

IMPLEMENTING A TRANSITIONAL SUPPORT PROGRAM

Sheila Edwards Lange¹, Eve A. Riskin², Suzanne G. Brainard³ and Denice D. Denton⁴

Abstract – As part of its National Science Foundation ADVANCE Institutional Transformation Award, the University of Washington implemented a Transitional Support Program for faculty members. The program goals are to make faculty careers less stressful during times of transitions such as a new child, first tenure track appointment, expansion or redirection of a research program, major illness or caring for elderly parents. Support is offered for up to three academic quarters for the faculty member moving through such a transition. Small grants are provided for course release, graduate student or post-doctoral support and/or laboratory supplies. Grant proposals are solicited quarterly and, in its first year, seventeen faculty have benefited from the program. Panelists will describe the program and provide guidelines for replicating similar programs at other universities.

Index Terms – ADVANCE, faculty careers, balancing family and careers, transitional support.

INTRODUCTION

One of the most cited advantages of a faculty career is its flexible schedule. As long as they are productive, faculty members can set their own work schedules and, in some cases, work locations. In the midst of major life crises, however, the same flexibility that was an advantage can become a burden. Because of the flexibility in a faculty member's schedule, a crisis or transition in a faculty member's personal life can easily consume a tremendous amount of time.

Studies on faculty stress have identified lack of time, family needs and pressure to do the research needed for promotion as the most common sources of stress among university faculty [1-2]. For many faculty members, time spent on campus is usually devoted to teaching and service, while evenings and weekends are used for research and writing. Children, major illness or caring for an elderly parent all detract from the time available for research and writing. Often the time given up to attend to major transitions in personal lives would otherwise be spent on the teaching and research needed for promotions and advancement.

According to a recent Chronicle of Higher Education article, the flexibility and unbounded nature of academic

careers is especially challenging for female faculty [3]. Although a supportive spouse or partner can alleviate some of the stress, women still bear most of the responsibility for care-giving, and men and women make very different trade-offs in how they allocate their time [4]. Thompson & Dey [1] report that female faculty experience greater levels of stress than their male colleagues, and suffer significantly more from lack of time and concerns about promotion. Mason & Goulden [5] found that faculty career transitions that coincide with child-bearing are particularly costly to women's advancement and promotion. According to their study, women who had babies within five years of earning their doctorates exhibited lower rates of earning tenure compared to men who had babies in the same time period.

To alleviate the negative impact that lack of time due to major life transitions might have on faculty careers, the University of Washington (UW) established a Transitional Support Program (TSP) as part of its National Science Foundation (NSF) ADVANCE Program. The TSP awards grants of \$5000 to \$27,000 to outstanding science, engineering, and mathematics (SEM) faculty in the midst of major life transitions, such as the birth or adoption of a child, personal medical needs, family illness, and/or caring for an elderly parent. The TSP also helps faculty members who need a modest level of support to advance from assistant to associate professor or associate to full professor. Support for the faculty member may be provided for up to three academic quarters during the transition. The primary focus of the program is to help faculty as they deal with the stress and challenges of balancing an academic career with a personal life.

What follows is a synopsis of the ADVANCE Program at the University of Washington, a description of how the Transitional Support Program was implemented at UW, a summary of evaluation results from the first year of the program, and the outlook for institutionalizing the program after the grant period ends. Recommendations on how to best replicate the program at other institutions are provided.

UW ADVANCE

The University of Washington was one of the initial eight universities selected for a National Science Foundation ADVANCE grant in the fall of 2001. The UW has a Carnegie ranking of Doctoral/Research University/Extensive

¹ Sheila Edwards Lange, University of Washington, Center for Workforce Development, Seattle, WA 98195, sredward@u.washington.edu

² Eve A. Riskin, Electrical Engineering Department, University of Washington, Seattle, WA 98195, riskin@ee.washington.edu

³ Suzanne G. Brainard, University of Washington, Center for Workforce Development, Seattle, WA 98195, brainard@u.washington.edu

⁴ Denice D. Denton, College of Engineering, University of Washington, Seattle, WA 98195, denton@enr.washington.edu

and for the past thirty years it has been the number one public university in the country in receiving federal support for research and training. It is one of the few universities in the nation where the Dean of the College of Engineering is a woman. Its female science and engineering faculty members are recipients of numerous national awards including National Science Foundation Fellowships and Presidential Young Investigator Career Awards and National Research Council Fellowships. The UW ADVANCE project was designed to build upon existing strengths at the university while serving as the catalyst for institutional transformation. The project's vision as articulated in the original proposal is "a campus in which all SEM departments are thriving, all faculty are properly mentored, and every SEM faculty member is achieving to his or her maximum potential."

The UW ADVANCE program created a Center for Institutional Change (CIC) that is advised by a joint leadership team from the College of Engineering and the College of Arts and Sciences. The leadership team includes deans, chairs and faculty members from both colleges, the dean of the graduate school, the vice president for minority affairs and the university's human resources vice president. Academic departments participating in the program include all ten within the College of Engineering and nine of the twelve in the College of Arts and Sciences' Division of Science.

The number and percentage of female ladder faculty in each college is shown below in Table I. Ladder faculty at the University of Washington includes tenure track faculty and a special category of faculty who are without tenure by reason of funding (WOT). The only distinction between WOT and tenure track faculty is the source of funding for the position. They have identical rights, responsibilities, and obligations as tenure-track and tenured faculty members at similar ranks. Their duties and qualifications for promotion and merit increases are also similar.

TABLE I

UW ADVANCE LADDER FACULTY, FALL 2002

	Total	Female	% Female
College of Engineering	209	32	15.3%
College of Arts & Sciences	253	35	13.8%
Total UW ADVANCE	462	67	14.5%

The UW ADVANCE Center for Institutional Change has six major components:

- Leadership development for science, engineering, and mathematics (SEM) chairs and deans;
- Department cultural change;
- Examination of UW policies for equity and policy transformation;
- Mentoring women in SEM for leadership;
- Visiting scholars who can contribute to the goals of the project; and
- Transitional support for female faculty members in SEM departments.

The leadership development component is focused on providing chairs and deans with information and tools to address issues of equity and promotion in academia. Half-day seminars have been held on issues such as dual career recruitment, understanding department culture, helping faculty navigate the tenure track and how to use the annual faculty review meeting as a faculty development opportunity. Chairs are invited to bring an emerging faculty leader from their department to the quarterly seminars.

The seminars have also contributed to the departmental cultural change component. In the initial seminar, one of the ADVANCE department chairs presented a case study of how his department assessed the culture and climate for underrepresented faculty and graduate students. Other departmental culture activity includes annual interviews with department chairs, focus groups with female faculty members, the development of a faculty retention toolkit and ongoing support for chairs interested in improving the diversity of their faculty and student bodies.

Examination of campus policies has been the purview of the President's Advisory Committee on Women (PACW) and other campus-wide diversity committees. The CIC Director was appointed to PACW and serves as a liaison to the Faculty Senate's Special Committee on Faculty Women. PACW and the senate committee have taken the lead on policy review with input from the CIC Director and the ADVANCE leadership team.

The mentoring component of the ADVANCE program is directed at female faculty and graduate students. A mentoring program that pairs female graduate students interested in academic careers with faculty members on campus has been implemented. An informal mentoring program for faculty emerged as a result of faculty input. Rather than formal matched pairs, faculty members preferred that the ADVANCE program provide them with networking opportunities and a cadre of experts willing to help with funding proposals and tenure packages.

The visiting scholars program provides opportunities for participating departments to bring underrepresented faculty members to campus for seminars or for an extended period up to a year. It is also used to bring experts to campus for brief periods to conduct research on issues of interest to the ADVANCE program.

The final component of the UW ADVANCE program, transitional support for female faculty members, was proposed as a way to support outstanding faculty members in the midst of major life crises. Issues related to its implementation are discussed below.

IMPLEMENTING THE TSP

The Transitional Support Program (TSP) at the University of Washington was implemented in Winter 2002. From the beginning, it was decided that the program would be competitive; that a variety of circumstances and proposed remedies would be considered; that the selection process

would be managed solely by the CIC Director and the ADVANCE Principal Investigator; that the request for proposals would be offered multiple times per year; and that participation in an evaluation process would be mandatory for all recipients.

In an effort to avoid perceptions that the program is remedial, the ADVANCE leadership team decided upon a competitive application process. It was hoped that the competition would signal to recipients and their colleagues that the award is given only to outstanding faculty members who are deserving of the honor. Applicants must submit written statements about the type of transition they are experiencing, how it has impacted their career thus far and how an award will help to advance their career during the transition. A letter of support from the department chair is strongly encouraged. To enhance the prestige of the award, recipients are called ADVANCE Professors.

The transitions experienced by TSP applicants have been as varied as the remedies proposed. Transitions experienced include major illness in a child, critical lab samples lost in a divorce, the birth of a new child, new faculty positions, and starting new research centers. Faculty are advised not to include information about a medical condition in the TSP application but to work with the Disability Services Office to obtain a letter affirming that a qualifying medical condition exists. Faculty medical leave must be used first in the case of personal medical conditions. If a faculty member's transition situation changes unexpectedly (i.e., a failed adoption or pregnancy), the award is reevaluated and the award is adjusted as appropriate to the new situation. All applications are confidential and the CIC Director is extremely discreet on who is consulted when seeking remedies.

As applications are reviewed, the ADVANCE/CIC Director works very closely with the applicant and his/her department chair to develop cost-effective remedies. TSP funds to pay for graduate student support have been one of the most popular remedies for faculty who need more time for research. In other cases, department chairs have provided course releases, or reduced the cost for course releases, to provide the ADVANCE Professors additional time for research. Others have needed funds for lab equipment or post-doctoral support. One significant outcome of the CIC Director and department chair collaboration on remedies has been the leveraging of award funding. Many of the department chairs have matched TSP awards either in-kind or with cash contributions.

Decisions on TSP awards and remedies are left solely to the CIC Director and the UW ADVANCE Principal Investigator (the Dean of the College of Engineering). The autonomy and flexibility in decision-making enables the Director to negotiate remedies with department chairs with little bureaucracy. Once a decision to grant an award is made, very little administrative action is needed to execute the negotiated remedy.

Another benefit of the tight decision-making process is that the request for proposals can be offered three times per year with deadlines in December (support for Winter Quarter), February (support for Spring Quarter), and May (support for Summer and Fall Quarters). Male and female faculty members in UW ADVANCE are sent quarterly email announcements about the program and its deadlines. The UW ADVANCE web site has deadlines listed for each quarter to allow faculty to plan ahead and a budget tool to help them calculate the costs of release time and/or graduate support.

Applicants are notified of their selection by the CIC Director and reminded that they will be required to participate in the program's evaluation process. The evaluation is managed by the Center for Workforce Development at the University of Washington. The evaluation is formative and qualitative. At the end of their award period, recipients are sent an email requesting a statement on the impact that the award has had on their research productivity and/or career advancement.

EVALUATION RESULTS

To date, in five rounds a total of seventeen faculty members from participating SEM departments have been designated as ADVANCE Professors. As part of the program evaluation, eight recipients of TSP awards have submitted statements on the impact of the award on their faculty careers. Although there are currently seventeen recipients, only half of the recipients were at a point in which they could evaluate the impact of the award. Statements from faculty members indicate that the program has greatly contributed to faculty productivity. A brief summary of statements is as follows:

- The TSP was used to support research assistance and has allowed the faculty member to produce three papers to submit for publication. The additional papers will significantly impact the faculty's tenure review in the coming academic year.
- The award was used to purchase lab supplies and support the faculty member's research program. As a result of the grant, the data gathered were used to produce a journal article, the faculty member has presented at a national conference, submitted a poster for an international conference, and is invited to present an abstract at another national society meeting in the fall.
- The award was used to provide research assistance. The faculty member has already submitted two proposals to fund additional research projects and is invited to present two abstracts to national meetings later this year.
- The award was used to buy-out of teaching a course spring quarter. As a result, the faculty member was able to prepare a research funding proposal for submission to the National Science Foundation that was funded for \$10 million dollars. The multi-year award will provide

funding for a new research center -- one of only two in the country.

- The award was used to provide research assistance and summer salary following the birth of a child. As a result, the faculty member was able to prepare two publications, and submit a proposal for a Faculty Early CAREER Award.
- The award was used for course release for an associate professor working on papers needed for promotion to full professor. In the first two weeks of the buy-out, the faculty member completed one paper for publication. She has made substantial progress on additional papers.
- The award was used for course release and research support. The faculty member was able to produce a manuscript with an undergraduate lab assistant that is now in press. She also used the time to explore a new research direction and produce preliminary results needed for an NIH funding proposal.
- The award was used to provide bridge funding for a research group while the faculty member recovered from a difficult pregnancy. The work of the laboratory and research group continued during her absence and several publications are anticipated based on the work.

An unintentional consequence of the TSP has been the informal mentoring of all those who submit funding requests, regardless of whether or not the request is selected for an award. When applications have not been selected for a TSP award, the CIC director has facilitated the applicant's introduction to other campus resources and programs. In a few cases, the CIC director has been able to work with the applicant and/or other managers to solve the transition concern with little or no funding.

POST-GRANT IMPLICATIONS

The UW ADVANCE project goal is to transform the institution rather than provide programs that terminate with the grant funding. Thus, the leadership team continues to focus on how to institutionalize programs that prove effective during the grant. The team is working to institutionalize the TSP program through campus-wide dissemination of information about the program's impact and by using program evaluation data to inform institutional policy changes.

The CIC director provides chairs and deans with feedback about the impact of the program on faculty productivity. In quarterly leadership training sessions, decision-makers are reminded of the leverage provided by the relatively inexpensive TSP awards. Chairs have been encouraged to develop similar remedies for potentially terminal associate faculty members.

Evaluation results are being used to inform institutional policy changes related to transitions. In the second year of the ADVANCE grant the UW received a Sloan Foundation

Grant to examine part-time tenure track models for faculty members. The grant will allow the institution to review existing policies and craft a flexible policy that faculty might use during transitions. The ADVANCE evaluation process has also identified concerns about the use of an existing tenure clock stopping policy at the university. Faculty expressed reluctance to use the policy because of negative perceptions about the impact on their relationship with departmental colleagues. The CIC director brought this issue to the attention of President's Advisory Committee on Women (PACW). The President's Advisory Committee is working with others on campus to investigate revisions to the policy that might improve how university faculty members perceive it as a tool for managing transitions.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REPLICATION

The TSP program at the University of Washington has been implemented to be flexible and responsive to the needs of faculty members. A variety of remedies has been used and recipients have included male faculty members. Program evaluation indicates that in each case, the TSP recipient has increased his or her research productivity. Based on the experiences encountered during the implementation of the program at UW, the following recommendations are offered to institutions interested in replicating the program.

1. Consider adaptability of the model to the scale and culture of the institution. The program can be implemented at the department level or university-wide depending on interest and the amount of funding available. The culture of the institution might influence the scale of the program as well as the population that might be eligible for participation in the program.
2. Include chairs and deans in the program planning and development stage. Chairs and deans are more likely to support a program when they are involved in its design. Their involvement will also lessen the need to explain program goals and/or justify requests for their assistance in the development of remedies.
3. Build flexibility into the language used to solicit proposals. Rather than limiting transitions to a specific list, flexibility in language will allow the program to respond to variations in the type of transitions that faculty may experience.
4. Strongly encourage or mandate that applicants include a letter of support from their department chair in the application materials. If the chair provides a letter of support, they will be forewarned about the type of transitional assistance needed. The letter is also a clear indication that the chair will be amenable to finding a solution to the faculty member's concerns.
5. Include language which allows for a reassessment of the award if the circumstances of the transition change substantially from those described in the application. The ability to increase or decrease awards will allow the program to better respond to faculty needs. Changes in

circumstances such as unexpected assistance from a family member, a miscarriage, a delay in adoption plans or quick recovery from illness could change the type of transitional support needed at any point during the award period.

6. Be cautious about program eligibility based solely on gender. Major life transitions impact both genders and in many dual career families the male partner does share equally in care-giving responsibilities.
7. Establish an expectation that recipients will assist in the evaluation process. Doing so sends a message that a tangible outcome is expected at the end of the grant period. Further, faculty members are aware of the importance of accountability for program funds and know ahead of time that they must cooperate with program evaluators.

SUMMARY

The presence of a Transitional Support Program has been extremely valuable for faculty productivity and morale. During the evaluation process, many of the TSP recipients noted that for the first time in their faculty careers they felt as if the institution were invested in their success. The availability of the program acknowledges that balance in faculty lives is valued by the institution. The program at the University of Washington serves as a model for other college and universities seeking ways to support faculty during difficult transitions.

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