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Iowa State University ADVANCE Collaborative Transformation Project: Enhancing Departmental Cultures, Practices and Structures

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Abstract

“The Iowa State University ADVANCE program is [...] designed to create an infrastructure at ISU for transforming structures, cultures, and practices in ways that enable and support recruitment and retention of a diverse, highly qualified and cohesive faculty. This infrastructure is designed to include “top down” university policies and procedures as well as “bottom up” initiatives involving departmental work climate and strategies for improving recruitment, retention and promotion of faculty” (Bird and Hamrick 2008).

To this end, ISU ADVANCE: • collects base-line quantitative data on the faculty recruitment, retention and promotion, and on faculty work issues such as satisfaction with departmental work climate and resource distributions, • supports policies designed to enhance faculty productivity and job satisfaction, • has implemented new programs such as faculty networking events and a mentoring program for faculty of color, • supports three Equity Advisors in the three focal colleges, • provides training to STEM faculty and department Chairs about subtle biases and how they operate, • supports ADVANCE Professors in each of 9 focal departments who work with the ADVANCE Leadership Team, focal department Chairs, and fellow faculty members to develop and implement department-level transformation strategies as part of a process called “Collaborative Transformation.”

Disciplines

Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research | Educational Leadership | Higher Education and Teaching

Iowa State University ADVANCE Collaborative Transformation Project: Enhancing Departmental Cultures, Practices and Structures

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ISU ADVANCE: Background

“The Iowa State University ADVANCE program is [...] designed to create an infrastructure at ISU for transforming structures, cultures, and practices in ways that enable and support recruitment and retention of a diverse, highly qualified and cohesive faculty. This infrastructure is designed to include “top down” university policies and procedures as well as “bottom up” initiatives involving departmental work climate and strategies for improving recruitment, retention and promotion of faculty” (Bird and Hamrick 2008).

To this end, ISU ADVANCE:

- collects base-line quantitative data on the faculty recruitment, retention and promotion, and on faculty work issues such as satisfaction with departmental work climate and resource distributions,
- supports policies designed to enhance faculty productivity and job satisfaction,
- has implemented new programs such as faculty networking events and a mentoring program for faculty of color,
- supports three Equity Advisors in the three focal colleges,
- provides training to STEM faculty and department Chairs about subtle biases and how they operate,
- supports ADVANCE Professors in each of 9 focal departments who work with the ADVANCE Leadership Team, focal department Chairs, and fellow faculty members to develop and implement department-level transformation strategies as part of a process called “**Collaborative Transformation.**”

ISU Collaborative Transformation (CT) Project

The ISU Collaborative Transformation (CT) project involves social science researchers working with faculty from nine ISU STEM departments (phased into the project in sets of 3). The CT Project is designed to “mirror back” to faculty in each participating department positive and negative aspects of their own workplace climate and of their department’s recruitment, retention and promotion practices—especially as these affect women and faculty of color (Bird and Hamrick 2008).

CT Data Collection and Dissemination Process (Department Level)

Data: Focus group and interview data.

Analysis: Open and focused coding.

Products: (1) 3 separate departmental reports on “climate”/recruitment, retention and promotion of underrep. faculty; (2) Synthesis report (available online at: http://www.advance.iastate.edu/reports-isu_advance.shtml)

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CT Departmental Level Change Strategies and Outcomes So Far: Highlights

Departmental efforts made thus far under the leadership of ADVANCE Professors to improve department climate and to create structures more conducive to recruitment, retention and promotion of faculty—especially women faculty—include:

- Addressing Work-Life Issues:
 - One department (GDCB) drafted a “Relief from Teaching for New Parents” policy (currently being reviewed by ISU Human Resources) (Powell-Coffman 2008a).
 - Another department (MSE) drafted a similar policy (after learning of the GDCB initiative) (Constant 2008a).
 - Two departments (EEOB, MSE) raised the issue of appropriate faculty meeting times.
 - One department held discussion of existing work-life balance policies (Constant 2007).
 - Two departments (GDCB, EEOB) collaborated to produce a policy for providing childcare for visiting speakers (Powell-Coffman 2008a).

- Addressing Recruitment Issues:
 - All three departments held discussions during job searches about the importance of understanding and avoiding cognitive biases (Constant 2008b; Janzen 2008b; Powell-Coffman 2008a).
 - Similarly, faculty in all three focal departments have addressed the issue of whether and to what extent “diversity” (defined variously by those who use the term) should be consciously used (or not) in faculty searches (Constant 2008b; Janzen 2008b; Powell-Coffman 2008a).
 - Two departments (GDCB, EEOB), in collaboration with a non-focal Department (BBMB), received an ISU mini-grant to support seminar series “for promising post-doctoral fellows and future faculty in the basic life sciences” (Powell-Coffman 2008a).

- Addressing Tenure and Promotion Issues:
 - Department Chairs all took departmental assistant professors to breakfast/lunch to discuss tenure and promotion (among other things).
 - One department (EEOB) decided to create a formal mentoring program for Associate Professors (Janzen 2008a).
 - One department (GDCB) developed a seminar series ... to present their own “research in progress;” also encouraged assistant professors to invite prominent scholars in their area of research to come to ISU to give presentations (with funding support) (Powell-Coffman 2008a).

- Addressing Department Climate Issues:
 - All departments (many but not all faculty members, Chairs) participated in a “Practical Tools for Recognizing and Reducing Unintentional Bias” Workshop organized by EA, Janette Thomson; APs and EAs also participated as “players” in a reader’s theater enactment of subtle bias (October 31, 2007).
 - Two departments have acknowledged need to ensure that assistant professors feel welcomed to participate in and state frankly/honestly their own views in discussions about important department issues (Janzen 2008b; Powell-Coffman 2008a).
 - One department (GDCB) hosted a special seminar on “communication with journal editors” to address the perception among many faculty and students that this information was most readily available through informal networks (Powell-Coffman 2008a).

These departmental efforts and outcomes have influenced and have been influenced by simultaneous efforts being made at the college and university level.

CT: What's Working Well

1. Training for ISU partners who serve as leaders (ADVANCE Professors and department Chairs) of the collaborative transformation process in the focal departments—especially training that includes discussion of case studies highlighting subtle biases and how they operate.
2. Associate Provost's invitation to each focal department to participate, with an added push from the focal department Chairs helped ensure high participate rates in all three first round departments.
3. Use of external facilitator to run focus groups, and the fact that the facilitator's background in social science and in particular gender and work.
4. Breaking departmental focus groups into separate meetings by faculty rank, and allowing faculty members to request a 1-on-1 interview in addition or instead of participating in the focus group.
5. The Co-PI's explicit acknowledgement in presentations to the departments before the focus groups took place that colleges within the university and departments within the colleges have different work cultures and norms.
6. Open and consistent communication between the departmental leaders (APs, in particular) and the social science researchers who are Co-PIs on the grant (and who are directing the CT project).
7. Regular meetings between the APs, Equity Advisors and members of the Co-PI leadership team.
8. Development of clear, explicit protocols for the process--distributed to members of ADVANCE Leadership Team, Equity Advisors, ADVANCE Professors, Focal department Chairs and Deans of focal colleges.

CT: Challenges

1. Collaborative Transformation is time-intensive. Data collection with the first round of departments was extremely time-consuming. This took a toll on the researchers and on APs. While the social science researchers were aware that time would be an issue (Bailyn and Fletcher 2008; Ely and Meyerson 2000), we did not adequately prepare the APs for the intensity of the work. Economies of scale (e.g., having clear and effective protocols already in place, providing more information ahead of time to the APs and department Chairs) should help better prepare the next round of APs and ease their workload. Also, the 2nd round APs will meet regularly with the first round APs (EA/AP bi-monthly meetings) to provide support and share insights.
2. Rate of progress in each department depends on multiple factors:
 - how much time and effort the ADVANCE Professors in each department are willing and able to put into this work;
 - the ability of AP to “see” the issues him/herself;
 - the ability of the AP and/or department Chair to leverage goodwill previously gained (personally) by being collegial and professionally successful in the eyes of colleagues (Powell-Coffman 2008a);
 - overcoming skepticism (which, according the APs, all 3 departments did) on the part of faculty that CT efforts (and related departmental faculty discussions) would yield positive results;
 - Chair support;
 - whether the CT effort is viewed as a way to make all that the department is already doing (e.g., faculty searches) work better, or CT effort is viewed as a separate “add on” that will just deplete time that faculty view as better spent doing other things.

3. Reception of the findings from the department reports (department audience only) and synthesis report has been somewhat mixed.
- While all departments viewed reports of findings as accurate and helpful, some nonetheless continue to believe that the efforts of the ISU ADVANCE program to change department cultures, practices and structures is a waste of time (e.g., *because “real” problem is that there aren’t enough women “in the pipeline”*).
 - Some faculty (mostly men) in at least one of the departments (GDCB) were braced for potential recrimination and discussions of years past, and were thus relieved that the focus group discussions for the CT project were forward-looking and focused on the future success of all faculty. The report from the departmental climate/recruitment and retention study did not diffuse all tensions, but it definitely provided a space in the department for fruitful discussions (Powell-Coffman 2008b).
 - Some faculty (women, mostly) believe that the CT project is not aggressive enough in dealing with issues of bias and discrimination.
 - Some faculty (men, mostly) are indifferent to the CT project as well as the ADVANCE Program.
 - Some trivialize the work of the CT project.

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