

Final Report
ADVANCE Departmental Transformation Grant Faculty Interviews, 2006
University of Michigan

Jean Waltman, Center for the Education of Women
March, 2007

Introduction

What have been the effects of ADVANCE at the University of Michigan? To help answer that question, this report focuses on one of the interventions outlined in the original NSF proposal: *Departmental Transformation Grants*. These grants involved substantial awards (up to \$250,000) to departments that made rigorous, specific and ambitious proposals for improving their own internal policies, practices and climates, based on analyses of the current situation and recent past. In the first round competition for these grants (2003), three awards were made: one in LS&A, two in the College of Engineering. These three departments were aware of and strongly engaged with ADVANCE, and included at least some faculty who supported the process of transformation. For comparison, we selected two departments—one in LS&A and one in CoE—that did not receive initial DTGs and had relatively similar demographic and intellectual profiles to the grantee departments. Initial interviews with men and women faculty members in all five departments were conducted near the beginning of the grant period; followup interviews were conducted in Fall 2006 during the last semester of the grant period. A total of 23 faculty were interviewed in the DTG departments at Time 1 and 13 (or 57%) participated in a followup interview. Sixteen faculty were interviewed in the “non-DTG” departments, of whom 10 (63%) were interviewed at Time 2.

Faculty from the three departments that won initial round DTG funds reported more benefits from ADVANCE initiatives than did faculty from the two departments that did not. The DTG departments have in common the fact that they were already more successful than the comparison departments at the time of the award, both in terms of their general climate and the climate for women. Perhaps this is not surprising. After all, they are the departments that were willing, at the time the DTGs were announced, to have conversations about the issues of women in science and engineering; willing to designate someone to write a persuasive proposal for a DTG grant and to offer at least minimal support for doing so. While the comparison departments engaged in some of these activities as well, they did not provide the same level of rationale, or evidence of the same level of departmental engagement, in their proposals. Awards were made to the departments that were more ready to deal with issues of gender and, in one case, had already begun before ADVANCE to identify and deal with some of the climate/policy/practice issues that they believed were dragging them down.

The interview study showed that the two comparison departments were more troubled units. Because they were consumed by serious dissension and systemic problems, members of these two departments were not able or willing to address gender issues—

even though in both cases such discussions might have pinpointed one of the major underlying causes for the poor climate.

At the outset of this project, the planning group for the interviews decided that all of the tenure-track women who held primary appointments in all of the five departments should be interviewed, as well as an equal number of men, matched by rank. Not every woman in the five departments agreed to an interview. In the end, 14 of the 18 tenure-track women in the five departments, and 17 of the 106 men in the five departments were interviewed. Twenty of the interviewed faculty were full professors, five were associate professors, and six were assistant professors. In addition, seven women and one man who were faculty members who had joined their departments since the time of the initial interviews were interviewed in 2005.

For the 2006 follow-up, all of the 39 people interviewed earlier were contacted, though some were on sabbatical or had moved away from Michigan. A few people who had joined their departments since the first interviews were also contacted. In the end, a total of 23 men and women faculty in the five departments participated in followup interviews. Content analysis of all of the interviews yielded insight into the commonalities among the grantee departments and differences from the comparison departments. This report summarizes the key findings from that analysis, and uses selected excerpts from the interviews to illustrate those findings.

Departments with Transformation Grants

Analyses of the interviews with those faculty from the three departments with transformation grants indicated that those departments benefited from ADVANCE programs in four ways:

1) Awareness, Climate and Transparency

In one of the departments, ADVANCE validated the kinds of positive changes that some members of the department had already begun to promote and implement shortly before the University received its award. In other words, on their own—and in conjunction with some encouragement from the Dean's Office—concerned faculty had been working to improve the tenure process, create a more transparent and inclusive governing system, and hire more women faculty. The ADVANCE mandate, including both the local and national empirical data, raised awareness of the problems women scientists faced, confirmed the legitimacy and importance of the department's efforts, strengthened the resolve to continue the improvements, and provided financial resources to do so.

In 2003, one senior male professor explained that, from the ADVANCE-based research he'd recently been reading, he concluded that he had been “completely out of touch with some of the things that go on [for my women colleagues].” His new awareness might have been shared by some of his male colleagues in the department at that time, but he suspected that “a quarter of the faculty believe fundamentally that women...don't really belong on the faculty, are only on the

faculty because of some affirmative action and not because of their merits.” Three years later that viewpoint is less prevalent (or at least harder to observe) because of ADVANCE-supported initiatives described below.

The increased awareness has paid off in more transparent procedures in the department. The current, very open tenure process was begun shortly before ADVANCE began. The process continues to be a source of satisfaction for the faculty. One senior male said, “I think the tenure procedures are better these days. It’s a much more open, documented, transparent environment. And I’m not worried about going back [to the old, secret process.]”

According to a junior faculty member, “The tenure process is very transparent. You know who is on your committee, and I frequently bug the chair of my committee. He doesn’t seem to mind, and he’s helped [and encouraged] me with my proposals....Seeking out one’s mentor is really encouraged.” Another junior woman compared the tenure process in her department “to people I know at other universities, where it’s very much ‘black hole-ish.’ You know, you give them some documentation and then some months later some answer is returned to you. So, yeah, I really appreciate the fact that here you’re kept informed about what the committee and department is thinking [and doing.]”

This situation is clearly supported by the fact that the chair is committed to transparency and to keeping faculty members involved in departmental decision making. One woman described the current chair’s style as much more democratic than the department has experienced before. “The chair wants to have a discussion and wants to get people’s input.” Though this woman is sometimes frustrated by faculty meetings that “turn into a free-for-all sometimes,” she concludes that the chair’s way is ultimately better and leads to better relationships among faculty members.

In a second DTG department, the department chair has recently directed a process to renew and change all the governance policies, in order to get the faculty more engaged in various administrative responsibilities and decision making.

In the third DTG department, issues of transparency are under discussion but not fully addressed. One male faculty member explained that “Not everybody agreed with the way the last chair ran the department. He had his own idiosyncratic ways of dealing with issues, through hallway talk and things like that, which for some people made things seem not so open. The new chair has his own ways of doing things, but I’m not sure anybody’s figured out what they are.”

A senior faculty member who’s concerned by the communication methods in the department said, “It is complicated if you have to connect across a number of faculty to the chair to discuss issues....It’s not that anyone’s hiding something from someone else. But everything needs to be transparent and well communicated as well.” In his opinion, even good information—if it doesn’t

reach people in a clear and timely manner—can't help. And that kind of condition is harmful for everyone but especially younger faculty trying to figure out what the department's looking for, where they fit in. It can lead to problems.”

Although the issue of transparent practices was still unresolved in this department, faculty advancement into the tenured ranks was altering both the way things were done and the balance of power across academic generations. According to a new associate professor, “I think there was a definite transition [once I got tenure]. As soon as we hired those new people, then suddenly I had people rolling into my office wanting advice...or needing someone to take up their case and yell at somebody for them because they don't feel entitled to yell at anybody yet. So there is definitely a change there; my role in the department is different.”

Another said, “There are a number of us who were juniors that are now more senior and it seems like we actually have a voice in the department. I have a lot more responsibility that I did before...I feel a stamp of approval that changes your world view. And all of a sudden people start coming to you and asking for your opinions.”

Another role the associate professors are taking on is mentoring their new junior colleagues. They admit that the new people are getting support to varying degrees, depending upon how willing they are to seek it out. One woman said, “When I arrived here, I did feel very isolated but I don't anymore. When the junior faculty come to me now, it's nice and I can tell them a lot. And so I really make an effort. The way we do mentoring hasn't changed, but there's more people who've gone through [the junior ranks], and so we're being more proactive. And I think that's a big difference. Don't know how long that's going to last.”

2) **Direct Support to Women Faculty**

Funding from the ADVANCE Departmental Transformational Grants enabled the departments to create specific kinds of supports for women faculty.

In one department, the chair enhanced the monthly luncheons earlier established for male and female junior faculty. Those lunches are becoming an established and highly effective part of the departmental culture. For the junior women, the lunches are one of the key factors in making them feel supported, appreciated, and successful. As one faculty member explained,

Some aspects of ADVANCE have been really important. There's an assistant professor lunch once a month. That might not sound [like much]. But it turns out the group has loved it. It's made them communicate with each other, and it's made sure that they all understand what's going on. They function as a unit ...It has

turned out to have been a pretty important thing [for] the overall morale of the assistant professor cohorts.

It appears that the ADVANCE-sponsored lunches have helped not only current but also potential future junior faculty. According to a junior woman,

The lunches turned out to be a really good recruiting tool for the Department, because the relationships that evolved from the lunches came naturally. When we had candidates back for a [second] visit, we would usually have one of those lunches. I think they could see what a competitive but friendly and supportive environment it was here. Our recruiting has been really good; we've recruited a number of additional women in the last few years. And I think [the lunches] are partly why. Nothing overt but, at least as far as I can tell, [the candidates] all comment on our great environment for assistant professors, a great place to start a career.

The other two departments used their DTG funds to support their women faculty (both junior and senior) with released times and other opportunities. For example, in one of the departments one woman has recently been promoted to full professor, and the men to whom I spoke credited ADVANCE funds (which she used to support a research project and gain a course release) for helping her to make that step. Likewise, that woman is known to believe that the climate, and in part the departmental ADVANCE initiatives, helped in recruiting the new junior women faculty. In the other department, DTG funds were used to support individual women faculty with release time, conference costs, or graduate student assistance, for example. For the women who received this assistance, ADVANCE obviously was a good thing. Furthermore, the male faculty members seemed pleased that their women colleagues were afforded such opportunities.

3) **Hiring**

Members of all three departments reported that ADVANCE had affected their approach to hiring. STRIDE, the ADVANCE initiative designed to inform departments about potential biases in hiring procedures, has also had a big impact on one of the departments. In the words of one faculty member, STRIDE workshops have "made people more aware of what they're doing when they evaluate applications...aware of the prejudices they might have."

Following the recommendations of STRIDE, that department restructured its faculty hiring process, conducting one open search for all candidates instead of creating separate hiring committees for each opening. The results appear to have

been well received by members of the department. It has, said one woman, “changed the way, hopefully, we’re going to do hiring in the department.” It has also resulted in the hiring of new women assistant professors in a context where gender “wasn’t even an issue....It was just ‘This is our best candidate, this is our top candidate, this who we want to go after.’”

The following account from a junior woman faculty member in this department suggests that ADVANCE and STRIDE are having an impact of the gender attitudes of senior male faculty:

I read [a letter of recommendation for a female applicant]. An older male professor had written it, and when I read the letter, I joking[ly] said, ‘I don’t want to meet this person because it looks like she’s going to run all over me and beat me to the ground.’ That’s how she was described in the letter. Her CV and everything else looked good, but from the letter I thought, ‘I’m not too sure about this person, very pushy, very bossy. Basically if she wants something she’s going to get it, no matter what,’ which can be a good thing, but it was over the top, like somebody who sounded very scary in my opinion.

But then the [male] chair of the search committee said, ‘We’re all taking this STRIDE workshop and [learning that] this [letter] may be typical....Basically what the letter says is that she’s a leader, but because she’s female it tends to be described in a different way.’ In other words, the search committee was totally aware. They had said, ‘Okay, [the letter] sounds strange, but we think she’s really good.’ I thought it was interesting, that I [a woman] didn’t even pick up on it when I read the letter, but [the search committee] realized that ‘It’s probably just the way she’s described, so we’ll see. We will interview her for sure, and then of course we can make a judgment. Maybe he was right. Maybe she will be overbearing, but....’ [Things like that] really make me feel that this a good place to be.

A junior woman in this same department commented that, “We’ve achieved critical mass and so it makes it [gender] not a big deal at all, which is perfect, exactly how you want it to be.”

Another woman commented that the idea of the open searches was “to bring in the best people and make an offer to someone who was best, even if they weren’t in our top priority area. And so there were a lot more arguments [in the hiring committee meetings] about the qualifications of the candidate than about what little area we needed to be hiring for....I think people were pleased with the results and hopefully it will continue.” One of her male colleague agreed, saying “The open searching has worked very well...in identifying outstanding candidates, not in identifying [only] outstanding women candidates.”

There was also a raised awareness of gender and hiring procedures among the men in a second department. As one of the men said, “My feeling has been that we should always be hiring the best people, and if we do that with sensitivity we will have a diverse place....If we make sure we are sufficiently sensitive to people’s individual needs and pressures and make sure they know they are welcome here and treated fairly, we will have a very strong department with people working together—and I think it’s working out that way.”

Increased successful hiring in the DTG departments had an overall impact as well. In the third department, a senior male faculty member said, “In terms of climate, I thought it was fairly good before. And it’s not dramatically changed for the better or worse,” except for more focus on diversity and for the increased influence that the younger faculty is having on many aspects of the department.” He was referring to the fact that the young faculty members have now all attained tenure and have assumed more authority and voice in the department, as well as many more responsibilities.

4) **Work/life issues**

By the time of the follow-up interviews, several of the interviewees had experienced recent pregnancies, childbirths, or adoptions. For many of them, the primary issues they now faced have to do with family issues. As one woman described it, “Lots has changed in the makeup of the department, including age, gender, race; and a lot of faculty have had children.”

There are indications that in these three departments the issues were being dealt with in positive ways (though not without some difficulties, described below). For example, one assistant professor said that when she turned in her annual report, “I wrote that I was a little frustrated because I can’t do as much as I want because I have a family now....The committee came back to me and said, ‘Oh, you don’t have to say that. We understand.’” The same department has embraced the new university-wide modified duties policy that enables fathers as well as mothers to have a semester of teaching relief after the birth or adoption of a child. As one senior man said, “I think most people understand that kids are a lot of work.” One young parent who used the policy praised the departmental attitude that “if you’re male and your wife has a baby, you know you get modified duties. It’s not a question of ‘Do you want it?’ It’s more like ‘We assume you’re going to take modified duties and, if you’re not, we’ll give you an extra TA position, we’ll pay for one of your graduate students to help supervise your class when this is going on, or whatever.’...I get the sense that [this isn’t how other departments do it] or at least the men are discouraged...but here there’s just no question that, if your family has a child, that’s what you’re going to do, and I think it’s made everybody happier. And it makes the women not feel like they’re being given some kind of special treatment.”

In one department, a faculty member took a semester free from teaching for the birth of a child. According to a departmental colleague, “No one objected; it was fine. I didn’t hear a single complaint about it.” The faculty member who took the leave was not so sure about the reaction to the leave, however. “I didn’t realize it at the time...but I’m becoming aware that the modified duties leave [that I took] is not a risk free thing...It’s possible there could be another environment [perhaps another department, another institution, another career line] in which my choices would be valued differently, but that’s just not the environment that we really find here [in my department] right now. You know, in a different environment, my chair would have told me this policy existed. He would have suggested that I take it. There’s a whole other level in how this could have been done...I had the right to do these things, and actually the way it’s written up, it’s a benefit, right? But I felt like I was taking a leap. So if 15 years down the road I’m chair, if I become aware of someone who could use these [flexible career] policies, I’m gonna walk it right down to them and say, ‘I don’t know if you know about this, but this is available to you. It’s entirely [your right], and you should consider this.’ That would have been a very different way of doing it and it didn’t happen [with me].”

A woman faculty member has sensed the same reactions from her colleagues. She said that one of her major surprises since becoming a mother is the unspoken reactions of some of her colleagues. She perceives that some of them may be disappointed by her decision to become a parent, concerned about how it will affect her commitment to her career.

These faculty members are sensing an important distinction between the language and intent of modified duties and other flexible career policies and the way they are received within the departments. One parent now believes he was wrong to think that “all parents go through exactly what I’m going through. I’m actually thinking now that that’s not true. I thought it was a generational divide; that senior [especially male] faculty came from situations in which they were not ‘co-equal caregivers’ for their families...but that all future faculty members that came through would be...But there are faculty members who are my age who do not face my issues and are not likely to. Their view on how they’re going to do [their careers] is that they are not [going to be] co-equal caregivers.”

Comparison Departments

Two departments (one in each college) were selected for comparison with the three departments with major departmental transformation grants. These departments were roughly the same size, with similar rank and gender demographics, and represented related types of disciplines. They were relatively unaffected by ADVANCE programs and activities, with the exception of the networking activities at the University level, aimed at women.

Climate. The climates in both of these departments were described by their faculty as conflictual and unpleasant.

In one, there was a distinct gulf between the male and female faculty, understood by many as a conflict between the more aggressive men and the less aggressive women. Women felt marginalized, invisible and powerless in the department when ADVANCE began and don't feel much less so now.

I've gotten a better understanding of the situation here. There are so many problems, but for me the major problem is not a gender one. It's meanness—to everybody, regardless of race or gender....I don't understand how some of these senior faculty think, [but] it is a loud aggressive character in the department that seems to be promoted....It's the personality [type] that gets rewarded....In faculty meetings people say outrageous things, and they're allowed to do it.

Quite honestly, there is a group of senior faculty that are just curmudgeons. It can't be perceived as a gender issue because they're not friendly to women but they're not friendly to men either....The environment is just pretty unwelcoming...and unsympathetic in general terms.

These women felt that conditions will not get better when these senior men leave "because they're training the younger guys, you know...with that [certain] affect, very confident."

At the time of the followup, women reported still having these feelings but also spoke with more conviction and solidarity about gender inequities in their department. Hearing about conditions in other departments and being exposed to the research on women in the STEM disciplines has helped them to articulate their own frustrations. Furthermore, the ADVANCE programs have introduced them to women outside their own department. As one of the women said,

The big [ADVANCE] dinners and lunches actually helped a lot because now I find that I'm [in the airport] and I'll see a woman that I'd seen at an ADVANCE event. We'll sit down and start chatting, so it's been really fun to get to know faculty in other departments and other places that I wouldn't have gotten to know otherwise. That's been probably the biggest impact for me—broadening my horizons on campus and opening up the community for me in a way that certainly wouldn't have been done without ADVANCE.

Other women commented on the continuing isolation, even among the women. For example, one said that if there's any socializing,

It happens between the guys in the hallway....I can't say I have had any bad interactions with any of the women in this department, but we're each in it on our own....The lunches [we used to have] were nice to help us realize that some of the

same things were happening to all of us, but they didn't really make us that familiar or sisterly or friends of any sort....Women can be the worst, you know. We see these happenings, but we are in it for ourselves, and we might not be able to help the sinking ship.

The second department was not divided so much along gender lines, but it was polarized around subfield differences, and conflict-ridden. The conflicts were factional, subject-based, and also based in personalities, but they have persisted despite departures and arrivals of quite a few apparently key players over the past few years.

Transparency. Both departments were also described as lacking transparent policies and practices. One woman, describing one department's faculty meetings, said,

It's almost preposterous because sometimes we're asked to discuss issues when we don't have all the facts....They try to make it seem democratic, but the chairman makes certain decisions that you never even hear about, and then we discuss in this very open-ended way other issues [about which] there are things we don't understand."

Another commented,

All the important negotiations seem not to occur at faculty meetings. They do not occur in the open; they occur, I think when [some male faculty members] come up with a plan....The rest of us find out about it when it's a fait accompli.

And another pointed out that,

Our chair does like to make unilateral decisions...he's learned lately to be more conscientious about asking people's opinions, whether or not he takes them into consideration....Some of the decisions are really still 'Where was that decision made exactly?' It just comes out of the blue."

Although overall transparency is perceived to be seriously lacking in both departments, one faculty member did point to a recent effort to revamp the tenure review process in one department. This has opened up the voting to all tenured faculty which he believes has increased transparency and given everyone more responsibility in the department.

Conclusion

The findings from these interviews suggest that attempts to improve the departmental climate for women are more effective when:

- A majority or at least a sizeable minority of faculty members are already familiar with the notion that gender inequities exist, may have already identified gender disparities as a problem within their department, and are willing to tackle them.

In such cases, the ADVANCE programs and funds are valuable resources to support their efforts.

- The department is not dealing with other, more immediate divisiveness and disruption. An otherwise troubled department may be unwilling to accept programs like ADVANCE, which rely upon faculty cooperation, open-mindedness, and willingness to support programs even if they are perceived to benefit one part of the faculty over or at the expense of others.
- Some one or some group within the department is willing to champion the cause and see that ADVANCE-like initiatives occur and do not falter over time.

The three departments that won Departmental Transformation Grants welcomed an infusion of ADVANCE funds to use in ways they believed would be useful in supporting their women colleagues. They ended up actually benefiting in four ways:

- Increased understanding, improved climate and increased transparency of procedures and policies;
- Direct support to women faculty;
- Improved hiring procedures and successful recruitment of new faculty;
- Increased attention to work/life issues.

In short, real progress was visible in these departments, despite their relatively positive climates at the outset of the DTG grant period. At the same time, it is important to note that many interviewees pointed to unfinished aspects of departmental transformation and the need for continuing efforts to make the climate truly positive and collegial for everyone.

In the two comparison departments, which were characterized by conflict-ridden climates and extremely low transparency, few of the benefits listed above occurred. However, the women did value the opportunities to network with their female colleagues at ADVANCE-sponsored workshops, speaker series, and social events.