

## LAUNCHING NEW FACULTY CAREERS: BUILDING A STRONG FOUNDATION FOR A DIVERSE FACULTY

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*We describe a new approach to orienting new faculty in academic institutions. This approach to “onboarding” is spread out across the first year of a new faculty member’s appointment and involves participation of the new faculty member along with four senior faculty members: the department chair, one senior faculty member with related interests from the department, one from a different department, and a trained senior faculty convener from a different field. Monthly meetings are chaired by the convener and systematically cover topics important to the faculty member’s new role and adjustment to the new community (inside and outside the institution). Data are reported for the first 82 “launch committees” for STEM faculty at the University of Michigan. Although new faculty were not asked directly, 98% of the 251 senior faculty described this new approach—year-long launch committees—as valuable and worth sustaining. As a result, there was widespread adoption of the model throughout the campus (beyond STEM fields). We close with suggestions for systematic research on the critical factors for success of a launch committee program.*

**KEY WORDS:** *diversity, faculty, onboarding, socialization*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

When predominantly White academic institutions make serious efforts to recruit and retain a genuinely diverse faculty, many processes must change, not just the process of recruitment (Stewart and Valian, 2018). Without active development of new methods of providing advice, support, and mentoring, the normal processes of institutional exclusion will make it less likely that those underrepresented in the institution will thrive. “Natural” mentoring and sponsorship will ensure that only the well-represented faculty will be provided quick and timely information about resources, procedures, and important milestones; offered opportunities to collaborate; or advised about setting priorities. In many fields, White women and underrepresented minorities—in some fields including Asian Americans—will struggle with excessive demands for service, too little in-

formation and support, and fewer opportunities (Chesler and Young, 2013; Gutierrez y Muhs et al., 2012; Rockquemore and Laszloffy, 2008).

When new faculty arrive at an institution, fresh from obtaining their doctorate, or from a postdoctoral or non-tenure-track experience, they embark on a process that is in some ways familiar. They have mastered different learning institutions, often many of them, and they have started many new school years with excitement about their opportunities and optimism about their success. They have been good at this process for more than two decades, and they have almost always loved being students.

Despite these previous academic experiences, there are crucial differences for a new assistant professor on the tenure track. The role they are taking on is one they have seen enacted many times—sometimes by many people like them, sometimes not—but even if they have had opportunities to teach classes as graduate students, postdocs, or adjuncts/lecturers, this is the first time they are taking on the whole role of tenure-track faculty member. But really—is it so different? The truth (and the cliché) is that it is. The tenure-track faculty role carries new rights and responsibilities. Faculty have rights to a salary and a title, to office space, and access to other institutional resources, even without considering the more abstract right (to academic freedom). They have the right to pursue an independent research program, making all the decisions about it for themselves. And they have some rights (variable by institution) to define the courses they teach and how they teach them. Finally, they have a right—as long as they meet their classes—to manage their own time. These are heady freedoms for those who have been supervised for a very long time. Of course, new tenure-track faculty also have responsibilities to meet the standard of that institution for research productivity, to teach courses adequately and that are needed in the curriculum, to behave responsibly toward and mentor students, to provide some well- or ill-defined institutional services, and to be collegial with other faculty. All of these are understood to be part of the role or the job, but they are also fairly vague. They can be enacted adequately—or not—in a wide range of ways.

### 1.1 Onboarding in the Academy

Sociologists conceptualize the process of entering a new work situation for the first time as involving socialization into a role and an organization, and often development of a new identity (Slaughter and Zickar, 2007; Tierney and Rhoads, 1994). They also view it as a frequently stressful process (Caldwell and Peters, 2018; Ellis et al., 2015). Social scientists who focus on work or organizations tend to think of the process of entering any organization as one that requires onboarding or assistance with entry (Caldwell and Peters, 2018; Ellis et al., 2017). This process is one that includes a lot of new information about the organization, but it also involves dispensing of advice, or mentoring. Academic organizations increasingly recognize that new faculty need onboarding and mentoring, but often the onboarding is carried out in an orientation event that involves a rush of information, experienced as like drinking from a fire hose (Bradt and Vonnegut, 2009), and mentoring is frequently viewed as a one-on-one relationship that may last a lifetime (Allen and Eby, 2010).

## 1.2 Socialization to the Role

Research on how doctoral students are “socialized into the academy” focuses on the process by which doctoral students develop a disciplinary identity (identification with engineering or chemistry, psychology or English), as well as an academic identity, or identification with academia and even the institution they attend (Stewart and Dottolo, 2005). Tierney and Rhoads (1994, p. 29) described the process as involving both investiture, or affirming relevant qualities the individual brings to the situation, and divestiture, or “stripping away” irrelevant or inappropriate ones (see also Weidman et al., 2001). Ultimately, the process of doctoral student socialization is intended to encourage qualities that will enhance subsequent thriving in academia and to discourage the persistence of any that will preclude it. Inevitably, it is stressful.

Socialization to the role of faculty member is usually presumed to build on the socialization already accomplished in graduate school (Fleming et al., 2016). Thus, new faculty are assumed to be strongly identified with their discipline(s) and to have accepted the norms and practices of academia. But, even if both of these processes are complete—and they may not be—the new faculty must be socialized into the particular norms and values that operate within a particular academic institution and department (Stewart and Valian, 2018). And, they must do so while occupying the new role of assistant professor—a role in which, vis-à-vis students they are authority figures and vis-à-vis colleagues, they are relatively low in the faculty hierarchy.

Research across work settings suggests that newcomer adjustment (role clarity, self-efficacy, and social acceptance) is related to good organizational outcomes such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job performance, intentions to remain in the position, and low turnover. The link between them is presumed to be a function of organizational socialization practices, which may include a variety of strategies. Bauer et al. (2007) present a meta-analysis of this literature, testing these links.

What are potential organizational socialization strategies and practices? The most common approach to assuring successful entry into any work organization—and here academic institutions are like all other work environments—is to provide a systematic introduction to the expectations, norms, and values of the organization (Ellis et al., 2017; Keisling and Laning, 2016; Klein et al., 2015). Successful introduction or onboarding is associated with good outcomes for the employee and for the organization, both in the short and long run (Bauer et al., 2007). Equally, ineffective onboarding is associated with poor outcomes and high costs to both (Holton, 2001).

In corporate settings onboarding is usually short-term, information-focused, and often involves a guide or mentor from the part of the organization the new employee is entering, though some scholars have emphasized the value of a welcoming and affirming process that provides direct assistance and training (Klein et al., 2015). In academic settings, onboarding is often accomplished in a single, campus-wide, one- or two-day orientation before the beginning of the academic year, and it includes everything from how to get around campus and how to get an ID card to expectations about teaching and grading. There is often little or no organized orientation to the individual’s home

department's practices and norms, and no leader from the department is present at the orientation.

Although academia has generally not invested extensively in thinking through the critical information best conveyed in this format or in others, research on the notion of psychological contract breach suggests that it would be wise for institutions to do more proactive and thoughtful onboarding than is common (Caldwell and Peters, 2018). Newcomer faculty bring with them expectations based on their graduate student experience, their interview experience with the department, and the offer they have accepted. If their expectations match their experience, they continue to develop trust in the organization and in their ability to perform according to its expectations and norms. If their expectations are not matched by their experience, they may feel that the psychological contract they agreed to has not been upheld by the organization—a feeling of psychological contract breach. That feeling is associated with lower trust and less commitment to the organization (Morrison and Robinson, 1997; Tekleab et al., 2013; Zhao et al., 2007). It is, then, very important for academic institutions to avoid psychological contract breach by fostering realistic expectations for reasonable demands and support at every stage of new faculty socialization, including initial orientation.

### 1.3 Mentoring

In many academic institutions (but not all of them), at some fairly early point in a tenure-track faculty member's first year, a departmental mentor will be assigned to them, or they will be asked to choose one (often with little clarity about the basis for choosing or the people being chosen). Sometimes this is accompanied by a fairly clear account of how often something should happen (meeting annually, every semester, or on some other schedule) but not necessarily what the goal is or how to achieve it. As a result, many senior faculty who are presumed to know how to mentor their junior colleagues perform this service, without having a clear idea of what they should do or what is expected of them, and naturally their junior colleagues have even less clarity. Stewart and Valian (2018, Ch. 8) outline alternative approaches.

Despite the vagueness of assigned or chosen roles, many studies find that both junior and senior participants believe mentoring is beneficial, and some studies document good measurable outcomes (Allen and Eby, 2010; Kram, 1985; Kram and Ragins, 2007). This is impressive, given the relative lack of clarity about the process or goals. Most of these studies, however, do not employ control or comparison groups of individuals who were not mentored, so it is difficult to be sure that it is really the mentoring that is leading to good outcomes (Allen et al., 2004; Baranik et al., 2010; Dobbin et al., 2015; Eby et al., 2008). And (perhaps inevitably when two people are left to form and maintain a relationship without clear guidelines or assistance) some mentoring relationships cause actual harm (Eby et al., 2010; Straus et al., 2013). These may be especially damaging in academic environments where relationships within a discipline and even a department often last for decades—for good or ill.

Partially as a result of recognition that one-on-one classical mentoring runs significant risks (particularly including the exclusion of those underrepresented in the institution) and cannot be expected to offer mentees a broad perspective on their developing careers, a variety of group-mentoring models have been proposed and tried. These collective mentoring models include the notions of a composite mentor (Packard, 2003), a mosaic of advisors (Rosen et al., 2009) or mentors (McCauley and Martineau, 1998), a personal leadership board (Katz et al., 2009), a developmental network (Higgins and Kram, 2001), and a mentor network (de Janasz et al., 2003). The Hunter College Gender Equity Project engaged a circle of advisors (Stewart and Valian, 2018, p. 301). All of these models assume that no single person can provide individuals all of the career advice they may need but that a group of people, who may or may not meet together, can collectively do that. The launch committee model builds on that insight.

#### **1.4 The Launch Committee Model of Onboarding and Mentoring New Faculty**

At Case Western Reserve University, Lavik et al. (2011, pp. 65–66) developed the notion of a launch committee, or a committee of senior faculty, carefully composed to provide support and advice during an individual's first year as a faculty member. The launch committee included the new faculty member and his or her department chair, a senior faculty member within the department who shared intellectual interests, and a senior faculty member from outside the department who might provide useful campus networking. Finally, there was to be a committee convener, who was trained to ensure that all of the kinds of issues that new faculty face were fully explored. The committee used a list of topics to discuss that helped remind the group of topics they might overlook (Gawande, 2009).

The program was originally conceived as especially valuable to new faculty in science and engineering fields because of the need to get a laboratory set up and functioning quickly, including ordering and calibrating equipment and hiring research staff to manage it. However, many other issues—planning a research program, teaching, recruiting and mentoring students, getting settled in the community and campus—were also addressed.

#### **1.5 ADVANCE at the University of Michigan**

The University of Michigan ADVANCE Program has developed a range of new approaches to institutional processes of recruitment, evaluation, and retention of a more diverse faculty in all fields, since 2001. In 2011, ADVANCE developed its own faculty “launch” program, based on the Case Western Reserve model; it aimed to provide all new tenure-track faculty at the UM with an improved entry to the institution, with the particular goal of ensuring that underrepresented faculty members would be offered the same strong foundation for their careers as those with well-represented backgrounds. In

this effort, ADVANCE created a model that included socialization and onboarding in the context of a group-mentoring program that was designed to avoid the single contact approach but also to specify frequent meetings for a limited period. Therefore, it was designed to last one academic year and to involve monthly meetings.

In this paper we report on how the new faculty and their senior colleagues—including their department chairs—viewed the experience and the benefits it offered each and all of them. We describe this program here because not only has it proven valuable to our new, more diverse faculty members, but our senior faculty committee participants have embraced it, in part because they felt they learned from the experience how to be better mentors of more junior colleagues, and in part because it was both gratifying and not excessively demanding. We have heard people at other institutions claim that their senior faculty wouldn't do what UM faculty have been doing; based on our experience, we doubt that, and we believe this model lays an important foundation for institutional success at faculty diversity.

The University of Michigan's launch program\* made some changes to the original model developed by Case Western Reserve to accommodate institutional scale and culture. These changes included having committees organized and supported by staff in the ADVANCE Program, with advice and input from department chairs. This enabled ADVANCE to attempt to include at least one faculty member with a shared gender and ethnic/racial background with the launchee. Another innovation is that the committees were convened in all cases by a faculty member outside the department, who had participated in a 90-minute orientation to the role and the process. In addition, the conveners were asked to provide notes on meetings to their committee members and to the ADVANCE Program, and they were encouraged to raise any troubling issues with staff in the program (and they have). They were also invited to a mid-year meeting to share experiences and suggestions with other conveners. In the training, conveners were provided with a list of potential topics to discuss (included in the Appendix), and certain key practices were emphasized: the value of talking through issues such as time management, work-life balance, how to deal with difficult students and colleagues, and how to address tricky laboratory and classroom management issues, among more expected issues surrounding establishing a research program and roles in teaching and service. Moreover, the training particularly emphasized giving attention to the more personal side of getting settled, such as how the launchee's partner and/or children were doing; whether they were making friends; and finding satisfactory ties in the community, including commercial establishments, religious institutions, schools, and other resources for themselves and their families.

In this study we present data that was collected annually to assess how the program was going. Since this data was collected, the program has been successfully expanded beyond STEM fields to social sciences and humanities disciplines, as well as to professional schools. Our goal in this paper is both to outline the model for the launch committee program and to present evidence of its costs and benefits to each of the participants.

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\*<https://advance.umich.edu/programs/launch-committees/>.



## **2. METHODS**

The procedures involved in collecting the survey data described below were approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Michigan.

### **2.1 Authors' Positionalities**

All three of the authors are White, currently middle-class, female STEM-educated individuals. Two of us are also tenured faculty members, and the third is a senior staff member. We have all been female doctoral students at a time when our fields were predominantly male. One of us is in a field that has remained male-dominated. As we have held some marginalized and some privileged identities in the course of our careers, we are conscious of the importance of being clear about the ways in which those experiences differ. We are all quite senior in our fields, and in this way we differ from the launchees in our study but not from the senior faculty; this could render us more aware of the experiences of the latter than the former. We have tried to guard against this by quoting respondents directly and recalling our own early-career experiences.

### **2.2 Protection of Vulnerable Populations**

We took steps (in particular in how we quoted from respondent comments) to protect the identities of all participants in the study, but we were particularly mindful of the vulnerability of the junior faculty launchees and the underrepresented minority and female faculty (all of whom were statistical minorities in this study). For that reason, we were careful not to identify the race/ethnicity or gender of any respondent in quotations from respondents.

### **2.3 Participants**

All members of 82 launch committees were surveyed within six months after the end of the launch committee meeting period, during each of four years, beginning in academic year 2012–13 and ending in academic year 2015–16. These surveys included chairs, conveners, internal departmental and external senior faculty members, and the launchees. Responses were obtained from 304 respondents: 68 launchees (83%), 61 chairs (72%), 60 conveners (73%), and 55 senior departmental faculty (67%) and 60 senior external faculty (73%).

Data analyzed here include administrative data about the composition of the committees and their meeting history, as well as survey responses to closed-ended questions by the launchee and to open-ended questions asked of the committee members about the individual's perceptions of the best things about the committee and their suggestions for improvement. These questions were designed specifically to assess the efficacy of the launch program by the research team at ADVANCE and may be used by other programs.

## 2.4 Administrative Data

These institutional data indicated the college and department of every committee member, as well as their gender and race-ethnicity. Variables were constructed from these data to indicate for each committee whether there was a female and/or underrepresented minority senior faculty member on the committee, as well as the race/ethnicity and gender of the launchee and the department chair. In addition, ADVANCE data indicated how many times the committee met and over what period.

## 2.5 Open-Ended Data from the Survey

The launchee and senior faculty committee members (including the chair, the convener, and the senior faculty members from inside and outside the department) were all asked, “What are the best things about the launch program?” They were also asked, “What could be changed or improved?” and senior faculty were asked, “Do you think ADVANCE should continue sponsoring launch committees?”

The “best things” were coded by two of the authors into nine presence/absence categories; responses could be coded for as many different categories as arose in an individual’s response; interrater reliability was 91%. Categories included launch committee structure and mechanical features, expression of multiple perspectives, provision of information/advice, benefits to senior faculty members, provision of support to the launchee, provision of assistance with problems, the presence of the chair, the value to the chair, and overall positive but vague statements. Examples of each category are given in Table 1.

Committee members were asked about changes that might improve the program. Only three responses were common enough to develop coding categories: nothing, scheduling processes, and meeting less often or for a shorter time. Interrater reliability for “what could be changed” was 89%, and reliability for “should continue” was 90%. Other comments were much rarer and more idiosyncratic (never more than a small handful of faculty), so codes were not created for them; these included keeping the agenda flexible, meeting more often or into the second year, providing opportunities for socializing, and providing launch committees for other (e.g., senior) faculty. We describe below the results for the coded responses to these questions as well.

## 2.6 Closed-Ended Data

The 82 launchees were asked a series of questions on scales most often rated from 1 = not at all to 4 = very, though a couple of items were binary (yes/no) or rated on a five-point scale. The questions were: “How welcomed did you feel when you arrived?”; “How satisfied were you with: the department orientation? the college/university orientation?”; “How integrated do you feel in the department now?”; “How satisfied are you with your teaching load? The courses you were asked to teach? The mentoring you are receiving at UM?” They were also asked, on a four-point scale from very negatively



**TABLE 1:** Coding for “What are the best things about the launch program?”

<b>Coding Category</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Structure and mechanics	Efficient use of time; practical mentoring strategy; got faculty up to speed quickly; regularity of meetings; fixed timeline; organized; forum to ask questions.
Multiple perspectives	Getting opinions from diverse faculty; junior faculty makes connections with other faculty members; networking; different perspectives for junior faculty.
Information/advice	Provides information about how the university works; learn how to navigate the system; helps faculty understand norms and expectations; great way to get oriented.
Benefits members	Better understanding of concerns of new faculty members; informative for senior faculty about how the university works in different areas; interdepartmental collegiality; opportunity to meet/chat with new and old colleagues; opportunities to collaborate.
Support to launchee	Helps them to feel part of community/team; communicates to launchee departmental/university commitment; helps them to feel integrated.
Help with problems Chair’s presence is good	Removes unnecessary hurdles; identify impediments to success. Kept chair accountable; time with chair for junior faculty member; important for chairs to hear about issues; ensures adequate information transfer.
Good for chair	Addresses questions chair didn’t anticipate; helps address concerns from wise senior faculty; complements departmental mentoring.
Vague positive	Good idea; launchee liked it; good concept.

to very positively, “How would you rate the department as a place for junior faculty?” In addition, they were asked two yes/no questions: “Is your research space fully ready for use?” and “Are there things you wish you’d known when you started?” Sixty-eight of the 82 launchees responded to these questions (83%). We report results in terms of particular items below.

### 3. RESULTS

#### 3.1 Preliminary Analyses

We conducted some analyses simply to describe the launch committees’ average composition and practices and the demographic characteristics of the committee members. In addition, we examined launchee closed-ended ratings, both overall and as a function of gender and race/ethnicity.

### 3.1.1 Descriptive Characteristics of Launch Committees

Launch committees began in academic year 2013, when there were eight committees; in the subsequent three years there were 28, 18, and 28 committees. They met an average of six times [most committees (78%) met between five and nine times] over an average of nine months. All but three of the committees met during the launchees' first year on the faculty. In the three unusual cases, the new faculty members' department chairs were concerned about offering something to a new first-year faculty member that had not been available to a new faculty member the year before.

Launchees were nearly equally identified in the administrative data as male (40) and female (42); none were not categorized in this way. The majority of launchees were White (51, or 62%), 10 were from underrepresented minority groups (URMs, 12%), and 21 were Asian or Asian American (25%). A little more than half were from the college of engineering (57%), about one-third were from physical and natural science departments in the liberal arts college (31%), and the remaining were from smaller health and science schools (nine, or 11%). Most took these positions as their first tenure-track faculty jobs; only seven had been in one other such position. Others had been in postdoctoral research positions.

Department chairs were overwhelmingly male (70, or 84%) and White (74, or 89%). Seven were Asian or Asian American, and one was from an underrepresented minority. Conveners were more often male than female (47 male, 35 female) and were also overwhelmingly White (89%), with five URMs and three Asian/Asian American. Internal senior faculty members were mostly male (77%) and White (59), with 19 Asian/Asian American and two URMs. External senior faculty members were also mostly male (74%) and White (66), with 12 Asian/Asian American and three URMs).

### 3.1.2 Launchee Closed-Ended Ratings

Ratings by launchees were generally quite high. Nearly all of them reported feeling moderately or very welcomed when they arrived (96%), 76% reported moderate or high satisfaction with the department orientation, and 82% with the college and university orientations. Even so, 46% reported that there were things they wish they had known when they started. At this point, one year into their assistant professorship, after participating in the launch committee, 70% reported that their research space was fully ready for use, and 93% felt moderately or very integrated into their departments. In terms of teaching load, 65% reported being satisfied or very satisfied, and even more were satisfied with the courses they were asked to teach (73%). In terms of mentoring, and their department as a place for junior faculty to work, only 3% (two faculty) reported dissatisfaction, with 41% satisfied and 56% very satisfied.

Male and female launchees differed in their ratings of satisfaction with college/university orientation, with men more satisfied (mean for men = 3.5, mean for women = 3.03,  $t = 2.28$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). They also differed in terms of felt departmental integration at the end of the launch period (male mean = 3.74, female mean = 3.35,  $t = 2.4$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).

However, and importantly for our purposes, there was no significant gender difference on any of the other indicators of satisfaction, including satisfaction with teaching load (means of 5.13 and 4.87 for men and women, respectively) and courses assigned (means of 5.11 and 4.84 for men and women, respectively), the mentoring received at UM (5.23 and 4.90, respectively), and their department as a place for junior faculty to work (5.17 and 4.76, respectively).

Launchees differed in terms of race/ethnicity in the rating of the department/college orientation, with underrepresented minorities (like women, compared with men) rating their satisfaction with it as significantly lower than the other two groups [ $F(2, 63) = 9.71, p < 0.001$ ; mean for URM was 2.22, for Whites, 3.38, and for Asians/Asian Americans, 3.53;  $p$  for contrast = 0.05]. Again, importantly for our purposes, there were no other differences in ratings by race/ethnicity.

### 3.2 Content Analysis of Committee Members' Open-Ended Responses

#### 3.2.1 Best Things About the Launch Committees

What was viewed as best about the launch committee experience depended somewhat on the perspective of the reporter, so we will outline these results separately for each member of the committee (see Figs. 1–5).

Launchees particularly commented on the structure and mechanics of the committee and the availability of multiple perspectives as most positive (over 40% for each), with information following close behind (31.7%).

In setting up the launch committees, there was a concern that department chairs would view the committees as an intrusion on their own authority and procedures. In fact, they valued the availability of multiple perspectives in the committees very highly (70% reported this), and the structure and mechanics as well (over 60%). They

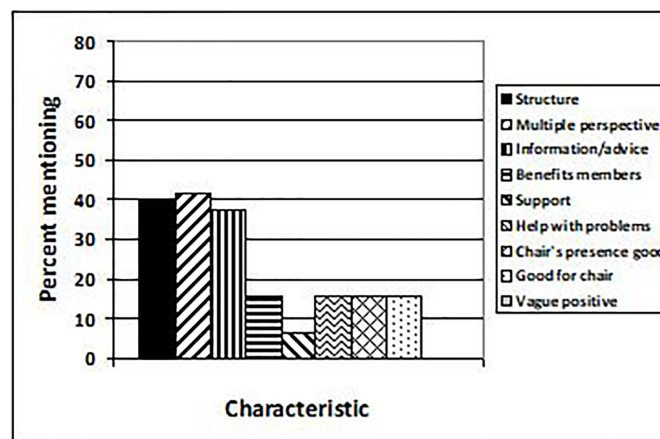


FIG. 1: "Best thing" about launch committee: launchee

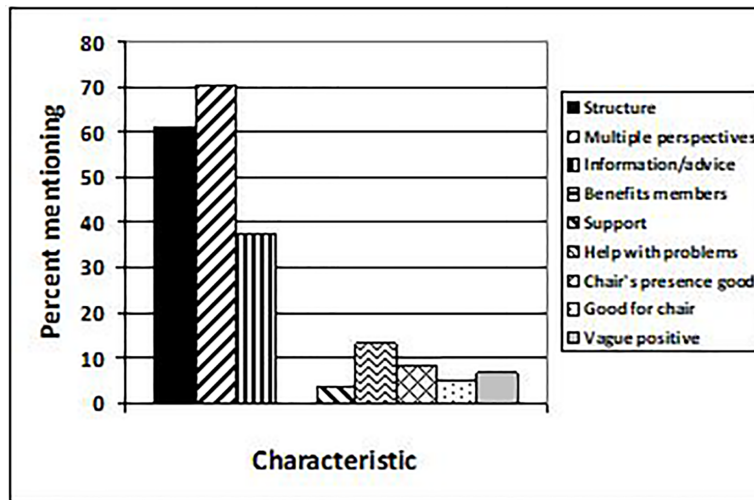


FIG. 2: "Best thing" about launch committee: department chair

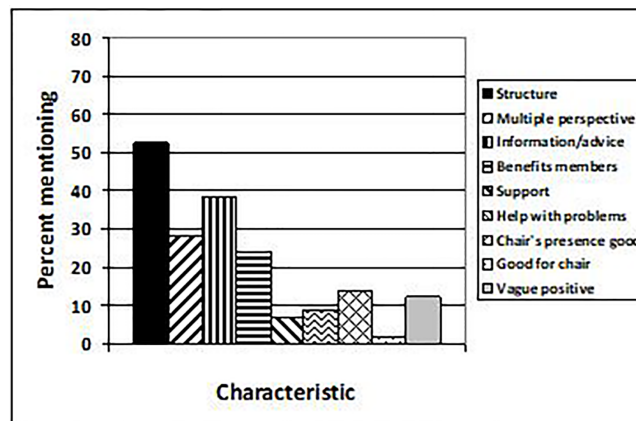


FIG. 3: "Best thing" about launch committee: convener

also spontaneously noted the value of information and advice to the launchers (over 35%).

The trained conveners of the committees (all from departments outside the chair and launcher) viewed the structure and mechanics of the committee as the best thing, with over 50% mentioning this. They often mentioned providing information and advice (nearly 40%) and multiple perspectives and benefits to members (nearly 30% and about 25%, respectively).

Senior faculty members from the department also valued the structure and mechanics very highly (nearly 60%) and multiple perspectives and information and advice highly (nearly 30% each).

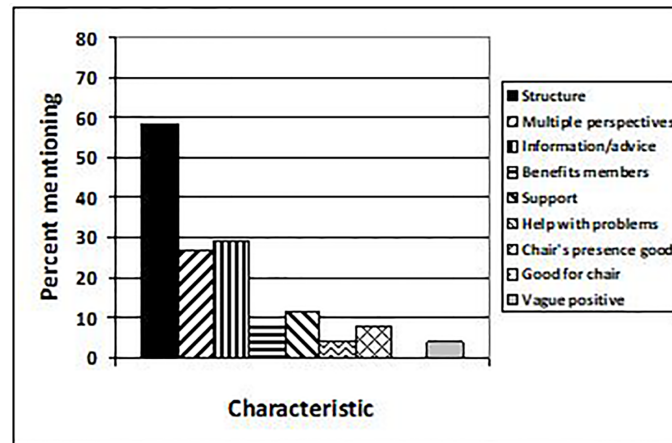


FIG. 4: "Best thing" about launch committee: internal member

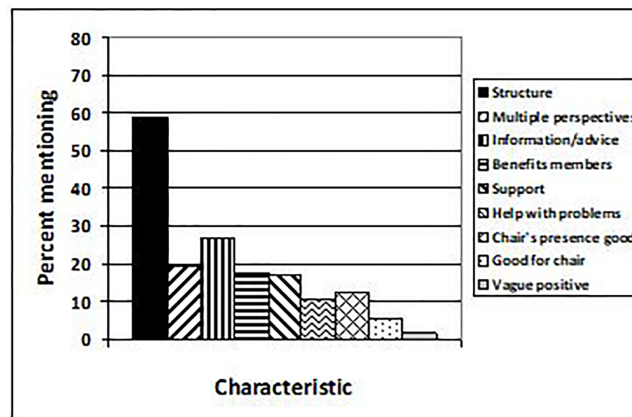


FIG. 5: "Best thing" about launch committee: external member

Senior faculty members from outside the department particularly valued the structure and mechanics (nearly 60%) and also valued several other features pretty highly (information/advice, multiple perspectives, benefits to members, and support to the launchee, all a bit under 20%). It is interesting that this group and the conveners (the two outside the department) were the ones most likely to note the benefits to committee members, which the department chairs did not note at all.

### 3.2.2 Overall Evaluation of the Launch Committee Experience

Because of their early involvement in a new program requiring new investment of time from senior faculty, all senior faculty committee members were asked if they thought the launch committee program should continue. A very large proportion said yes.

It is perhaps unsurprising that conveners overwhelmingly said yes (95%, and another 3% said “I’m not the person to judge this”; only one person did not respond, and none said no). Some of the responses from conveners are particularly illuminating. One said:

*Yes, because it provides a structured framework for mentoring that provides a sense of informality and impartiality, since ADVANCE is not part of any evaluative body of the university’s promotion and tenure hierarchy.*

Another wrote:

*Absolutely. The launchees clearly benefit in ways that should improve their teaching and research, as well as comfort and appreciation of their role in the university. It also benefits the launch committees by increasing their awareness of good practices across campus that could be used in our own units. Finally, it has become a strong selling point to potential new faculty (e.g., I’ve seen junior faculty who have had a launch committee telling potential recruits about it with great enthusiasm).*

A third made these points:

*Yes. I believe that the Launch Committees serve several very important functions. (1) They are really advocacy committees, where the senior members can help get things done on behalf of the new faculty member. (2) They provide a forum for sharing best practices about how to begin a career. I am certain that our discussions help change the mind set of senior faculty, including chairs, about how to help junior faculty get off to a quick start. (3) They provide ‘normalization’ in how we help a junior colleague get started. Rather than waiting for a junior faculty member to speak up and ask for advice or help, the Launch Committee provides proactive advice. Since all junior faculty (in my unit) have Launch Committees, no one will ‘fall through the cracks.’*

Of the department chairs, 91% said yes, launch committees should continue, and 3% said some version of “I’m not the best person to judge.” One person said, “maybe, but not for everyone,” and two said no. One chair pointed to its value to launchees and its relevance for retention:

*I am convinced that the Launch program is an invaluable asset for UM, helping young faculty leverage the intellectual diversity of this campus. I had to deal with a retention case of a 2nd year assistant professor this past year. The Launch committee was instrumental in getting the research of this faculty off the ground early enough to make it impossible for the faculty to even consider leaving.*



Another noted the value of the early attention:

*Absolutely. My new faculty this year who had the pleasure of this program are doing much better than last year's hires [who didn't].*

The few chairs who expressed reservations noted the administrative burdens, the burden for chairs, and the possibility that it is taking over a function better served by departments or schools/colleges.

*Yes, although the administrative burden may become too much....*

*Yes, but do not require department chairs to be on every committee. Believe it or not, most of us actually meet regularly with junior faculty (ALL junior faculty, not just those in their first year). Also, hard as it may be for the ADVANCE team to realize, there are other responsibilities that department chairs have.*

*No. ADVANCE can just offer a short workshop during the new faculty orientation day, since much of what happens in the Launch committee is a year-long orientation. The department/college should run a mentoring committee that will help develop professional leadership in the candidate.*

Internal department faculty senior colleagues were nearly as positive (89% said yes, 5% said maybe, and only two said no). More than department chairs, and perhaps more than conveners, these faculty pointed to the ways the launch committees addressed issues that other mechanisms do not successfully address.

*I think the 'external' (to the associated department) oversight regarding the department moving forward on renovations, setting up labs, etc., is good. The opportunity for new faculty to ask questions too is good.*

*Yes. I think this is a quick and relatively easy way to make sure that all new faculty have a chance to understand how their department and the university works, allow them to build multi-department contacts, get regular supportive feedback and advice, and sends a powerful message to new faculty that the university wants them to succeed—pre tenure one can imagine that the system is out to get you (which in some senses it is). To realize that everyone is rooting for you, I think may be a powerful message of these committees.*

*Definitely. I think that this is a very good program. It is not too burdensome for the senior faculty involved, and my feeling is that it is very useful to the new faculty. I wish such a program was available when I started out.*

The admittedly infrequent caveats that came from internal senior faculty were also different from those from chairs and conveners:

*I do not find this to be a good use of time. Although the external members were very well-intentioned, their lack of experience in our department/field prevented the discussion from going beyond generalities, confining it to a kind of small talk. At one point, an external member even made a funding suggestion that was way off base. The time would be better spent in a more focused discussion with department mentors.*

*I have mixed feelings. The launch committees may give the feeling of false security, giving the impression that something will be done if mentioned in the committee meeting. In fact, the committees have no power. In that regard, the committee may impede progress. On the other hand, it gives the new faculty member a chance to vent frustrations and ask questions.*

The issue of external faculty not knowing the department is, of course, the flip side of external oversight and multiple perspectives. And, the worry about the committees' lack of power is the flip side of the benefit of its independence from evaluation systems.

Finally, external faculty senior colleagues were least enthusiastic, with 84% saying yes, 5% saying "I'm not the best person to judge," 6% saying maybe, and two individuals saying no. Across the four groups, out of 251 participants, only six people said no. The large majority who saw its benefits were very convinced:

*Yes. They are enormously valuable for the new faculty and also help the current faculty to 'invest' more clearly in their newer colleagues. The team mentoring approach is MUCH better than relying on one mentor to have the experience to adequately council on a variety of topics. Having the chair involved is great!*

*Yes, either ADVANCE or another impartial organizing group should do this. I think that if it was purely internal (for example from the specific college's dean's office), it would not have the immediacy and impact. And, frankly, the immediacy is a critical part of the program. Launch does the most good when the group meets multiple times in the first six months of a new faculty start.*

*Yes. I think it should be encouraged in all departments for all new faculty members.*

Reservations were about the commitment of time and effort and the removal of responsibility from departments. For example:

*I hope depts. don't end up relying on launch committees and do a less effective job of internal mentoring.*

*The launch committee coordinator did a superb job, but I wasn't sure how much mentoring was going on outside of the launch committee discussions—and whether we were duplicating that (we shouldn't) and what added value we were bringing.*

At the same time, they recognized that what was good for the launchee might be creating inappropriate dependencies in the departments:

*If you asked the junior faculty, he'd say that he got a lot out of it. So my concern is not about the value he got from the launch committee but whether the dept. may rely exclusively on the launch committee to do the required mentoring.*

Finally, some worried that their role as external senior faculty was not always well-defined or significant. One wrote, "I think they could be smaller. It seemed a bit much."

### 3.2.3 Suggestions for Changes/Improvements

Committee members were asked about changes that might improve the program. Only three responses were common enough to develop coding categories: nothing, scheduling processes, and meeting less often or for a shorter time. The most frequent response was nothing (13% of launchees, 2.28% of chairs, 29% of conveners, 21% of internal senior faculty, and 37% of external senior faculty). Fewer mentioned scheduling issues—either time or location (2.9% of launchees, 15% of chairs, 16% of conveners, 7% of internal, and 6% of external senior faculty). Finally, a relatively small number mentioned meeting less often or for a shorter period (10% of launchees, 9% of chairs, 10% of conveners, 20% of internal, and 19% of external senior faculty).

## 4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The launch committee model was embraced rapidly and broadly at the University of Michigan (it is now available to all new faculty throughout the disciplines represented in the College of Literature and the Science and the Arts and has also been adopted in many of the other schools and colleges). As the data reported here show, it serves multiple purposes. For all new faculty it provides access to at least four senior faculty in a structured context in which information about their process of getting settled is sought, and information and advice is offered; for department chairs it provides regular, structured opportunities for their new faculty to receive attention, information, and support; for senior faculty committee members (including the ADVANCE-trained conveners), it provides an opportunity to assist newer faculty colleagues at a critical career transition, as well as exposure to campus-wide practices in teaching, research, and service that may be useful. At least as implemented within the University of Michigan, there was little resistance to or criticism of the model, perhaps because it was administered by a unit perceived to be outside the normal hierarchy and generally benevolent (ADVANCE), and

because it made few administrative demands on the participating faculty. Perhaps most importantly, it clearly met a perceived need for equitable early-stage mentoring and support to new faculty. In addition, it was recognized as meeting an unmet need by nearly all parties, and as doing so in a relatively painless manner. Benefits to new faculty were very widely recognized, both in terms of their access to quick, useful information and advice and in terms of their appreciation and sense of connection to and support from the institution. Finally, senior faculty were often surprised by the benefits they themselves acquired, in terms both of the pleasures of knowing the newest generation of scholars better and in terms of enjoyable interaction with colleagues from around campus.

It is important to note that at UM, as this program developed and spread, it was adopted for all new faculty within a department under the assumption that it was important not to limit access to particular groups of faculty, since that normally creates stigma for those assumed to need it. Instead, ADVANCE provided a uniform program for all new faculty and thereby aimed to ensure that women and underrepresented minorities in STEM were served as well as other groups. Both the quantitative data and the qualitative data suggested no differences in satisfaction with the job, or with the program, though there were lower satisfaction ratings by women and underrepresented minority faculty for department/college orientation programs.

We are mindful of the risk of overinterpreting a single difference when other satisfaction indicators reveal generally equivalent results. We do note, though, that the department/college orientation programs—all brief (a few hours at most) and generic to apply to everyone—do seem to be an onboarding process that is particularly inadequate for those (women and racial/ethnic minorities) who are least “typical.” In contrast, the mentoring received at UM, including the launch program and the other more individualized processes and issues, were experienced equivalently by female and ethnic/racial minority faculty. Thus, although one of the first experiences of onboarding at UM was remembered as differentially negative by female and ethnic minority faculty, later experiences were not, suggesting that the launch program did address diverse faculty needs successfully.

This study is inevitably descriptive and cannot assess the program’s impact (e.g., for retention and promotion) against its absence because there was rapid adoption across departments and for all new faculty. An experimental study with random assignment of individual faculty to the program would be a valuable next step. It would also be possible to experiment with offering or withholding different features: having the chair participate, having an external member, having a trained facilitator, and/or having it centrally administered (vs. administered departmentally). We see assets to all of these features and in the absence of systematic study encourage adoption of the whole model. However, clearly there would be value in the systematic study of which of these features is most critical, as well as in assessing programs of different lengths and intensities (Only the first semester? Two meetings/semester vs. four? Extending through two or even three years vs. one year?).

In the absence of this kind of rigorous program evaluation data, we provide this descriptive account for two reasons: because it offers a new and specific model for faculty

onboarding; and because the program has been so highly valued by virtually all of the participants, at least in this initial implementation. As we outlined in the introduction to this paper, the literature strongly suggested the importance of this period of settling in and the clarification of expectations and norms, as well as provision of information and feedback during this early period. The results across our program confirm the positive value of the launch committee structure in assuring that this complex process occurs for all new faculty—an especially important goal for institutions bringing in faculty members who reflect greater diversity of background and experience than their senior colleagues.

#### 4.1 Implications for Other Institutions

We believe that the launch committee model is highly adaptable to different institutional settings. For example, the importance of a centralized external organization such as our ADVANCE Program may be less in smaller institutions, and the value of interdisciplinary connections may vary somewhat in different institutions or disciplines. Equally, the number of meetings and the duration of a launch committee's life can be varied to suit institutional norms and needs. We note that the University of California at Davis has developed a launch program<sup>†</sup> similar to the Case Western Reserve and University of Michigan models, but they have adapted it to address the quarter system they operate on and have reduced the required number of meetings. These kinds of adjustments to local conditions, as well as alterations in precisely how many committee members there are, and who serves on the committees, are all aspects of the launch committee program that can be altered to suit local needs.

At the University of Michigan, we experimented with launch committees for new senior faculty. It did not work as well as we had hoped, so we abandoned it. Others might find a good way to do that as well.

We do believe that some form of training for conveners, as well as an outline of desirable topics to cover, is very important. Their precise form and content, though, can certainly be adapted. Similarly, programs could experiment with having particular topics as the focus of particular meetings (this is left to individual committees to work out in the UM model, and some flexibility seems crucial).

Finally, particularly when more than one new faculty member arrives in a department in a given year, department chairs may not be able to serve on all launch committees. The critical practice in this case is to identify someone who is a meaningful proxy for the chair—providing departmental perspective—and ensuring a flow of feedback to the chair about issues that might be addressed by the chair.

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## APPENDIX

**Monthly Update:** The committee, in focusing on the areas below, should use the following questions as a guide. These topics may not all be relevant at every meeting. Other questions and resources will be identified by the committee as necessary.

**Personal and Professional Life:** Is everyone in the household settled? Are there any issues that need to be addressed (e.g., dual-career)?

**Space:** Has suitable lab space been identified? Is renovation of the space necessary, and, if so, what is the process for renovation, and how is it proceeding? Has the new faculty member moved into the space?

**Equipment and Supplies:** Is the procedure for purchasing equipment and supplies clear? Has equipment been ordered? Is there joint equipment to which the new faculty member needs access?

**Funding:** Have appropriate funding agencies and submission deadlines been identified? Are there UM programs that are appropriate to apply to? Has the committee inter-

nally reviewed the new faculty member's proposals? Are there opportunities for him/her to be included in larger team-based grants?

**Lab Personnel:** Is the process for adding new students to the group clear? Is the new faculty member getting students, postdocs, and/or technicians into his/her research group? Are the lab members productive? Are policies that apply to the faculty member's graduate students, for example regarding course load, lab rotations, and qualifying exams, clear?

**Integration into the University:** Is the new faculty member meeting researchers across the university with similar interests? Is s/he beginning to form collaborations?

**Teaching:** Are the expectations for teaching during the first year clear? Does the new faculty member need additional resources (e.g., material from a previous course instructor, interpretation of midterm evaluations)? Are there questions regarding policies and procedures or any difficulties to resolve? How is the teaching going?

**Service:** Are the expectations for service during the first year clear? What is the new hire's experience with service?

**Mentoring:** Is the committee coordinating with other mentoring set up by the department? Has a plan for mentoring following the termination of the launch committee been established?

**Scheduling Next Launch Committee Meeting:** It is easiest to schedule the next meeting while all committee members are in the room. Committee members should always bring/have access to their calendars at committee meetings.