External Evaluation Report for Texas A&M ADVANCE - Year 2, May 2012

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This report is based on the following data sources: conversations with PI Sherry Yennello and project director Chris Kaunas at the ADVANCE PI meeting in November 2011, telephone conversations with Chris Kaunas in June 2011 and January 2012, and a visit to campus May 9, 2012. During my campus visit I met with 15 individuals, including the theme leaders, evaluation and research teams, the project core team (Yennello, Kaunas, and coordinator Linda Stelly), and the steering group as a whole, which includes all of the above. I also reviewed the original proposal, quarterly reports for the past year, the project web site, and other documents provided.

Overview—Strategic Approach and Progress

In the middle of its second year, TAMU ADVANCE is making rapid progress on several fronts. A campus ADVANCE Center for Women Faculty is established and branded; twelve committees are actively planning and running a diverse menu of initiatives under three themes; and the Center is taking advantage of partnering opportunities across campus that are leveraging NSF funding and that will aid future sustainability. Over 120 faculty are involved in the activity committees and others have been drawn in for specific tasks. The leadership team is energetic and engaged; they are alert to challenges and proactively seeking creative solutions to them, as well as justifiably proud of their successes so far.

The TAMU ADVANCE Center organizes its work under three themes, each supporting the broader goal of protecting last decade's 'reinvestment' in hiring nearly 450 new faculty. Efforts gathered under the titles of Recruitment and Retention, Success Enhancement, and Climate Change seek to ensure that the new hires (about 20% of whom are women) are retained, supported to do good work, and satisfied with their careers. This approach is well aligned to TAMU's present situation, but it does pose a challenge for the project and its evaluators in that success will depend on less quantifiable outcomes such as climate change and the success of faculty who are currently assistant professors approaching third-year and tenure reviews, or new associate professors. Low rates of hiring university-wide mean that TAMU ADVANCE cannot expect major gains in the hiring of women, which on other campuses has been an indicator on which progress is more readily measured (albeit not easily won).[1] This may be where the project's theoretical framework, based on APA's principles for a "psychologically healthy workplace," turns out to be most useful, by defining measures that can be used to assess improvements in overall campus climate or in job satisfaction of particular faculty subgroups.

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[1] Based on data published in Bilimoria, D., Liang, X. (2012). *Gender Equity in Science and Engineering: Advancing Change in Higher Education* New York, NY: Routledge.

<u>Project Activities</u>

The quarterly reports to NSF detail the activity committees' work and progress. Here I outline some highlights and challenges, and comment on the portfolio of activities as a whole.

Success Enhancement

The ADVANCE Scholars program is seen as an early win. The program matches Scholars (early-career women faculty of color) with both on-campus advocates and off-campus mentors. This model is proving beneficial to the advocates (senior faculty and administrators who are mostly men and women of color), who are themselves energized by working collaboratively to plan activities and interact with their Scholars. Several Scholars attended the Road Map workshop and are participating in a grant-writing Success Circle. Such positive synergies were intended but perhaps greater than expected.

Another synergy is the spin-off of a grant-writing club Success Circle from the Road Map workshop. Because some other Success Circle topics have not taken off as anticipated, the committee is experimenting with one-off workshops and project-based groups as ways to instigate supportive cohorts that can counter the isolation often felt by early-career faculty.

The Administrative Fellows program is attracting good faculty candidates and generating positions in a variety of administrative offices. Feedback from the Fellows suggests that key elements of the model include an individual structured plan that provides each with a task and the authority to do it, and cohort-building and formal professional development via networking lunches of Fellows and their sponsors. This is valuable learning for the ADVANCE community as a whole, as this type of program has not succeeded everywhere it has been tried. I encourage the evaluation and research teams to document these outcomes and processes.

Recruitment and Retention

The Road Map workshop is seen as a major success, offering high bang for the buck both for the 41 early-career participants and the equal number of more senior colleagues who planned the workshop and presented sessions. This workshop has dual goals to help pre-tenure faculty succeed, and to recruit postdocs for an "early look." Leaders believe that they succeeded in involving so many faculty because they invited them to participate in a finite capacity, e.g. to contribute a specific piece. About half of STEM departments nominated a postdoc participant. It is hoped that this opportunity will help departments to begin to think of recruiting a diverse faculty pool as something that begins early and is ongoing, rather than only commenced when a position opens. Because the number of early-career STEM women faculty is finite and many of them attended this year, the planners are considering ways to adapt or revise the workshop for next year, as an entirely new cohort will not be available.

Several ADVANCE Speakers have been invited and well received by a wide range of faculty.

The Faculty Recognition committee hosted one event. It was not well attended, possibly due to low morale on campus given current economic and political turbulence in Texas public higher

education. They plan to feature additional "women of accomplishment" on the web site, and to gather and publicize data on campus awards (as well as draw on existing lists of national awards compiled by others).

The effort to train Award and Search Committees is understandably slower to gain traction, since it is, as one leader put it, a "face to face confrontation with how business is done." We discussed strategies for committee members to educate themselves on the literature in unintentional bias and gender equity, and for broadening membership to include people in the planning who can be "organizational catalysts"[2] on campus. A recent visit by U. of Michigan STRIDE members was viewed as helpful in clarifying the path forward.

Climate Change

Departmental Mini Grants are the early success for this strand, as application numbers are rising and coming from departments who have not yet engaged with other activities. The committee recognizes that the mix of proposals includes some that truly address department-level climate and others that target resources to individual women, the departmental impact of which is less clear. They hope to encourage an evolution toward the former over time. We discussed ways to encourage adoption of effective models pioneered by one department, such as publicizing successful plans and (especially) outcomes (not available yet), and offering targeted funding for adapt/adopt projects that build on a favored design. We also discussed ideas for linking this activity to others, e.g. soliciting mini grant proposals with the specific aim to foster a departmental mentality of early and proactive recruiting for diversity and excellence.

Leadership training for Department Heads is underway. The committee is generating ideas for its next topic, after work on mediation this year. Engaging heads is important, and an area where other ADVANCE IT projects have had mixed success. At Colorado, we found that chair/ head trainings were best received when presented by peers who were seen as effective chairs.

Efforts to address climate as influenced by civility of interactions among faculty and staff, and among faculty and students, are distinctive in the ADVANCE program portfolio, so there is less help to be found from other IT projects. These concerns strike me as somewhat particular to the TAMU campus, perhaps significantly shaped by staff insecurity over their position as at-will employees in a financially difficult time. The Faculty/Staff Interaction committee has taken an

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[2] Sturm, S. (2007a). Gender equity as institutional transformation: The pivotal role of "organizational catalysts." In A. J. Stewart, J. E. Malley, & D. LaVaque-Manty, eds. *Transforming science and engineering: Advancing academic women,* Ch. 16, pp. 262-280. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Sturm, S. (2007b). The architecture of inclusion: The role of organizational catalysts. Presented at *The Science of Diversity*, Columbia University, New York, New York, 16 November 2006. Online version dated February 11, 2007. http://www2.law.columbia.edu/ssturm/pdfs/2-23-07%20buffalo%20talk.pdf (accessed 3/22/09).

action research approach, investigating the issues in partnership with the stakeholders before designing an intervention. This approach seems useful for a sensitive task, even if it feels slow to those involved. I wonder whether a similar action research effort would likewise benefit the Student Diversity committee, which continues to experiment with approaches to engaging students in conversations about respect and diversity.

No information was available about the Merit Pool Incentives. As proposed, this is a potentially very significant initiative in providing direct reward to departments for their diversity efforts. Challenges are understandable in the current financial climate, yet I hope that any real or perceived lack of transparency does not lessen the influence this strategy might have on establishing diversity as an institutional value for which heads are accountable.

Portfolio as a Whole

In general, efforts that direct resources to individual faculty and departments are taking off faster than other strategies, consistent with the experience of other ADVANCE IT projects. Efforts to engage faculty in the hard work of shifting collective understandings, values, norms and practices will necessarily proceed more slowly.

The activity committees have significant autonomy to plan, revise, and re-strategize. As such, they might be better termed "strategy" committees than "activity" committees: each is not constrained to pursuing the activity described in the initial proposal, but rather tasked to find and implement activities to achieve the defined objective. Their intellectual energy thus drives the work. Theme and project leaders are attuned to the capacities of each committee and flexible in how they work with different leadership styles.

Some areas important in other ADVANCE IT projects are deliberately excluded from the activity portfolio. Some work/life issues are non-problems at TAMU (stop-clock policy) or areas where ADVANCE has little leverage (dual career hiring). At some campuses, data-gathering work has revealed issues for mid-career women, e.g. career planning and preparation for promotion of associate professors. It seems possible, particular in relation to reinvestment, that ADVANCE may wish to explore the needs of this faculty group and consider initiatives that offer wider support than does the Administrative Fellows program. Thinking ahead to the future, the committees may wish to consider how some opportunities (such as one-off workshops developed for Success Circles) might be extended, with other sources of support, to non-STEM and male faculty. Such strategies make good use of work already done and dollars already expended, broaden support for ADVANCE, and lay the ground for institutionalization.

Making Connections

Members of the steering group were well informed about the broader initiative and how the parts fit together, but thought that their activity committees are probably not. The web site is informative and transparent (including project reports, for example) but a web site does not push information out to campus constituencies. We discussed ways to help committee members serve as advocates for ADVANCE as a whole by being better informed about the overall initiative. On

other campuses, communications strategies have included brochures, newsletters, special events, and celebrations, as well as presentations at department meetings, deans' councils, faculty governance structures, etc. I encourage leaders to be explicit and purposive about their communication strategies to meet the needs of different stakeholders. It is not too early to start shaping the narrative about ADVANCE on your campus.

ADVANCE is already leveraging funds and spinning off programs as a means to engage other units beyond the grant's scope. Examples include:

- Use of the ADVANCE Scholars as a model for a project in the College of Engineering

- Preliminary conversations with administrators about supporting ADVANCE Scholars in non-STEM departments

- Partnering with the Women's Faculty Network to co-sponsor the annual luncheon celebrating women's accomplishments. This is seen as revitalizing the network and providing an important opportunity to showcase faculty women's achievements to senior administrators and other faculty, while highlighting ADVANCE through the Administrative Fellows who presented. Similar events have had high symbolic value on other campuses and also serve as opportunities to publicize the ADVANCE work.

- Potential linkages with efforts in faculty development and training for new administrators and department heads now run by the Dean of Faculty's office

- Providing input to administrators on work/life issues (child care, lactation) that are not listed among ADVANCE objectives but are relevant to faculty women's lives.

Research and Evaluation

The social science studies team is conducting six studies. Five examine particular ADVANCE interventions and a sixth addresses teaching evaluations. We discussed study design and progress, including e.g. challenges due to overlap of samples given the relatively small number of STEM women faculty at whom interventions are targeted. Most of the studies are psychologically oriented, focused on individual perceptions and experiences. Thus these studies can potentially assist the project in an evaluative manner, by providing details about the outcomes for individual participants in ADVANCE interventions, and the features of the intervention that contribute to the outcomes for individuals. I encourage the social science studies team to view their work not as stand-alone efforts that will only bear fruit as the IT project nears completion, but to consider ways to support the IT project work along the way. For example, how could they provide early glimpses from their data as formative feedback to help the project team in its planning and decision-making about these interventions?

The evaluation team has rethought its initial plan, recognizing limitations in an intervention-centered approach that relies on assumptions of clean baseline data, readily distinguishable and statistically sufficient treatment and comparison groups, and no cross-contamination of samples. These are of course desirable features of an experimental design, but not always realistic in a

project that seeks systemic change through a combination of initiatives. Rather, the team has developed an innovative approach that treats the department as the unit of change, hypothesizing that the intensity of departmental participation will relate to the extent of change there. They will compile periodic snapshots that incorporate participation, engagement, impact, climate, and recruitment/retention data, in the form of a large matrix. They will then develop a narrative for each department that presents and interprets the different indicators and their combination. Using this approach, they hope to not only describe engagement, but to construct an "index of engagement" and to observe and explain changes in this index over time in departments, using a "difference in difference" analytical approach. Factor analysis and other modeling approaches may yield insights as to the relative importance of certain interventions, engagement in individual vs. multiple interventions, and other factors.

This approach has the potential to capture the interrelated effects of multiple interventions in an overall system change project, and to make good use of data already being gathered (NSF indicators, climate survey data). I do not know of any other IT project evaluation that has taken this approach. By taking an institution-level view, it complements the research studies that focus on individuals and directly addresses NSF's programmatic goals for ADVANCE. Thus I am quite enthusiastic about the promise and creativity of this approach. That said, I have two concerns related to what may be missing from this tactic:

a) The potential loss of information useful to project leaders in a formative manner. This is an important role for evaluation at this stage of the project, when initiatives are still being developed. I encourage the evaluators to think creatively (on their own and with the steering group) about how to document insights that are emerging along the way, especially those that will help to improve and refine activities, and those that will explain the success or failure of activities in the long run. I am not fully persuaded of the formative value of the matrix data, which will tend to provide a historic picture rather than the rapid feedback more useful to leaders. How might the team capture in real time the observations and insights that will help leaders to refine their initiatives? My comments on the social science studies plan are also relevant to this point; I think the two teams can be mutually supportive to the project leaders in this domain.

b) The potential lack of data on processes and context that will help to construct explanations. Change in higher education is complex and multi-dimensional, operating at multiple levels and in interconnected subsystems. While I think there is great potential in the "index of engagement" idea, the results are unlikely to be simple. Information on process and context could be very helpful in understanding, for example, the reasons for differences among departments within a college. We discussed the potential role of the external evaluator in helping to gather such data. However, as I noted last year, "There is no way that I can gather the same rich and detailed view of the project as can those directly involved and knowledgeable about campus cultures and structures; their complementary perspective will be essential."

As the evaluators further develop this approach, I encourage them to review Bilimoria and Liang's recent book[1] to prompt further thinking about the potential and limitations of the NSF indicator data, and for ideas of other indicators they might include in the matrix. They might also make good use of the faculty flux charts (popularized by the Hunter College IT project) as a communication tool.

We also discussed the use of data as a tool for change, which many ADVANCE projects have found powerful.[1,2] For example, knowing how their unit's gender demographics compare with national averages for faculties and for the hiring pool can make it harder for faculty to view their own department as "doing just fine" if it is not. The evaluation team has provided results from its recent, careful and longitudinal salary study to the Dean of Faculties, who is making proactive use of it. I encourage the evaluators and leaders to consider other ways in which data can be presented in sensitive but candid ways and used to dispel misconceptions.

Both the research and evaluation teams are well-qualified and diligent, but face an unnecessary barrier in the prohibition by the NSF program office from hiring graduate students as research assistants. This also wastes an excellent opportunity for social science graduate trainees to develop research skills and pursue research interests in women in STEM or higher education.

Project Management

The project appears to be very well managed. The core team communicates frequently and the steering committee meets twice monthly. They have formal and informal contact with a variety of institutional leaders. A new web developer/graphic designer will come on board soon to provide faster web updating and enhance the use of social media. Project director Kaunas juggles many interactions with committees, themes, and external constituencies, with savvy logistical support from Stelly. They draw on the national AIM group for ideas and support from other ADVANCE directors. The leaders' overall tone is realistic, describing the campus mood of one as "hunkering down" to weather the current difficulties, but nonetheless upbeat.

With respect to the external evaluator's role, we discussed the timing of next year's site visit and the possibility of participation in the External Advisory Board meeting next year in preparation for an NSF site review anticipated for 2013. While focusing on leaders' perspectives has been important so far, it may be wise to extend next year's site visit to meet directly with faculty participants in order to independently gauge TAMU ADVANCE's visibility and impact.

Summary

TAMU ADVANCE is making excellent progress on multiple fronts. Their distributed approach to organizing project activities is involving many faculty and appears to be generating substantial buy-in from senior faculty and administrators as well as reaching many junior women STEM faculty. Project leaders are alert to opportunities, proud of successes so far, and thoughtful about their challenges. Capable research and evaluation efforts offer significant potential; they can be interlinked and leveraged even more effectively to aid the project's everyday work.