interactive, online tool for preparing P&T committees for their work. The Awareness of Decisions in Evaluating Promotion and Tenure (ADEPT) tool includes case studies, games, and an extensive bibliography that are intended to help users learn to identify forms of bias in evaluation and thus achieve more fair and objective evaluations. Modules are targeted both to candidates preparing a record for evaluation and to members of P&T committees who will review such records. After piloting and testing, review of this online tool was required of all members of P&T committees, and often committees were also required to discuss best practices and fictional cases with their

peers. Leaders reported that committees that discussed the hypothetical cases and consulted the games found they had less contentious deliberations. Review of the fictional cases also helped committees to establish some shared understanding about criteria before they addressed the merits of particular tenure cases. The PC-based ADEPT materials are available to others under a no-cost license. <http://www.adept.gatech.edu/>

Several other institutions developed implicit bias training that was offered to various campus constituencies, including chairs, deans, and hiring committees. Anecdotal reports indicated some “trickle-over” effect of this training into P&T committee deliberations. These efforts are discussed further in Brief 5 on recruitment and hiring, because implicit bias training was often used as an intervention to influence hiring processes.

2. Education and training for institutional leaders

Several institutions offered workshops or seminar series to department heads that addressed their dual responsibilities for mentoring colleagues through P&T and carrying out evaluation processes fairly (see also Brief 4 on development of institutional leaders). These topics included

- implementing flexible work policies such as opportunities to stop the tenure clock or take on modified duties (see Brief 8), especially if these policies were new or revised;
- carrying out tenure review (for new chairs or after a new process was implemented);
- mentoring junior faculty through tenure;
- conducting annual performance evaluations or merit raises; and
- evaluating the scholarship of engagement.

In addition to workshops, a variety of other educational strategies for unit leaders were developed.

The *University of Michigan* ADVANCE program worked with an on-campus theater group, the CRLT Players, to develop and disseminate an interactive theater presentation called *The Faculty Meeting*, which depicted faculty discussions on important topics such as faculty searches and P&T decisions and how gender dynamics and faculty rank influence such conversations and affect the participants.

At *Virginia Tech*, results from the COACHE survey of pre-tenure faculty were used to educate department heads and P&T committees on how pre-tenure faculty experience life in their departments and the tenure process. (For more about COACHE, see <http://isites.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=coache>)

At *Georgia Institute of Technology*, the Promotion and Tenure Advance Committee surveyed the faculty to examine academic faculty perceptions of advancement processes, faculty development, and evaluation. The committee also identified best practices in unit P&T practices and generated a report shared with all deans and chairs and made available on the ADVANCE website.

The PACE program at the *University of Montana-Missoula* developed a “retention guidebook” intended to support chairs and other senior faculty in providing a supportive work environment and thus helping to retain a diverse and excellent faculty. The guidebook includes information on policies, mentoring, departmental climate, and everyday interactions. www.umt.edu/provost/faculty/faculty-development-office/chairs/docs/RetentionGuideBook.pdf

3. Education of pre-tenure faculty

Numerous institutions offered periodic short workshops or information sessions to inform pre-tenure faculty about the tenure and promotion process, discuss preparation of the dossier, and address questions. Some of the formats used included working lunches, presentations or panels of senior administrators and P&T committee members, or panels of recently tenured faculty. New faculty orientation offered an opportunity to

share selected information early in a faculty career, while workshops offered later in the career timeline could be more detailed and more focused. P&T topics were often incorporated as sessions into other, more comprehensive faculty development programs for early-career faculty (see Brief 1).

Basic topics included the departmental, college, and university review process and timeline and the rights and responsibilities of tenure candidates. More extended programs might include one-on-one consultation about dossier preparation, long-term career planning, or peer mentoring on issues of concern to faculty. Some projects constructed websites and FAQ documents that detailed processes and gathered resources.

At the *University of Maryland-Baltimore County*, procedures were formalized so that, by the end of their first semester, all newly hired faculty members will have worked with their department chairs to develop a personal career development plan. The plan identifies major milestones that must be met in order to have successful third-year review and tenure decisions. The design of this intervention has an educational emphasis but includes a structural element through its formalization across departments.

In addition, many ADVANCE projects noted that tenure-related concerns and questions were often addressed in their mentoring programs (see Brief 3). At *Case Western Reserve*, “speed mentoring” enabled individual pre-tenure faculty to get feedback and advice on their vitas from senior faculty from other fields, particularly on how their vita might be viewed by someone outside the discipline. Likewise, the *University of Colorado Boulder* found that a coach from a different department could dispel myths about P&T and reduce anxiety of pre-tenure faculty. Occasionally, more serious concerns could be identified and solutions sought proactively before they became barriers to a successful tenure bid.

4. Education for promotion to full professor

A few institutions offered occasional workshops or informational brownbag sessions for associate professors who were considering whether and when to apply for full professor rank. Topics included setting career priorities, making and implementing a career plan, and preparing a promotion dossier. Sessions provided opportunities for participants to reflect on and clarify their own goals and to compare notes with others. In some cases, these resources were targeted at women (and men) who had remained in the associate rank longer than average. ADVANCE leaders at one campus noticed a surge of applications, and several promotions to full professor, in the year following such a session.

Evaluation

Quantitative data from institutional records on faculty composition by gender and rank are often used to identify issues and monitor institutional or departmental progress on women’s advancement through the ranks. Interpreting these data can be challenging because the numbers of women in any given field are often small, and, thus, trends over time are hard to detect or to separate from the merits of specific advancement cases. However, such data, especially when set in a national, disciplinary context, can be useful in helping departments to identify opportunities to improve, as well as in monitoring progress on institutional goals.

Flux charts popularized by *Hunter College*’s Gender Equity Project have been a useful tool at some institutions to communicate changes over time in women’s status by rank within or across departments. They can be a visually effective way to portray trends in individuals’ movement between ranks, showing, for instance, whether a decline in the number of women assistant professors is due to their promotion to associate professor or their departure from the institution. Examples and instructions for preparing flux charts can be found at GEP’s website, <http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/genderequity/benchmarks.html>

For educational interventions, standard approaches for evaluation of workshops, such as short post-surveys or focus groups, can be used to probe the extent to which participants feel better informed and find the information useful and to refine the delivery of workshops and information sessions (see also Brief 1). It is

harder to measure or monitor the actual impact of educational approaches on P&T preparation, committee deliberations, or outcomes. Climate surveys may be useful both to identify issues that need to be addressed and to monitor progress on them. For example, many institutions have used the survey offered by the Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education (COACHE) for this purpose.

Affordances and Limitations

These affordances and limitations are observed in the context of ADVANCE IT projects in our sample.

Affordances of structural approaches include the following:

- Policy solutions are likely to be lasting and sustainable. Guidelines can be used to define in detail how the policy will be carried out and by whom. Institutional officers have responsibility and oversight for faculty advancement, and thus, lines of accountability are generally clear.
- Policies apply to everyone; thus, they can reduce the impact of informal processes that can be unfair and can also address perceptions of inequality

Their limitations may include the following:

- Aspects of campus culture—especially around centralization and hierarchy—may make it difficult or impossible to standardize P&T processes across all schools, colleges, or departments.
- Some resistance may be encountered if new procedures or policies are seen as infringing on faculty autonomy and leadership in defining standards of excellence for tenure and promotion.

Advantages of educational approaches include the following:

- Learning about implicit bias can be useful to faculty in multiple professional contexts, including evaluation for hiring, P&T, awards, admissions, writing recommendation letters, etc.
- Because tenure and promotion are important to faculty, education on these issues is likely to be taken seriously.
- Over time, education on this topic can reach many faculty and influence a cultural change in how advancement processes are carried out and dossiers reviewed—helping to “push the needle,” as one leader described it.

Limitations of these approaches include the following:

- Not all faculty participate in P&T deliberations, or they may not do so until well along in their careers. It may take a long time for new knowledge and behaviors to spread. Conversely, at some point the training will reach saturation and new approaches will be required.
- It is difficult to measure the impact of educational approaches on P&T outcomes.

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For Further Reading

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To cite this document

- Laursen, S. L., & Austin, A. E. (2014). Strategic Intervention Brief #6: Equitable Processes of Tenure and Promotion. 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.