Lessons Learned from *AdvanceVT*

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VirginiaTech
Invent the Future

Introduction

AdvanceVT is a comprehensive program to promote and enhance the careers of women in academic science and engineering at Virginia Tech through institutional transformation. Programs target graduate students preparing for faculty careers, new faculty just starting out, senior faculty preparing for leadership roles, search committees, department heads, and senior administrators. As the grant funding expires, all aspects of the program are being evaluated and prioritized for continuation.

Increasing the number of women

❖ PhD and Post-doctoral Fellowships (19 awarded)
❖ Transforming the Professoriate Conference (2006, 65 attendees)
❖ Graduate student seminars (2-3/semester)

"Being exposed to such confident, accomplished women is really important for striving students who don't have such figures filling tenure-track positions in their own departments."
– seminar participant

Recruitment and Retention

❖ Brochure on Unrecognized Bias
❖ Search committee assistance
❖ College Liaisons (COS, COE)
❖ Visiting scholars program
  • 26 hosted to date, 4 hired
❖ Mentoring workshops (156 participants)
❖ Promotion to Professor panel (85 participants)

Leadership Development

❖ Leadership fellowships (6 awarded)
❖ Leadership development program (18 participants)
❖ Research seed grants (22 recipients)
❖ Faculty leadership lunches (2-3/semester)
❖ Distinguished lectures (1-2/year)

Updating Work-life Policies

❖ Dual Career Assistance
  Office established fall 2005
❖ Stop-the-Clock (Pre-Tenure Extensions)
  Existing policy revised 2006
  1 year automatic extension for new parents
  Language adopted for external letters
❖ Modified Duties
  Adopted 2006
  Central funding for one semester
❖ Part-time Tenure Track
  Adopted 2007
❖ Expansion of Child Care

"The new work-life policies at VT, such as modified duties, have been hugely instrumental in our getting our top candidates in recent years."
- Faculty survey respondent

Warming Department Climate

❖ New department head orientation (annual)
❖ Advancing Diversity Conference (annual)
❖ Negotiation and Conflict Resolution workshops
❖ Department Climate Compendium
  • Available at www.advance.vt.edu

Research and Assessment

❖ 2003 – 2007 New Faculty Cohort Interviews
❖ 2004 Child Care Needs Assessment Survey
❖ 2005 Faculty Focus Groups
❖ 2007 Underrepresented Faculty Focus Groups
❖ 2005 and 2008 Faculty Climate Surveys
❖ COACHE Surveys of Pre-tenure Faculty
❖ Work-life policy utilization tracking
❖ Promotion and tenure outcome tracking
❖ Numbers of women at various levels across the institution
❖ Seminar and workshop evaluations
❖ Follow-up studies of fellowship and grant recipients

Outcome Measures

The number of women faculty have increased across all colleges during the grant period.
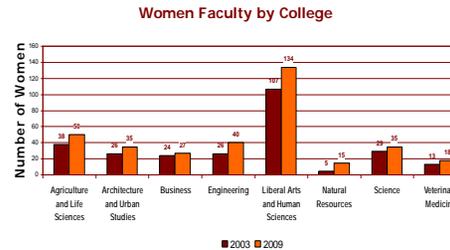

The percentage of women faculty in the College of Engineering was 13% in fall 2009, just above the national average of 12.3%, and an increase from 9.4% in 2003. The percentage of women faculty in the College of Science has increased from 15% to 17% in the same time period.
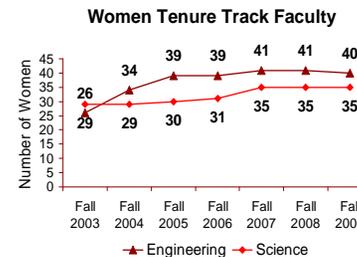

Women experience faculty life differently from men. While progress has been made in many areas, faculty survey findings indicate that more work is yet to be done.
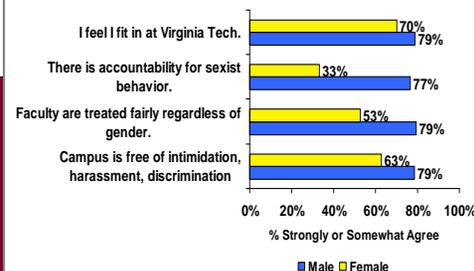
Flexibility and work-life balance are not just issues for women or for pre-tenure faculty; men and senior faculty need them too. Both men and women are taking advantage of work-life policies in increasing numbers.
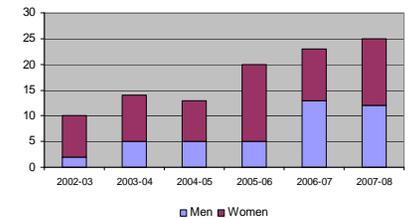
"[The stop-the-clock policy] was one of the reasons I chose VT because eventually I would like to start a family and knowing that I had the flexibility to do that made me feel that work-life was actually valued here."
– recent faculty hire

Reflections and Recommendations

❖ Perceptions matter, and evidence means different things to different people
❖ Approach to change must be comprehensive and responsive to institutional context
❖ Persistent, effective leadership from the top is critical
❖ Use data of all types to nurture an evidence-based culture
❖ Borrow freely and adapt strategies of others
❖ Build allies, especially men in key roles
❖ Money brings credibility but many important changes cost relatively little (*don't tell NSF this!*)
❖ Institutional transformation requires changes in policies, practices, norms, and culture -- and faculty norms and culture are very difficult to change