



Institutional Portfolio
Utah State University
(USU)

Utah State University ADVANCE Institutional Transformation Project:

ADVANCE-US

Dates of Grant: Sept. 2003-Aug. 2010 (Round 2)

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Key Elements of the Overall Change Strategy

Based on a fairly extensive self-study prior to receipt of the award, including interviews and some baseline data collection, this project identified three primary areas of focus:

- Transform departmental climates by working at the department level to reduce stereotypes and to improve hiring processes and internal equity.
- Transform policies and procedures by updating policies, increasing transparency, and establishing precedents and training for administrators and faculty committees to reduce biased decision-making and address gender-related work issues.
- Transform faculty support infrastructure by strengthening structures that foster collaborative research and improve data collection.

The team referenced a “dual agenda” model as the conceptual basis for the project. Drawn from the business literature, the dual agenda links gender equity to productivity and engages work groups in identifying activities that would foster improvement toward both ends. This model was most clearly visible in the departmental transformation efforts; leaders reported this terminology was not explicitly used in describing the ADVANCE work within the institution. Another recurrent theme is strengthening faculty research through direct support, improving skills, and fostering on-campus collaborations.

Relevant Elements in the Institutional Context

- The campus is located in a rural part of a politically conservative state. Project leaders cited religiosity as shaping faculty perceptions of climate and as generating tensions in some departments. It was also a factor in faculty retention because historically spouses have had difficulty getting work in town. Leaders also reported location as an asset in generating a feeling of community, as faculty work, live, and socialize in the same town.
- Significant financial pressures on the university were evident in the reports, with budget cuts and no raises for faculty several years before the national recession struck elsewhere. Administrative turnover was high throughout the grant period.
- USU is a land grant institution whose doctoral programs emphasize STEM.

- Carnegie: Public RU/H, high undergraduate.

Scope of the ADVANCE Initiative

STEM departments in four colleges were included: natural sciences, engineering, agriculture, and natural resources. Some opportunities were targeted to women but none fully excluded men. Faculty programs were also open to non-STEM faculty. Some efforts to address recruitment of Native American students were incorporated.

Project Elements

Major activities included the following:

- *Transformation processes with nine departments.* These represented a significant effort, as interview and sometimes also climate survey data were gathered and analyzed, after which results were fed back to the department head and to faculty in a facilitated meeting so that department members could themselves identify and commit to potential solutions. ADVANCE then received proposals from these departments and supported the self-identified activities if these seemed realistic and aligned with the data analysis. Various department-identified initiatives addressed areas such as recruiting, strengthening research support and collaboration, increasing interaction and informal networking, improving the effectiveness of department meetings, bridging generation gaps, and supporting particular women faculty. These varied in success; the reports analyze contributing factors in some detail. Engagement of the department head was seen as especially critical.
- *Work/life efforts* addressed a range of issues, including lactation rooms, assistance with partner hiring, funding for faculty support during life transitions, child care referrals, and an on-campus child care center, now open.
- *Faculty development* included collaborative seed grants to women faculty undertaking new research projects, intended to foster success of tenure and promotion cases and develop informal mentoring relationships; an online mentoring handbook; a variety of one-off sessions on faculty work skills such as grant-writing; and leadership workshops for current and future department leaders.
- *Efforts on policies and practices.* The project developed training similar to the Michigan STRIDE program, known as the Science and Engineering Recruitment Team (SERT), on bias for search committees (later sustained through the human resources office); formalized and publicized a part-time tenure-track policy and a tenure-clock extension policy; developed and applied a non-discrimination statement about gender identity and expression; and formed a faculty senate committee on diversity and equity to oversee these issues. At the grant's end, a modified duties/family leave policy was in use in practice but had not been formalized. USU established college-level ombudspersons to ensure fairness of tenure and promotion processes and now requires a promotion committee to be formed within three years of tenure to inform and facilitate associate professors' advancement to full professor.
- *Substantial data-gathering* efforts were also carried out, and several of these were institutionalized as long-term institutional monitoring.

Outcomes

- The proportion of women assistant professors increased from 23% to 34% over the grant period, and that of women full professors from 5% to 8%. By the end of the project, hiring of women in most colleges was comparable to the national pool. However, these averages mask some significant departmental differences.

- Fifteen seed grant recipients were tenured or promoted.
- The average time for women in associate professor status has increased. The team explains this by the fact that more women are now in the pipeline for promotion to full professor; they are not solely the superstars who get promoted very rapidly.
- Climate survey results indicated a decline in gender difference over time between men's and women's perceptions of climate; at the later time point there are no statistically significant differences. This may mean climate had improved.
- A half-time vice provost was placed in charge of diversity and faculty development; this position was seen as crucial in sustaining ADVANCE gains. The provost's office sustained data collection of the NSF indicators, but responsibility for analyzing it was not assigned. Other activities were adopted by a new Women and Gender Center that united three earlier programs and ADVANCE; this center will offer workshops and networking. The ADVANCE program's experience with collaborative seed grants was used as a model in revamping internal grants offered by the university's research office.

Research Team Observations

- The sizable effort to improve departmental climates in a one-by-one approach is distinctive among ADVANCE projects and has required considerable courage. Successes have been mixed and context-dependent, but the process has been well-documented and offers useful information to others.
- This is a case where context has a clear influence on the problems identified as significant and the solutions that were pursued, as well as on the outcomes. Administrative turnover posed challenges that the team solved with great creativity, turning to other quarters on campus for ideas and help. It can be argued that USU's achievements are harder-won than some others.

For Further Reading

The program's website was not archived. Some individual documents—both internal documents and external resources—are available in the USU Digital Library Commons.

<http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/advance/>

Some presentations can be retrieved by searching for Utah State or its programs on the ADVANCE Portal.

<http://www.portal.advance.vt.edu/index.php>

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