Launch Program Evaluation Summary: AY2013-2015
Launchees

In May, 2013 the ADVANCE Program initiated Launch with a pilot program of eight newly appointed assistant professor faculty in STEM fields in the LSA Natural Sciences Division and the College of Engineering. In 2014 and 2015 the program was open to all first year STEM professors in these two colleges; in addition, some STEM faculty from other colleges were included in the program. In 2014 there were 28 launchees and in 2015 there were 13 in the program.

Each year an evaluation of the program was conducted by the ADVANCE Program through surveys to all committee members. Included in the evaluations were open ended questions asking each respondent to describe the best things about participating in a Launch committee and also to suggest things that could have been done differently or better. In addition, in the first year (2013) we were able to compare the experiences of the eight launchees in the pilot program to 13 similar first year assistant professors in LSA Natural Sciences and Engineering who did not participate.

Following is a brief summary of the findings comparing launchees’ and non-launchees’ experiences from the pilot year data, followed by the responses from all of the launchees to the two open-ended questions about the Program, with examples of launchee responses

PILOT PROGRAM FINDINGS

As noted above, in the first year pilot program those in Launch as well as a comparison group of similar STEM first year assistant professors were surveyed about their experiences as a new assistant professor at UM. This kind of comparison became impossible when all STEM new hires in CoE and LSA were included in the program after the first year.

All of the pilot launchees reported quite positive early experiences at UM. Their ratings of department satisfaction and climate were also generally positive for both program participants and non-participants. However, compared with women non-launchees, women launchees reported significantly higher satisfaction with the amount of service they were asked to perform and were more likely to agree that their colleagues create a respectful work environment.

Both male and female launchees also reported that their research space was fully functional more quickly than faculty in the comparison group, and non-participants reported more or more longer-lasting problems with their research space.

Finally, all of the new faculty were generally satisfied with the mentoring they were receiving. However, launchees reported knowing significantly more senior UM faculty outside their departments and there was a trend suggesting more ease for them in identifying a senior colleague to help with a question or problem.

BEST THINGS ABOUT THE LAUNCH PROGRAM

Forty-five of the 49 launchees described what they found best about the program. Their comments were organized into six broad categories: the perspectives/advice from different mentors; the support and advocacy they received; connections the program facilitated to others outside their departments; the opportunity to raise questions; regular access to their department chair; and appreciation for the committee process and facilitation.
Perspective and advice from many different mentors.
Launchees valued having multiple mentors and gaining advice and information from many different points of view and backgrounds. One commented that the committee was a “great source of advice from people with different perspectives” and another agreed that the experience “brings new perspectives to the regular department culture/environment that junior faculty are normally exposed to. It helps the integration with the school beyond the department too.” Moreover, the new faculty appreciated “getting advice from senior faculty” including advice about funding opportunities, clarifications on procedures and processes, recruiting graduate students, how to negotiate the first year, and teaching as well as “having more than one mentor.” One launchee also noted, “I found that the first meeting in particular, which took place even before I moved to Ann Arbor, was very helpful, as it gave me a very good perspective on what I should start doing as a faculty member.”

Support and advocacy.
Beyond the information they gained from different faculty on the committee, the launchees also valued the support and advocacy these faculty provided. One reported,

I feel very supported here. My colleagues and launch committee take the mentoring seriously, they are enthusiastic about it but they also don’t pressure me to be mentored in a specific way.... I know the quality of the mentoring and the enthusiasm for helping junior faculty succeed is much higher here [than where I was before]."

In addition, launchees noted that the committee “provided support in a non-judgmental or evaluative setting” and “helped advocate for me with others when it was needed.”

Connections to those outside the department.
Launchees appreciated the opportunity to meet and learn from those outside their department. For example, one respondent valued “getting diverse opinions and having people outside my department weigh in.” Others noted “the excellent opportunity to get to know senior faculty members who I would have never had a chance to interact with” and “having people from both my primary and courtesy departments to help [me] learn about each other and where I fit in.”

Opportunity to raise questions, both by launchee and by other committee members.
Launchees appreciated the opportunity to ask their own questions as well as hear the questions asked by other committee members. One commented, “It was useful to have questions get raised, even when I wouldn’t normally ask them, and to see senior faulty discuss the answers in front of me. Even though I didn’t always participate, it was nice to hear professors talk about the issues.” Another noted that,

in all the launch committee meetings I felt comfortable asking all kinds of questions—where to submit papers, how to deal with colleagues, teaching questions, etc. I probably would not have made myself ask these questions had we not had meetings scheduled.

Another simply appreciated “having an opportunity to be able to ask questions, and more importantly, being told what questions I ought to be to asking.”

Regular access to chair and other faculty.
Several of the new faculty noted that the launch committee meetings allowed them regular access to their chairs and other senior faculty. One “liked having my chair’s ear for an hour a month” another appreciated the structure of having “a set time each month to discuss issues and my questions, with the department chair, my senior mentor, and a senior faculty member from another department present.”
Another respondent agreed, “I get my mentor and chair in the same room every month to discuss any problems I am facing. So, I didn’t have to go out of my way to approach them each time an issue arose.”

**Committee process and facilitation.**

Many of the launchees liked that the committee kept them on target and ensured they were focused on longer-term goals; “there’s someone who sort of keeps you on your toes, so that you don’t let something fall by the wayside while other things are getting done.” Several of the new faculty made special mention of the ADVANCE facilitators who convened and managed the meetings. One respondent noted, “My Launch convener was fantastic! He was very organized and helped to guide our discussions in fruitful directions.” Others appreciated the meeting agendas and follow-up minutes. One commented, [The committee facilitator] goes through the minutes, and then goes through to see what the progress is on each. That is really good.”

**WHAT COULD BE DONE DIFFERENTLY OR BETTER?**

Launchees had far fewer suggestions for changes to the programs; 17 provided responses. Their comments were generally related to three issues: frequency of meeting, member participation and content of meetings. Many had no suggestions for improvements.

**Frequency of meetings.**

Some of the launches expressed a preference for fewer meetings; one suggested no more than three per semester. Another found that there was much less to talk about by the end of the year. Others wanted the committee to meet more frequently, for example a “minimum of monthly meetings.” Finally, one commented that “there were times when the meetings were too often, and times when there were too few. I think three per semester would have been ideal, maybe once every six weeks.”

**Member participation.**

Several launchees discussed member attendance at the meetings—both the lack of attendance by some committee members as well as a desire to have conversations without the full committee in attendance. One, for example, expressed concern that members weren’t always in attendance and commented that “ensuring sustained participation of the committee members could be improved.” Another sometimes found some members “disengaged.” In contrast, others thought it wasn’t essential to have every member at every meeting. For instance, several appreciated the chair’s presence but at times felt discussions would have been different without the chair present. Another suggested that members rotate attendance “so we’d have 3-4 regular [members] and one new person every month.” Similarly, one found having four senior faculty at the meeting made it very formal and “evaluative.” Another agreed, “there have been a couple of times when I would have been happier having a one-on-one conversation with anybody on the committee. It’s a little paralyzing when I have to speak in front of everybody.” One launchee suggested that not everyone attend every meeting and substitute those missed meetings with individual coffee or lunch meetings.

**Content of meetings.**

Some launchees would have appreciated more specific advice. For example, one wanted more help with teaching (“come see me give a lecture, take a look at my exams”). Another indicated that “it would be nice if they ’insisted’ they read my grant proposal, or meet with me one-on-one to discuss teaching or proposals, because some people are too intimidated or embarrassed to ask a Launch Committee member for help.” Similarly, one commented that the meeting agenda was driven solely by the questions being asked, rather than proactively setting an agenda; “for example, in retrospect it would have been helpful to talk more about my research directions, but no one ever asked.”