There are significant differences by gender in the (a) expression of interest in a leadership position at Virginia Tech and (b) interest in leadership development opportunities. Of those responding to the question (n=742), significantly more tenured and tenure-track faculty women than men expressed an interest in a leadership position at Virginia Tech beyond their current position, such as a department chair, center director, or dean (women, 47% of 189; men, 31% of 553). Similarly, significantly more female than male respondents expressed an interest in opportunities to develop leadership skills (women, 77% of 194; men, 55% of 563). Non-Caucasians (all minorities) expressed significantly more interest (76% of 87) than Caucasians (59% of 670) in opportunities to develop leadership skills.
Interest in leadership positions is probably affected by perceptions of the availability of leadership opportunities. Slightly fewer women (56% of 180) than men (60%, of 529) somewhat or strongly agreed that significant leadership opportunities are available to them at Virginia Tech. Differences were not significant on this item by gender or ethnicity.

Balancing Leadership and Other Responsibilities

For faculty members, interest in leadership positions is probably influenced to some extent by perceptions about the ability to maintain an active research agenda and a concern about the impact on family and other work-life issues.

Only a small percentage of faculty respondents perceive that it is possible to hold a leadership position at Virginia Tech while maintaining an active research agenda (women, 18% of 183; men, 24% of 551) (see Figure 2). Differences by gender and ethnicity are not significant.

Concern about the ability to hold a leadership position and balance work and personal responsibilities is a second reason that may deter faculty members from considering a leadership position. Women have significantly greater reservations than men about the possibility of holding a leadership position at Virginia Tech and maintaining a balance with work and personal responsibilities. Male respondents (48% of 515) were significantly more likely than female respondents (29% of 179) to somewhat or strongly agree that it is possible to hold a leadership position at Virginia Tech and balance work and personal responsibilities.

“There are some leadership roles that I’m interested in, but I am really active in research right now and have to see how that plays out first.”
Female Faculty Member, March, 2004

Associate Faculty Interviews

Figure 2: Percentage of tenured and tenure track men and women who strongly or somewhat agreed that it is possible to hold a leadership position at Virginia Tech while maintaining an active research agenda or balancing work and personal responsibilities.

*not significantly different

“I share the viewpoint of many of my female colleagues that leadership would be more appealing if there were better representation of women in those positions. I would like to see that happen at Virginia Tech.”
Female Faculty Member Leadership Program Participant March, 2005
As has been found in national faculty surveys, women and minorities generally express significantly more concern than men about the representation of women and minorities among the faculty and in senior administrative positions and other diversity-related issues. Significantly more women (90% of 204) then men (59% of 532) somewhat or strongly agreed that there are too few women and minorities in leadership positions at Virginia Tech. Minority respondents were significantly more likely than majority respondents to agree that there are too few women and minorities in leadership positions at Virginia Tech. Similarly, significantly fewer female than male respondents agreed that faculty members are treated fairly regardless of gender (women, 40% of 198; men, 78% of 524), race (women, 50% of 181; men, 81% of 527), or sexual orientation (women, 40% of 198; men, 78% of 524). While not an uncommon finding in climate studies conducted in other settings, the huge gender gap in perceptions of fairness in matters related to diversity points to the need to include men in diversity initiatives.

Figure 3: Percentage of tenured and tenure track respondents who strongly or somewhat agreed that the leadership in their department can be trusted, by college. (n=788)

The majority of respondents expressed trust in the leadership in their department and the belief that there are administrators at Virginia Tech who model effective leadership. Most respondents (80% of 788) strongly or somewhat agreed that the leadership in their department can be trusted. Differences by gender and ethnicity are not significant. Faculty women (83% of 184) were significantly more likely than men (72% of 529) to somewhat or strongly agree with the statement “There are administrators at Virginia Tech who model effective leadership.”

A lower percentage of tenured and tenure track respondents (42% of 786) somewhat or strongly agreed that they have confidence in the university’s leadership overall. Differences are not significant by gender or ethnicity.

“... institutional transformation will occur at Virginia Tech as more women and underrepresented minorities enter visible leadership positions on and off campus. However, individual faculty are only going to be motivated to take on this challenge if they feel that the benefits outweigh the burden and risk to them and their careers.”

Female Faculty Member Leadership Program Participant March 2005

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Despite strong reservations, particularly in regard to the ability to balance work and personal responsibilities, female faculty members responding to the AdvanceVT Work-Life Survey expressed greater interest than male respondents in a leadership position at Virginia Tech and in opportunities to develop leadership skills. Similarly, minority respondents expressed significantly more interest than majority respondents in opportunities to develop leadership skills. The relatively high levels of interest expressed by women and minority faculty at Virginia Tech offers a unique opportunity to effect institutional transformation by expanding the diversity of perspectives brought to the table on important institutional decisions about policy and practice. Institutional transformation is further advanced when the representation of women and minorities achieves a level of visibility that communicates positive messages about institutional climate to potential faculty, staff, and graduate students.

Faculty appear to have largely positive views about their department’s commitment to diversity. Despite the concern for under-representation of women and minorities in leadership positions, most respondents perceived that there is support for the success of women and minority faculty in their department. Significantly more men (94% of 531) than women (75% of 207) agreed that their department is supportive of the success of women faculty and of minorities (women, 82% of 188; men, 92% of 529) (see Figure 4).

Perceptions do not always match reality. Despite the relatively low representation of women holding distinguished professorships and chairs (4 of 100 endowed professors are women; 4 of 20 distinguished professors are women), the majority of faculty (women, 65% of 179; men, 83% of 485) believe that women and minorities are well-represented among those in their department who are nominated for awards and honors. Differences are significant with fewer women than men agreeing with this statement.

**Figure 4: Percentage of tenured and tenure track women and men who strongly or somewhat agreed that their department is supportive of the success of faculty of all races and ethnicities and women faculty.**

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**Institutional Transformation Through Leadership**

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**AdvanceVT’s Leadership Development Program**

AdvanceVT addresses the empowerment of women and minorities as leaders and scholars by the creation of a leadership work group within the sub-structure of the organization. The mission and activities of this group incorporate:

- Leadership training for women and minorities.
- University-wide awareness of the representation of women and minorities in leadership positions.
- Financial support for women leaders visiting campus.
- Mentoring for women and minority faculty who might be considering leadership positions in the future.

For more information about AdvanceVT’s leadership programs contact Dr. Roseanne Foti, Associate Professor, Psychology (rfoti@vt.edu) or Dr. Karen Thole, Professor, Mechanical Engineering (thole@vt.edu).

AdvanceVT, Fall 2005

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