External Evaluation Report for Texas A&M ADVANCE
Year 5, June 2015

Sandra Laursen
Ethnography & Evaluation Research, U. Colorado Boulder

This report is based on a visit to campus May 5-6, 2015. During my campus visit I met with 16 individuals (in various combinations) from the TAMU ADVANCE team, including the theme co-chairs, evaluation and social science studies teams, the Center personnel (project director Chris Kaunas, PI Sherry Yennello, coordinator Linda Stelly, assistant Melissa Shaffer) and the new dual-career coordinator, Dea Polk. I had telephone conversations with Kaunas in September 2014 and April 2015, and I reviewed the project web site, recent quarterly and annual reports, plus some new presentations and reports from the project, evaluation and social science studies teams received during my visit.

Overview—Strategic Approach and Progress

Nearing the end of its fifth year, the ADVANCE Center is active and visible. Key administrators engage with the leadership team on planning and thinking forward to sustainability. Twelve activities are conceptually clustered under three themes: Recruitment and Retention, Success Enhancement, and Climate Change. Each activity is aligned with one or more principles for a "psychologically healthy workplace" that address job satisfaction and work environment; this framework is used mainly to justify rather than design or drive the activities. Most activities are ongoing and are undergoing only minor revisions in response to formative evaluation; in a few cases, activities are winding down as their five-year budget is expended. Given this status, and the thorough documentation of activities in the project's interim and annual reports to NSF, I do not review the individual activities here, but they are itemized for easy reference. Most of the report will focus on the broader discussions of the integration of evaluation and research and the project's attention to institutionalization and sustainability; I offer some comments on prospects for sustaining individual activities here.

The *Climate Change* strand addresses faculty's everyday interactions with colleagues, staff and students, and leaders' awareness of gender bias.

- LEAD offers professional development for department heads, enhancing their knowledge about gender (and other) equity issues and practical strategies to address these issues. It is viewed as important in advancing awareness and skills of these key leaders.

- Student programming seeks to improve faculty experience of climate by coaching students on behaviors and "Aggie values" around respectful communication with diverse faculty. Student-driven videos and skits are presented at new student orientation and summer "Fish Camp" sessions. This activity is innovative relative to other ADVANCE projects; it is unclear whether and how it may be portable to other institutions, given its locus in an important but idiosyncratic component of TAMU culture. Certainly these

issues will need to be considered in disseminating this intervention. To date, evaluation data do not show evidence of change in faculty experience of student disrespect.

- Departmental Mini Grants offer STEM departments funding to address specific climate issues they identify as important. These have been delayed for a time while the program is reviewed and reconsidered.

- FASIT engages department-based faculty/staff teams in learning about implicit bias and differences in campus cultures that each group experiences, then helps them to implement self-defined climate improvement projects in their own unit. This activity had a slower start but is gaining momentum. This project is distinctive relative to other ADVANCE projects and taps into an aspect of climate that has been little explored but may be widespread. However, the lack of a rigorous impact evaluation may hamper potential uptake of FASIT on other campuses.

The *Recruitment and Retention* strand focuses on recruiting more diverse faculty and helping them to succeed and thrive.

- STRIDE training offers professional development on broadening search pools and countering implicit bias in evaluating applicants as preparation for service on a search committee. Two colleges are now requiring STRIDE training for all search committees, and a workshop was offered to TAMU System department heads in July 2014. Variations also being developed to apply the same concepts to promotion and tenure, awards, and other areas where implicit bias may shape evaluation. The Dean of Faculties (trained as a STRIDE leader) also incorporates an abbreviated version into sessions for department heads. Two cohorts of STRIDE leaders are available to conduct trainings. We brainstormed some ideas to increase the small audience for trainings so that STRIDE leaders' time is well used. A study of the impact of this program is suffering from low response rates; the research team is considering various options to gather the needed data. Gathering data to demonstrate impact should be a priority, as the STRIDE training may be one of the higher-impact programs on this campus, as it has been elsewhere.

- The Faculty Recognition effort seeks to increase equity in who is nominated for and receives campus and external awards. This effort is currently less active.

- The Roadmap workshop supports new assistant professors, postdocs and some participants from outside A&M. This workshop is viewed as a good candidate for uptake by other units as early as spring 2016. The College of Engineering has requested inclusion of their graduate students from groups underrepresented in engineering.

- The ADVANCE speaker series is ongoing.

The *Success Enhancement* strand focuses on enabling women already at the institution to flourish in their careers.

- The ADVANCE Scholars program matches early-career women faculty of color with on-campus advocates and off-campus mentors. Qualitative evaluation results are positive about its impact on participants and advocates. Small numbers of early-career faculty are involved, and these sample sizes will not support a statistical analysis, but it may still be interesting to track the retention of Scholars in comparison to historical TAMU retention of women of color to see if there is any early evidence for longer-term effects that may help to demonstrate the value of the positive short-term effects reported in the qualitative study.

  The Scholars program is viewed as a strong candidate for institutionalization. Several colleges have agreed to pay the incremental cost of including their eligible early-career faculty, and some STEM departments are independently supporting the off-campus mentoring component to early-career white women who are not eligible for the full Scholars program. A plan has been laid out for transitioning the programming costs to the Diversity Office and the per-scholar costs to the colleges.

- The Administrative Fellows program is ongoing; no new Fellows are likely to be supported with ADVANCE funding, but some colleges have subscribed to a buy-in model for the future. Whether or not this will be used is an open question. There has been some attention to the perceptions and realities of how this program may play into the advancement of mid-career women, issues described in last year's external evaluation report. Recent data from one of the social science studies should be used to help address these questions and describe the impact of this program. Because the Fellows model is used in other university programs that are expected to continue independent of ADVANCE funding, it is important to identify and share the lessons learned in ways useful to leaders of these other Fellows programs. The ADVANCE Center may be a good administrative home for bringing Fellows together for reflection and trouble-shooting, and for ensuring attention to practices that are identified as successful.

- Some Success Circles are ongoing; these peer mentoring/interest groups function as one way for women faculty to find others with common interests.

Dual Career programming has been supported by a supplemental grant from NSF's Career/Life Balance initiative. Activity slowed when the first coordinator left for another job, but a new Dual-Career Program coordinator has been hired and is catching up with open cases and developing new community contacts of her own. One challenge has been to manage the expectations of faculty partners who are non-citizens and do not have US work authorization. The sustainability model for this program is obvious, as the position could be readily adopted into the Dean of Faculties' office. Whether or not that happens will depend to a strong extent on the careful tracking that is being implemented. These data—and perhaps some testimonies from

faculty who have benefited—will be needed to build the cost/benefit analysis demonstrate whether and how this program is valuable in retaining excellent faculty, particularly women.

Progress toward Sustainability and Institutionalization

As noted above, the ADVANCE team has already begun to secure "small commitments" to sustaining some of its efforts. I summarize here some steps that reflect progress.

Many ADVANCE projects find that, in order to institutionalize their activities they must broaden access by including men and non-STEM faculty in many programs. (This need not imply that all programs are opened to all faculty.) Thus one mechanism for institutionalization is to grow the clientele for existing ADVANCE activities, recruiting financial support for these activities from the newly participating units. In this vein, the project continues to build relationships with other university units. I have earlier noted the inclusion of non-STEM units of COALS, Medicine and Veterinary Medicine, and activities in the Bush School of Government and Public Service. New agreements are being developed to include the College of Education, the non-STEM units of Liberal Arts, and Public Health. In most cases the agreement make provision to include these units in specific activities at a defined cost; STRIDE trainings and ADVANCE Scholars seem to be those most commonly of interest. In working out these agreements, the ADVANCE Center is gaining a better sense of possible post-grant business models. In general, this mechanism addresses program costs but not the costs of a Center and its staff.

Another mechanism that has assisted in institutionalizing ADVANCE goals is sustaining data collection and reporting. It is essential to ensure that there are clients who want the data, and especially to ensure that they understand that data-gathering will not automatically continue under institutional auspices. That is, the ongoing utility and need for these data must be articulated by the stakeholders. TAMU has taken first steps in this direction; for example, the Dean of Faculties will support a graduate student to analyze climate survey data and has asked Evaluation Team leader Lori Taylor to continue her salary analyses. These are reasonable solutions for the transition period, but relying on faculty to pursue these analyses may not be viable in the long term.

Overall, the ADVANCE core leadership team has been remarkably stable over the duration of the grant, which has helped to maintain both effort and morale in the face of challenges. However two key activity committee leaders have left TAMU in the past year (Merna Jacobsen and Becky Pettit); both were instrumental in shaping the activities they led (FASIT and ADVANCE Scholars) and thus their departures have the potential to negatively affect these two activities. This points to the importance of building shared ownership of activities, including shared knowledge of their impact and how to implement their key elements, at least for activities that are seen as promising to continue.

The Legacy of TAMU ADVANCE

At this time, the project has sufficient support to extend the life of the ADVANCE Center for 1-2 years under a no-cost extension. The legacy of ADVANCE beyond this time depends on the case

its leaders can make for sustaining this work. The process should include both formal planning and informal stakeholder engagement. While this long-term visioning may feel less urgent than the day-to-day programming, it is an essential priority at this time. It may be necessary to reduce some activities now in order to re-deploy staff time for this sustainability work.

Formal Planning for Sustainability

What is the process by which decisions about sustaining ADVANCE will be made?   There are many possible models for sustaining the ADVANCE goals, whether by transferring specific activities to other offices, by maintaining an ADVANCE Center to coordinate ongoing activities and take on new initiatives, or some combination. Such planning should not assume a foregone conclusion about the nature and extent of institutionalization, but should explore all possible options. Not all programs provide the same return on investment.

To that end, it may be strategic to convene an ADVANCE Institutionalization Task Force, to include some core ADVANCE leaders and key administrators, but also some new members who can review the evidence with fresh eyes, offer 'outsider' perspectives and help to generate new ideas. Such a task force might be charged to identify and explore possible business models, to propose criteria for prioritizing specific activities to institutionalize or to sunset, and to report their recommendations back to the community. It should search for alignments with other institutional goals and synergies with the work of other units, while remaining attentive to institutional procedures and chains of command.

In the meantime, the ADVANCE Center will want to define the assets it can offer and consider its capacities to support ongoing and new initiatives. It will also be important to demonstrate willingness to sunset programs or elements that are less effective. We brainstormed possible elements of a Center business model, such as assisting with NSF 'Broader Impacts' grant activities, broadening focus to address underrepresentation in groups other than STEM women (thus addressing broader institutional diversity goals), serving as an incubator for new initiatives, and seeking "backstop" funding for Center personnel while they work to secure grants. There may be synergies with TAMU-CIRTL (http://cirtl.tamu.edu/index.html) in adapting ADVANCE materials to enhance graduate students' career success and understanding of diversity.

Informal Engagement of Constituents

To make a case for sustaining its work, ADVANCE will need to inform the campus broadly about what it has accomplished, and articulate the value of those accomplishments. This may require a shift in focus from doing the work to communicating it, and a shift in portraying the project as a set of 12 activities to making the case for how it has been a coherent effort toward institutional change. I believe that two existing elements of the project can be more effectively mobilized in making these shifts: the broad base of faculty support that has been garnered through their involvement in activity committees, and the project's investment in social science research and evaluation. Two strategies are urgent and essential in mobilizing these assets:

1. Enhancing the numbers and knowledge of "educated advocates" and engaging them to help articulate what ADVANCE has done and how it has had an impact on the TAMU campus. Possible tactics include:

   - Committee self-assessment: Since the design and development work of the activity committees is largely complete, it is an opportune time to re-convene each committee to review its work, tally its accomplishments, and summarize lessons learned about what worked and did not work. Conclusions from this self-assessment process might be summarized in short reports or activity briefs that follow a common template. A variety of types of data would usefully inform these reports: data on the need or rationale for the program, on the activity outputs (numbers of events held, people reached, dollars distributed, etc.), and, where available, on the activity outcomes (indicators of success, evidence of impact on individuals or the institution). Such activity briefs do not necessarily substitute for evaluation reports; rather, they summarize key points and data nuggets for use as tools for talking with deans, heads and other leaders, as well as shared more generally on the web site. One committee (perhaps one led by an ADVANCE co-chair) might pilot this self-assessment as a way to figure out the process and format of the report. However it is carried out, it is crucial that the working faculty participate meaningfully in this self-assessment and have a chance to understand the ADVANCE effort beyond their own committee involvement.

   - Community conversations: The activity briefs could form the centerpiece of a structured retreat or public event (e.g., poster session) to engage activity committee members and other ADVANCE allies in structured conversation to learn about the full set of activities, identify synergies, and offer their own ideas about and priorities for institutionalization. Good documentation of these conversations and their outcomes will be essential fodder for formal decision-making. There may be value in preparing an overview brief or summary to accompany the set of individual activity briefs.

   - Core team reflection: What take-aways or messages are essential to communicate to colleagues? How can you best articulate the coherence of the ADVANCE Center's many activities? What insights has the team gained about how to work for change, that can be shared with deans or other leaders? What more can you learn by listening?

   - Distributed conversations: How can educated advocates be empowered and encouraged to share what they know in their own everyday work on campus, in departments and on committees around the university? Is there a role for department- or school-level communication with faculty, e.g. targeted presentations or discussions about ADVANCE but also about what needs they see that can be addressed in future work?

   - Web site refocusing: To date the web site has served primarily as a tool for describing activities and informing would-be participants about ways to become involved. How can

it be enhanced to place emphasis not just on what has been done, but what has been accomplished?

2. Using evidence from project evaluation and social science studies to show what has been accomplished but also to articulate the need for ongoing attention to these and related issues. Peer-reviewed scholarly papers emerge too slowly and reach too narrow an audience to help in decision-making about sustainability, yet both teams have valuable knowledge that can help in making these decisions *now*. What forums and forms will best reach varied stakeholder groups?

- Presenting strategically: Both teams have been presenting work that is reported as well received and impactful, and have noted some ways data have been used to influence decision-making (e.g. in salary equity). This should continue, with particular attention to the most strategic venues for such presentations.

- Enhancing the value of evidence: TAMU's reports on statistical analyses of institutional data are carefully done and comprehensive, but often quite technical in style. How can the Evaluation team identify what analyses are of most interest to stakeholder groups and find effective ways to communicate these key findings to stakeholders? Effective visualization can highlight main messages; standardized "dashboard" formats or "report decks" can facilitate comparisons over time (see e.g. Evergreen, 2013; McMahon, 2014). For transparency, details about methods and samples can be placed in a separate appendix so that they are available to those interested, but do not present barriers to those most focused on the results.

- Extracting insights: The Social Science Studies are framed as research to build generalizable knowledge, but in fact these studies also have program evaluation value because they are based on data about specific activities or interventions conducted at TAMU. Along the way, it is certain that the researchers have developed essential insights about the program and its effects. These insights may be distinct from those directly answering their research questions, but they are nonetheless very valuable to the leadership team in understanding whether and how the program "works." While I acknowledge researchers' caution to communicate too much too soon, it should still be quite possible to distill these insights into a useful form for the leadership team and to communicate them in language that makes clear their status as evidence-based results without claiming the same status as peer-reviewed findings. Such information is important input into the decision-making process, with greatest utility if delivered *soon*.

- Finding audience-friendly language: Presenting project-derived results to stakeholders will require different emphases and different language and visuals than typically used with experts in one's own field. For instance, methods can be summarized succinctly, and less is needed in the way of a literature review or theoretical framework, but more attention must be paid to explaining the results and answering the crucial question about

their implications, "So what?" It would be wise for both teams to experiment with ways of presenting their results to non-experts. As an example, my own struggles to understand the evaluators' difference-in-difference analysis led us to collaboratively invent some useful language and visuals to explain the analysis, which the team was able to implement to good effect at the recent ADVANCE PI meeting.

- Expecting accountability: It is important that the leadership team hold these two teams accountable for these contributions; the evaluation and social science data are gathered in service of the ADVANCE project, not vice versa. At this crucial time, the leadership team must ask loudly, clearly, and repeatedly if necessary for analyses and communication tools that can help them plan and participate effectively in decision-making for long-term sustainability.

I have raised these issues—effective mobilization of advocates at the grassroots level, and effective integration of evaluation and research into the project work—in each of my last three reports (May 2012, Oct. 2013, June 2014). These issues seem even more salient to me as the project enters its final years. I see great potential—and great urgency—to leverage what has already been built to aid in defining what sustainability looks like for this project.

While this discussion has focused on communicating ADVANCE work with campus stakeholders to clarify the opportunities and needs for institutionalization, the same kinds of planning and communication practices will help to enhance the reputation of TAMU ADVANCE beyond the confines of campus, in part by helping the team learn how to more effectively communicate its accomplishments. Eventually the teams' planned journal articles will also assist with this. For example, I believe the difference-in-difference analysis will be well received in the ADVANCE community, but I still have concerns (also raised in prior reports) about the lack of a plan to gather data about possible mechanisms of diffusion of improved climate into ADVANCE-exposed departments. I look forward to continued discussion with the team about how we might learn more about this hypothesized process.

References cited

Evergreen, S. D. (2013). *Presenting data effectively: Communicating your findings for maximum impact*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

McMahon, G. (2014, May 28). Stop decking around: 7 ways to use Powerpoint. Blog post. http://makeapowerfulpoint.com/2014/05/28/stop-decking-around-7-ways-use-powerpoint/