



ADVANCE PROGRAM

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

**The Importance of Coaching for Full Professors:
Insights from ADVANCE Leadership Coaching Program's 17-year
Duration (2008-2024)**

U-M ADVANCE Program

August, 2025

INTRODUCTION

Program History

ADVANCE's Faculty Leadership Coaching Program was designed to support faculty success at a critical career point: recent promotion to full professor. Driven by needs articulated in the research literature and the specific experiences of newly promoted U-M full professors, ADVANCE's coaching program aims to support U-M faculty in these key areas:

- Promotion of knowledge, skills, and abilities that support effective leadership;
- Individual goal setting;
- Development of strategic tactics to achieve goals.

Since 2008, ADVANCE has partnered with the College of Engineering, School of Information, and the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts to provide coaching services to recently promoted full professors within their units. Over the course of eight individualized sessions with expert coaches, faculty members were afforded the space and time to define priorities, goals, and actions to achieve success in their new career phase. In collaboration with these external coaches, participants explored topics such as building strong partnerships, planning next career steps, pursuing leadership roles, communicating effectively, and navigating challenging and complex situations.

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Data Sources

As part of the Leadership Coaching Program, ADVANCE administers feedback surveys to capture participant's experiences along their coaching journey. The data collected from 146 faculty members in these surveys have historically been used to inform changes in the program (see Statistical Appendix Tables 1-2 for response rates and survey respondent demographics). Participant feedback also surfaces needs that inform future ADVANCE programming and priorities, as well as systemic policy changes.

These data, paired with ADVANCE-maintained datasets and findings from previous ADVANCE reports—including exit interviews on U-M faculty members—were used to discover the insights detailed in the current report, including areas of need and the impacts of leadership coaching on faculty. The surveys featured both closed-ended questions and broad, open-ended questions. In keeping with best practices of qualitative research, the number of responses (n) to open-ended items are included to demonstrate prevalence of a theme. These frequencies do not inherently indicate importance; given the variation in responses, even a small n can be considered meaningful and a larger n is not always more meaningful. Only themes supported with three or more responses were included.

The main body of this report highlights selected findings; the Statistical Appendix details the methodology used for this report and contains detailed results of all findings.

INSIGHT 1: Coaching clarifies pathways to leadership for faculty.

Pathways to Leadership Lack Clarity

In previous exit interviews of U-M faculty, half of senior faculty who have voluntarily left U-M cited a lack of leadership opportunities as one factor in their decision to leave [1]. Faculty pathways to formal leadership were often seen as unclear or absent, resulting in faculty seeking opportunities at other institutions. This lack of clarity had substantial consequences for U-M's ability to retain associate and full professors.

Helping faculty members understand and navigate these uncertainties can enable them to better seek out and take the necessary steps to achieve formal leadership positions. Several participating faculty members reported having a desire for support with career planning ($n = 12$) and decision making ($n = 10$) prior to coaching.

They named balancing short- and long-term goals ($n = 7$), professional and personal responsibilities ($n = 8$), and job functions (i.e., research, teaching, and service; $n = 6$) as areas of desired growth.

Coaching Clarifies Leadership Paths

ADVANCE-maintained datasets showed that faculty members who received leadership coaching were significantly more likely to move into formal leadership roles than those who were eligible but did not enroll in the program (65% and 54% moved into leadership roles, respectively; Statistical Appendix, Figure 1). These participants moved into a wide variety of leadership and administrative roles, including but not limited to vice provosts, deans, chairs, and directors, across 64 different units, departments, centers, and offices on campus.

Program participants frequently reported that coaching increased their ability to work towards and achieve their goals ($n = 69$). Overall, participants reported that coaching strongly supported their individual goal setting (Statistical Appendix; Figure 2). In open-ended responses, they also reported that coaching helped them with goal setting and planning ($n = 44$).

Additionally, a few faculty members reported that the Leadership Coaching experience may have increased their willingness to assume leadership positions and additional responsibilities ($n = 9$).

“I am currently [...] not in a leadership position, but the coaching has proven effective in getting me to think through what it will mean to assume one of these positions in the near future and I've been laying some groundwork as a result.”

- Coaching Participant 1

INSIGHT 2: Coaching strengthens faculty's management of energy and priorities.

Faculty's Time is Valuable

In a 2023 ADVANCE campus-wide climate survey, fully-promoted faculty reported spending significantly more time on service work, including holding leadership positions, than associate or assistant professors [2]. With this transition, faculty members often have a hard time managing competing commitments and priorities. Similar to previous findings, many participants reported that, prior to participating in coaching, they had a desire to improve their self-understanding and awareness ($n = 19$).

Additionally, self-awareness is key to time management skills [3]. Participants noted a need for a wide variety of time management and prioritization skills ($n = 19$), looking for practical guidance and tools to enable them to better balance long-term and short-term goals ($n = 7$), improve their work-life balance ($n = 8$), strengthen their decision-making ability ($n = 10$), and open up more time for scholarship ($n = 6$). Participants also reported time restraints and hectic schedules ($n = 33$) were major barriers to their productivity and leadership effectiveness.

Coaching Improves Self-Awareness

Participants reported their coaches helped them develop time management and task prioritization skills ($n = 13$), through different activities and tactics. Several noted that exercises related to identifying what they spend their time on, relative to their priorities, helped them to better manage their time moving forward ($n = 5$). Some faculty members also reported that coaching improved their goal-setting and decision-making capabilities ($n = 44$). A few went on to add that the techniques and skills they learned in these areas greatly reduced their stress ($n = 3$).

Many faculty members found their coach's insights to be invaluable, reporting that their coach provided a new perspective with which to view challenging situations and common stressors ($n = 42$). They also reported that these insights helped them understand ($n = 53$) and change their own behavior and better evaluate their priorities ($n = 69$). Several participants also reported that their improvement supported their success in new leadership and administrative roles ($n = 24$).

“The process of self reflection has allowed me greater peace of mind regarding things that usually stress me out; given me tools for thinking about managing energy rather than time, and prioritizing tasks; and it inspired me to write a [proposal] I hadn't planned on.”

- Coaching Participant 2

INSIGHT 3: Coaching develops faculty's necessary leadership skills.

Faculty Need Preparation for New Roles

In an exit interview study, one-quarter of faculty who left U-M between 2011 and 2019 cited department leadership skills and styles as the worst features of their U-M units [1]. A lack of preparation for leadership was also felt by leaders—and those poised to become leaders—who participated in coaching. In surveys, participants often reported they had desired to build their leadership skills prior to coaching ($n = 84$), with some hoping for support in their current leadership roles ($n = 25$) and others hoping to prepare for new leadership roles ($n = 29$).

Some faculty members named specific leadership skills they hoped to work on in coaching, including improving mentorship skills ($n = 8$), the ability to respond to conflict ($n = 9$), fostering positive workplace climates for others ($n = 6$), strengthening their confidence ($n = 7$), improving communication skills ($n = 16$), and building their hiring ($n = 4$) and delegation skills ($n = 4$).

Coaching Builds Essential Skills

Many faculty members reported that participation in coaching positioned them to be better administrators and leaders within their units ($n = 24$). They also mentioned that it helped them improve their effectiveness ($n = 24$), productivity ($n = 6$), and job satisfaction ($n = 5$). Many also cited that coaching helped them develop skills essential for effective leadership [4], including strategic skills ($n = 126$), interpersonal skills ($n = 76$), cognitive skills ($n = 53$), and business skills ($n = 13$).

Faculty participants reported that coaching helped them develop their leadership skills and style, and think more strategically and engage productively in diverse environments (Statistical Appendix, Figures 3-6). These skills, in turn, can benefit the faculty they went on to lead. For example, while navigating COVID-19-related policy changes at the university, state, and federal levels (e.g. return to work, etc.) in AY 2021-22 [5], ADVANCE-maintained data showed U-M department chairs who participated in leadership coaching saw significantly less turnover than U-M department chairs who were not coached (3% and 7% of faculty left the university, respectively; Statistical Appendix: Figure 7).

“One of the greatest benefits of coaching is that in the process of working together, I was given time to reflect upon my style of working with others and my approach to large tasks and projects. When I was asked to [take on a leadership role] it helped to go into that project with the realization that delegating work is not easy for me.”

- Coaching Participant 3

INSIGHT 4: Faculty still require support beyond coaching.

Intersecting Challenges to Effective Leadership

Obstacles to effective faculty leadership are multi-layered. They exist at individual, structural, and systemic levels that can reinforce each other. For example, in exit interview studies of U-M faculty, poor school/department climate was the most common reason faculty cited for deciding to leave the university, with 46% of faculty members mentioning it as a factor in their decision [1]. Additionally, faculty of all ranks reported feeling less than satisfied with campus climate on a university-wide survey [2].

Relatedly, coaching participants named long-standing department structures, expectations, and office politics in their home departments as barriers to their success as leaders ($n = 24$). Participants also named larger structural issues, including discrimination, harassment, and microaggressions related to identity (i.e., gender, race/ethnicity, and age), as prohibiting them from leading effectively ($n = 11$).

Research support and family needs were also among the top reasons faculty left U-M [1]. Additionally, 21% of faculty mentioned in exit interviews that improving faculty mentoring could aid in the University's efforts to help faculty develop as scholars [1]. A few leadership coaching participants reported feeling the pressure of specific issues, such as funding concerns ($n = 5$) and non-work challenges ($n = 33$) as well.

Varied Challenges Require Varied Solutions

Meeting the varied needs and challenges faculty experience requires employing varied approaches, practices, and policies. Coaching can benefit and support faculty in a wide variety of ways, but it is not a panacea. Institutions should offer multiple forms of support for faculty, which could include supporting transition points in the faculty career and funding to support faculty needs; please visit [the ADVANCE Program](#) website for examples of these and other programming that supports the needs of faculty at U-M.

“This leadership program is an amazing investment in U-M faculty. I have discussed my experience with colleagues at other institutions, including chairs and deans, and all marvel at the fact that this is done for us. I really value this opportunity and I hope this program will continue in the future.”

- Coaching Participant 4

Acknowledgments

The ADVANCE Program at the University of Michigan would like to express deep appreciation to the faculty who have participated in the Leadership Coaching Program. Without the partnership and trust of these participants and survey respondents, this report and the insight shared would not be possible.

This report was prepared by the following individuals:

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The ADVANCE program partners with multiple coaching firms to support the needs of our faculty. We are grateful to all for their historic and continued partnerships.

References

- [1] ADVANCE Program. (2019). Exit Interview Study Final Report. University of Michigan. <https://advance.umich.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/UM-ExitInterviewStudy2019ReportFinal-1.pdf>
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- [5] ADVANCE Program. (2019). The effect of COVID-19 on U-M faculty experiences: Results from a limited survey conducted by the ADVANCE Program. University of Michigan. <https://advance.umich.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Effect-of-COVID19-on-UM-faculty.11.7.21.pdf>



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Statistical Appendix**
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August, 2025

Statistical Appendix

Methods

Survey Evaluations

ADVANCE administered surveys to evaluate the program. Participants were invited to take surveys both after they completed half their sessions and after they completed all sessions. Survey measures included identifying the degree to which coaching had impacted specific professional areas as well as a variety of open-ended questions related to aspects of coaching that worked well and what could be improved.

Table 1. *Survey Response Rates*

Survey	Invited	Responded	Rate
Mid-coaching survey (post-4 sessions)	168	113	67%
Post-coaching survey (post-8 sessions)	74	61	82%

Of the 146 participants who responded to ADVANCE's surveys on Leadership Coaching, respondents were from: College of Engineering (37%), College of Literature, Science, and the Arts (58%), School of Information (2%), and other units (Kinesiology - 0.7%; Joint LSA/CoE appointment - 0.7%). The demographics of survey respondents can be found in Table 2.

Table 2. *Survey Respondents Demographics*

Racial/Ethnic Group	Women	Men	Not Indicated	Total
White	50	39	0	89
Asian/Asian American	10	12	0	22
Underrepresented Racial Minority (URM) ¹	13	9	0	22
Not Indicated	1	1	11	13
Total	74	61	11	146

¹ Underrepresented Racial Minorities (URM) includes respondents who identify as African American/Black, Hispanic/Latinx, Native American/Alaskan Native, and/or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, but who do not identify as International.

Quantitative Analysis

In the survey administered to participants at the end of coaching, participants were asked a series of Likert-scale questions related to areas of impact. Response scales included: Not at all (0), A little (1), Somewhat (2), and A lot (3). Averages were computed by racial/gender intersectional groups including Underrepresented Racial Minority, Asian/Asian American and White Men and Women. ANOVA and t-tests comparing white participants to POC² participants and men to women were performed for each survey item. Figures 2-6 show results.

Qualitative Analysis

Open-ended responses to items on the post-four and post-eight session surveys were coded for themes by ADVANCE staff. Survey questions broached a wide range of topics, and were categorized into four main areas based on what types of answers they solicited: expectations going into coaching, programmatic evaluation, positive feedback, and areas for improvement.

Leadership and Retention Rates Analyses

The ADVANCE Program maintains a large dataset of all tenure-track faculty at the University of Michigan from 2001-2024 with key demographic variables³. For the purposes of this study, only faculty members who were eligible to participate in Leadership Coaching (i.e., promoted from associate professor to professor 2008-2024) were included. Relevant variables in this dataset included sex (binary) and race (as reported to U-M Human Resources), school/college unit, appointment type⁴ each year as of November 1st, and reason for leaving a tenure-track role⁵ (if applicable). For retention related analyses, only faculty members who voluntarily or involuntarily left the University were included. A new binary variable was created: whether a faculty member participated in Leadership Coaching. χ^2 or Fisher's Exact tests comparing participating faculty to non-participating eligible faculty were performed for leadership rates and attrition rates. Figures 1 and 7 show results.

Limitations

The methods outlined above were limited in their scope. Each year from 2008-2024, associate deans of the three partner schools and college units invited newly promoted faculty members to participate in the Leadership Coaching program. Invitations were sent to newly-promoted faculty members who met at least one of the following criteria: 1) they are interested in leadership, 2) they are likely to be asked to take on a leadership role in the future, 3) they

² People of Color (POC) includes respondents who do not identify as White.

³ Aligning with broader campus reporting practices, ADVANCE extracted, cleaned, and counted faculty data from the U-M Human Resource Snapshot (HR02) data warehouse. HR02 includes sex (female, male) which we report as gender (Women, Men).

⁴ Appointment types include: professorships, director (including directors of academic program, centers, and programs), chairs and associate chairs, deans and associate deans, provosts and vice provosts, and vice presidents.

⁵ Departure reasons include leaving the university voluntarily or involuntarily, retiring, passing away, switching tracks (while remaining at U-M), or going on long-term disability leave.

recently took on a leadership role, and/or 4) there are, or will be, open opportunities for leadership in their unit. Because faculty members could be selected to participate based on their pre-existing interest in leadership positions, analyses comparing faculty migration into leadership roles may be biased. Results should be carefully considered, as we cannot infer coaching was the sole intervention that resulted in their progression into leadership roles; it is possible that some participants were poised to hold such roles regardless of their participation.

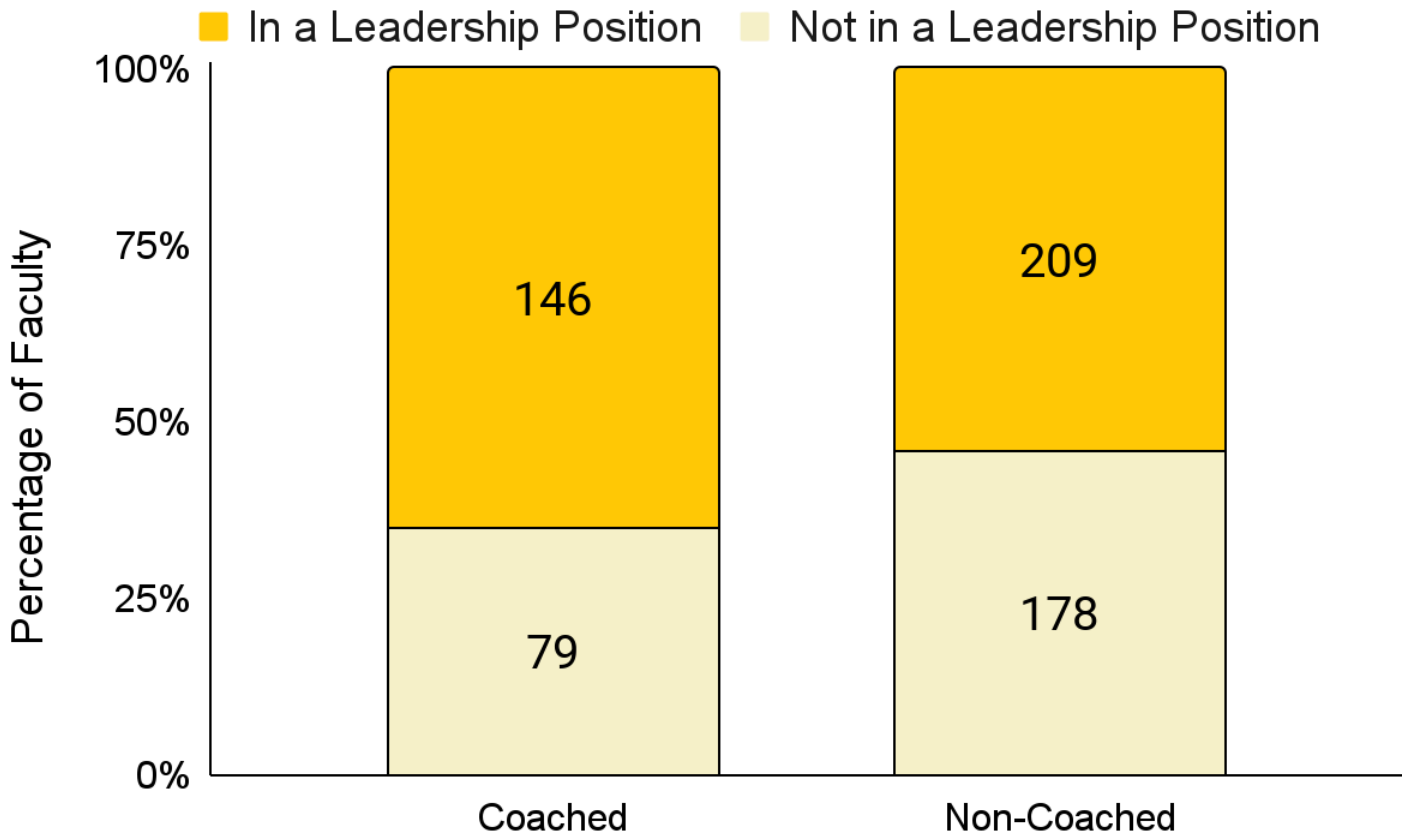
The surveys ADVANCE administered were designed to capture participants' responses upon completion of 4 and 8 sessions. Participants who did not complete four or eight sessions did not receive one/both of their surveys and thus their opinions/sentiments are not included in these data.

Results

Comprehensive Findings

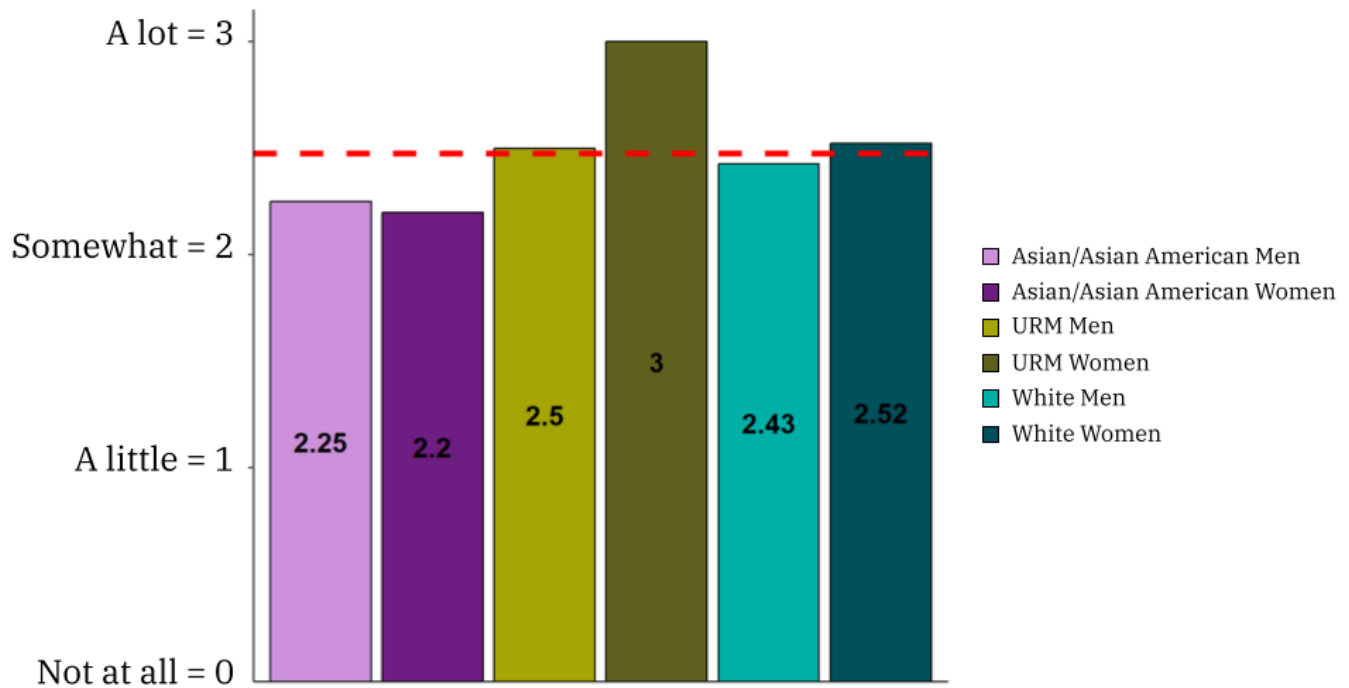
The main body of the report highlights a selection of relevant insights. Below is a comprehensive list of findings for all analyses performed, including those not featured in the main report. This appendix uses figures extensively; for a screen-reader accessible version, please refer to the accompanying [supplemental tabular data](#).

Figure 1. Proportion of Faculty Members in a Formal Leadership Role from 2008-2024 at U-M by Coaching Status



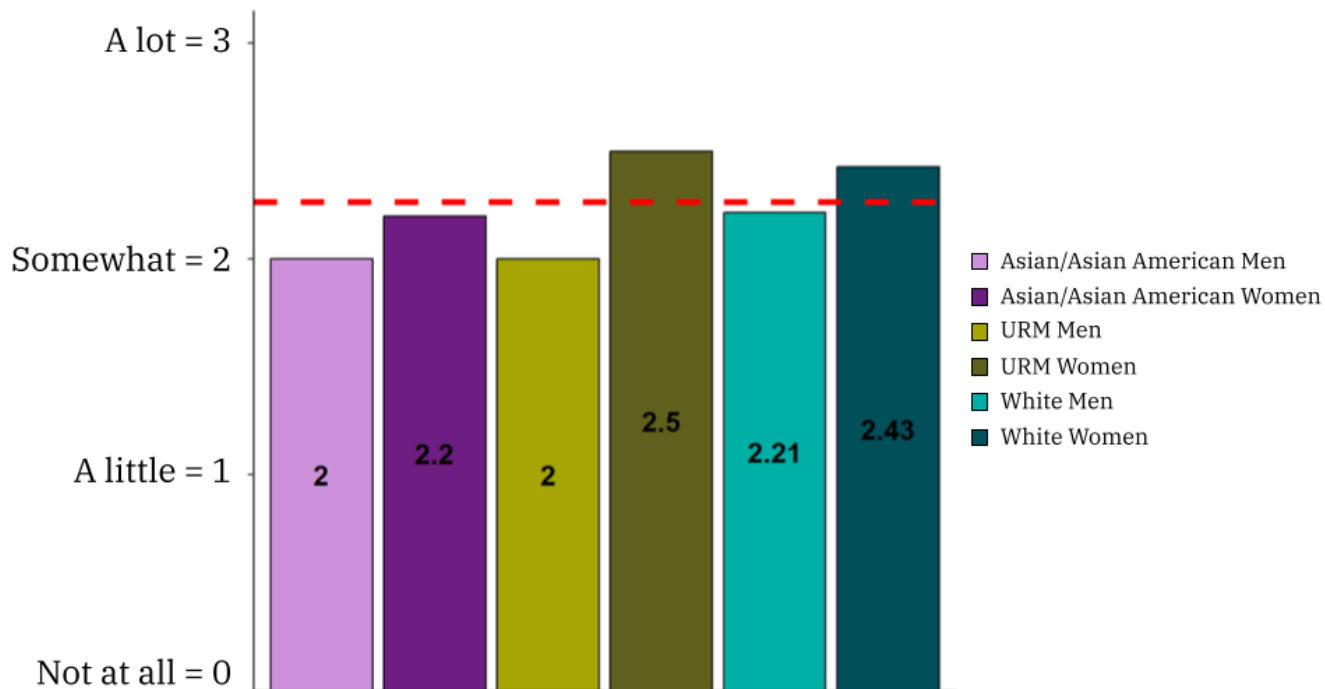
Note. The proportion of faculty members in formal leadership roles was significantly higher among coached faculty members (65%) compared to non-coached (but eligible) faculty members (54%), $\chi^2(1, N = 612) = 6.48, p = .01$.

Figure 2. *To what extent did coaching support your individual goal setting?*



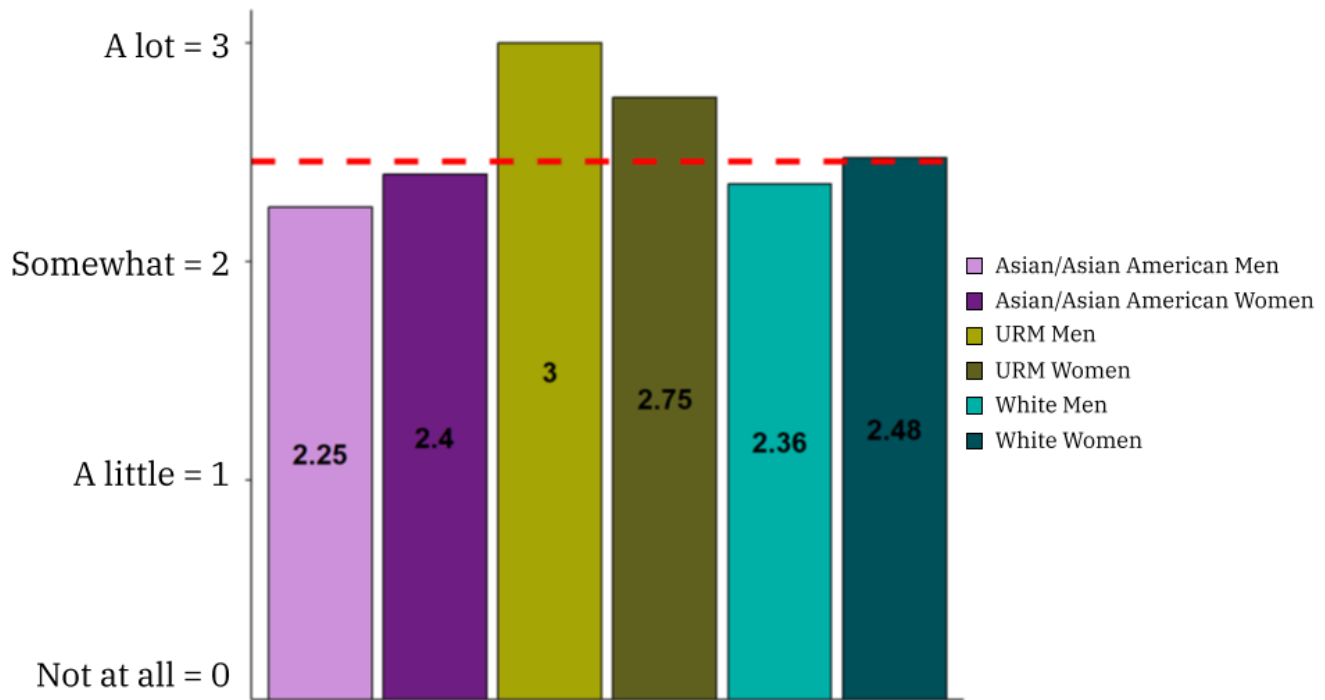
Note. On average, participants reported that coaching supported their individual goal setting (dashed line; $M = 2.48$). No significant differences ($p < .05$) were found between intersectional groups.

Figure 3. *To what extent did coaching develop your leadership skills and style?*



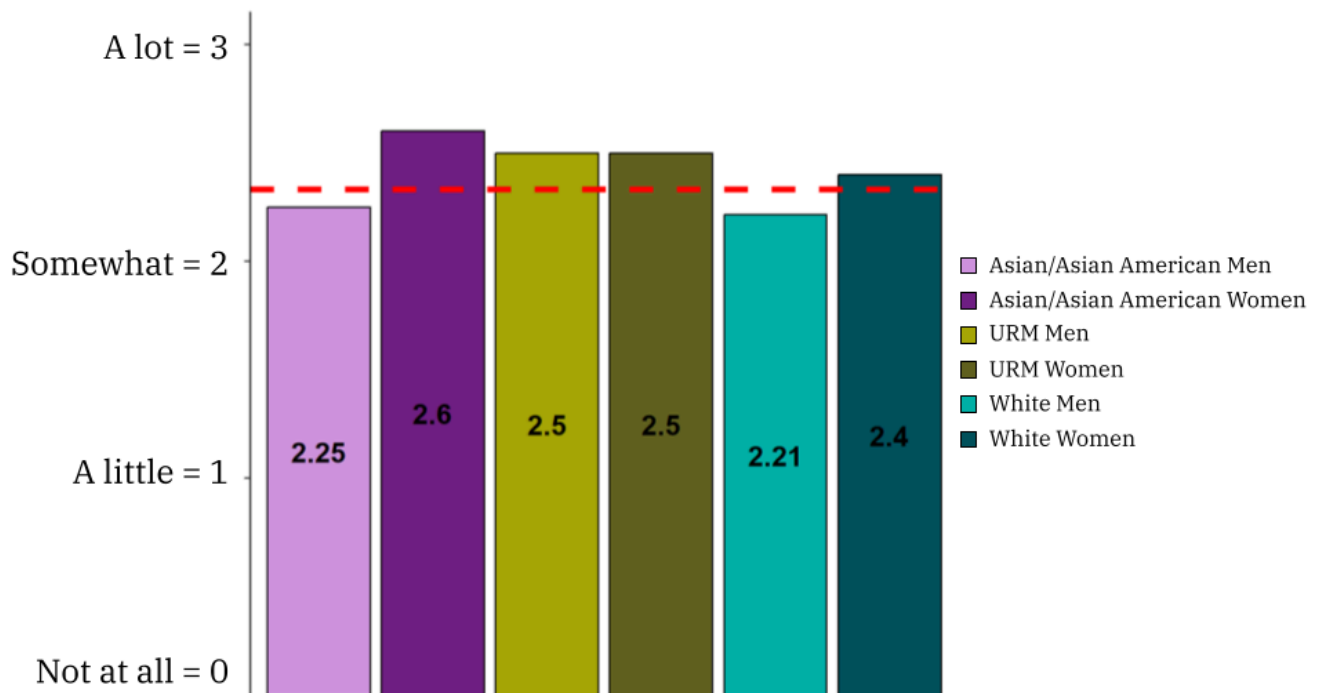
Note. On average, participants reported that coaching supported the development of their leadership skills and styles (dashed line; $M = 2.26$). No significant differences ($p < .05$) were found between intersectional groups.

Figure 4. To what extent did coaching help you think more strategically and/or function in diverse environments?



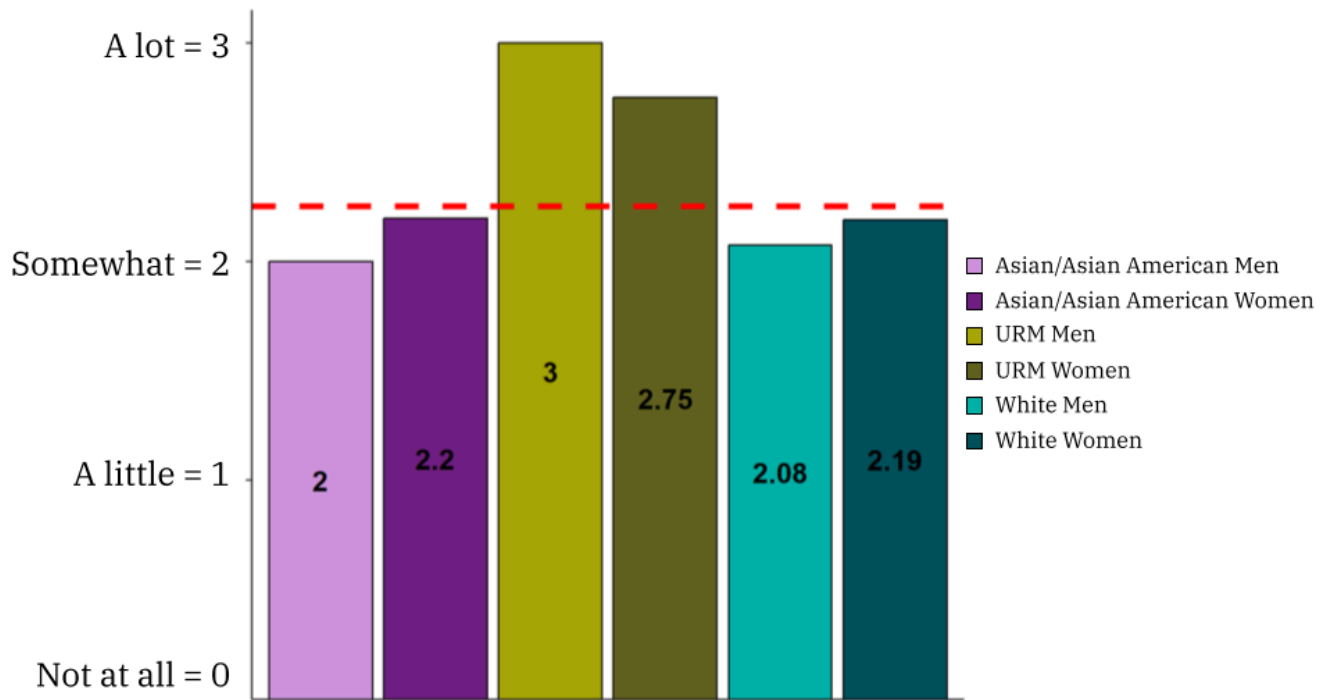
Note. On average, participants reported that coaching helped them to think strategically and function in diverse environments to a substantial degree (dashed line; $M = 2.46$). No significant differences ($p < .05$) were found between intersectional groups.

Figure 5. To what extent did coaching increase your ability to engage productively with those who are different from you?



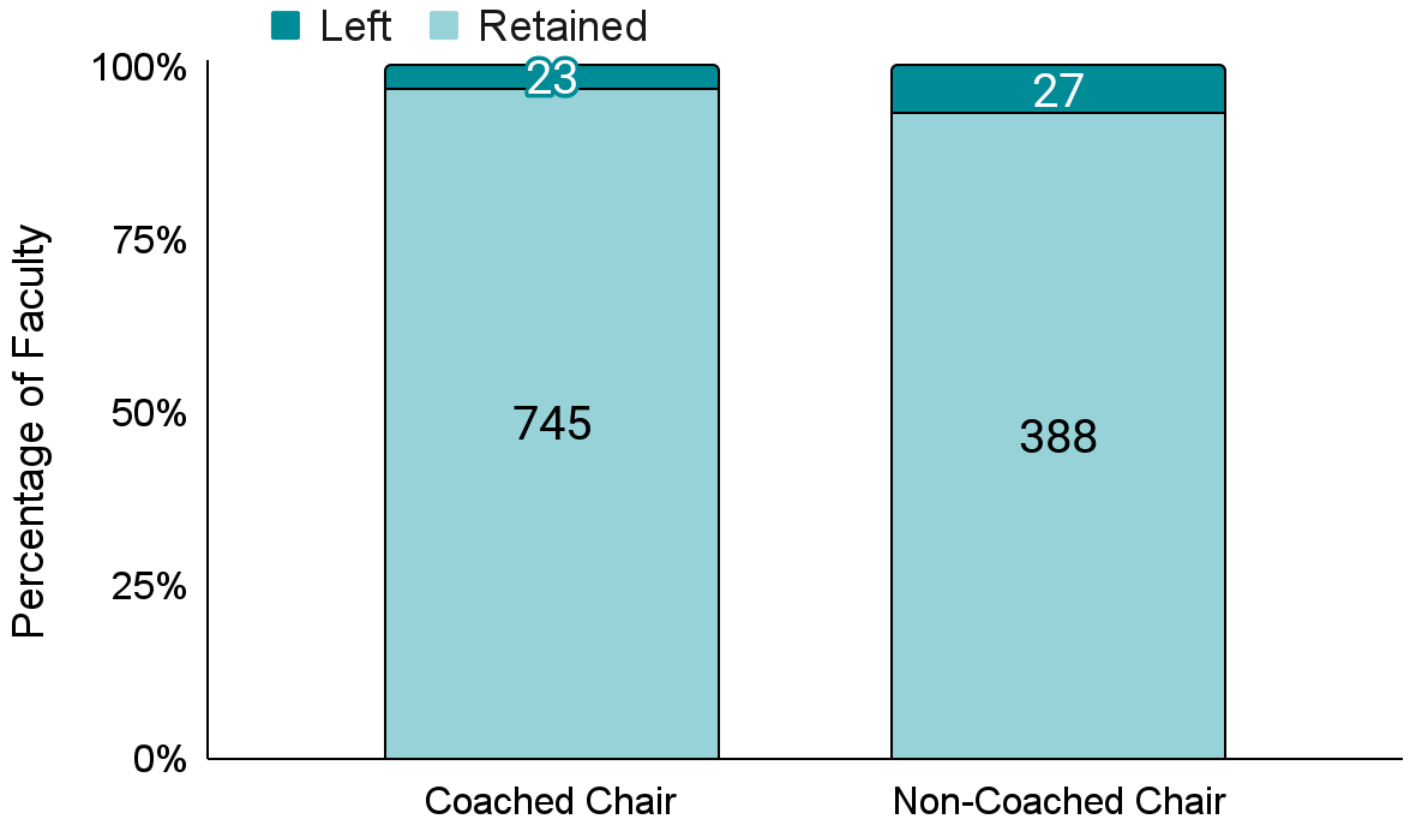
Note. On average, participants reported that coaching increased their ability to engage productively with others to a substantial degree (dashed line; $M = 2.33$). No significant differences ($p < .05$) were found between intersectional groups.

Figure 6. To what extent did coaching increase your resources for dealing with the ways you are different from those around you?



Note. On average, participants reported that coaching somewhat increased their resources for dealing with the ways they are different from others (dashed line; $M = 2.25$). No significant differences ($p < .05$) were found between intersectional groups.

Figure 7. Proportion of Retained Faculty Members Post-COVID in Departments with a Coached Chair



Note. In 2020, faculty attrition rates (i.e., the percentage of faculty members who left their role the next year) were lower in departments with coached chairs (3%) than in departments with non-coached (but eligible) chairs (7%), $\chi^2(1, N = 1180) = 7.36, p = .007$.