

# **Texas A&M University ADVANCE**

## **External Advisory Board**

### **Year Three Site Visit Report**

*The External Advisory Board (EAB) for the Texas A&M ADVANCE Program met with the ADVANCE Leadership Team, the Internal Advisory Board (IAB), Activity Leaders, Development Staff, and senior faculty members from targeted colleges on January 15, 2013. This report details the findings of this visit and recommendations for future action based on questions asked of the EAB by the ADVANCE Leadership Team.*

#### **What are the program strengths?**

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The ADVANCE Center has generated a broad base of attention to key issues of climate, recruitment and retention, and success enhancement. The twelve activity streams are well along and quite comprehensive; it appears that the 146 advocates are very engaged and that the activities sponsored by or through the Center are effective and well-received. It is a very impressive mix of “top-down and bottom-up” engagement.

ADVANCE activities appear to be well organized, well implemented, and well received. Faculty members who have participated in them are clearly benefitting. Leaders across the STEM departments as well as Texas A&M’s executive administrators seem enthusiastic about ADVANCE efforts. The ADVANCE staff is passionate and committed to what they are doing. Social science studies are already turning out interesting results, which are being presented at scientific meetings nationally.

The board noted serious buy-in at the presidential level and by many (but not all) of the STEM deans all across the university. Peer pressure is a good driver of culture change and will likely lead to the eventual engagement of all the STEM deans. There are clearly energetic champions on the leadership team and the Center. A very positive observation is that the expanded faculty hiring that concluded several years ago served to bring in a new set of faculty members (at all levels) not imbued with the old culture.

The elements of the ADVANCE program have excellent, strong leadership. There seems to be a compelling vision and support for that vision among the entire leadership team. A particular strength of this program is that this support exists at the very top (president of the university) as well as throughout the faculty.

The leadership is beginning to ask the hard questions and framing the questions in such a way that it is beginning to get the answers that will help to improve the assessment of the program and, ultimately, the program itself.

A significant set of baseline data has been collected and the team is beginning to get a sense of what this data means. The data suggests that the system is healthy but highlights areas where more attention could be directed. While the faculty distribution with respect to gender may be reflective of what is also seen at many good institutions, the university should strive to change these percentages to reflect what can be.

The university has put in place a structure that has the potential to make significant contributions towards increasing the proportion of women in STEM. Notable activities include climate change, student diversity training, search committee training, and the administrative fellows program. This list is not intended to be exhaustive, but to only point out examples of what is in place. All of them offer the potential to expand the eyes and ears of the leadership team and gather the input from the broader community as a long-range plan for action is developed and executed. It is critical that these groups determine the right questions that must be asked.

NSF cut Caregiver Travel Grants from the grant, and it is fantastic to see it happening anyway at Texas A&M. But it is funded by a grant from a private foundation, which is likely not a sustainable mode. Texas A&M should look to other mechanisms for supporting these benefits, which enable career-advancing travel that otherwise might not be possible.

### **What areas need additional focus?**

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Gender diversity is clearly at the forefront of ADVANCE efforts. What about other aspects of diversity that intersect with gender, such as race, gender identity and sexual orientation? For example, women of color and lesbian faculty are likely facing different challenges from white heterosexual faculty. What might those challenges be? Perhaps the climate data could address this question.

On a related note, it is striking how white the Texas A&M and ADVANCE leadership is. Clearly more efforts have been placed on recruitment, retention, and recognition of faculty of color, but have those efforts also resulted in those faculty members moving into leadership positions?

An undercurrent exists that suggests that when the program addresses increasing and improving the opportunities for women, it means “white” women. This is a very sensitive issue and one that most have difficulty addressing in an honest and open way. We are naturally defensive, and respond by saying the words, pointing to the difficulties, highlighting the examples of inclusiveness, and showing the images.

Does the ADVANCE grant allow there to be more focus on post-docs, research scientists, lab managers, various other professionals and other non-tenure-line faculty (who are often women)?

The social science team has impressive expertise in survey research methods. Should they be given greater latitude over design and implementation decisions in the climate survey?

It would also be useful to engage the 34 STEM department heads more extensively. The social science and evaluation teams are very good; it might be useful to think about how best to integrate them together into a coherent whole, and how to focus the evaluation on data that pointedly describes the Texas A&M context, rather than only on the more general data requested by NSF.

It appears that little ADVANCE programming addresses work/life balance, which is a key component of the Psychologically Healthy Workplace framework. Can there be more focus in existing ADVANCE activities on ways to help faculty balance work and family commitments (and thrive while doing so)? For instance, could this be an explicit focus in some of the Success Circles, Department Mini Grants, and LEAD Program activities?

More recognition and reward are needed to individuals and groups for diversity and climate. A process needs to be put in place for nominations of women and underrepresented faculty for early, mid, and later career awards in their fields.

### **What other synergies or collaborations might be pursued?**

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In addition to the external mentors that are involved with the ADVANCE scholars and the external STEM candidates involved in the roadmap workshops, it might be useful to regularly engage industry partners and community partners to create a broader network and perhaps improve the climate for younger STEM faculty. The planned engagements with Fish Camp and the SWAMP group are worthy of expanding, especially as they follow national trends to go from STEM to STEAM—engaging the arts and new media in the various activity streams of ADVANCE.

The opportunity exists for Texas A&M to move beyond these surface solutions by expanding the leadership team to more reflect the population it hopes to achieve and taking steps to gather the input of a larger cross-section of the university. The opportunity exists for the university to establish lines of communication that ensure the underrepresented population sees itself as a part of the solution rather than the source of the problem. Of course, the ADVANCE grant itself may not be extensible to those outside of the STEM areas.

**In addition to NSF required data, climate survey and retention analysis, what other data would help tell the ADVANCE story?**

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Unpacking the data about cohorts of STEM faculty would be very helpful—who is getting counseled out and when; who is putting themselves up for tenure and promotion and when—rather than just the overall outcomes data required by NSF. This is especially important in light of the relative success rates overall found at Texas A&M. This may involve closer coordination with the data in the Dean of Faculties office and some in-depth look at norms and practices in the different colleges and departments.

Texas A&M has excellent data on the percentages of faculty that are awarded tenure after requesting it. It would be instructive to know the data that reflect which faculties choose to not apply for tenure and their reasons for not applying. What is the percentage of women that leave after three years?

How does the percentage of women who leave the institution after earning tenure compare with the percentage of men who leave after tenure? How do their reasons for leaving compare?

What would be useful to present (more useful than the data NSF requires) is the yield and the timing at the tenured and full professor (and university professor) levels of an assistant professor hire, for both women and men, not just the promotion statistics, as some leave before they choose to put their case forward, or delay putting their case forward for promotion.

Also, is there any difference in the promotion success, lab space, and general success in their research and teaching for women with children compared to women with no children?

Present stories about the way that faculty are using the Caregiver Travel Grants. It would be great for NSF to hear how such grants enable conference trips, data collections, travel to labs, etc.—advancing careers and advancing science—especially for women.

Ask the faculty who have benefitted from the ADVANCE activities to provide personal accounts of their experiences and successes, in person to the site visitors. Perhaps ADVANCE could also compile written stories or videotaped interviews on the website. Stories from those junior and mid-career women provide the most compelling demonstration of the successes of this initiative.

The data/facts about the low percentages of women and the underrepresented in STEM in relation to their corresponding percentages in the population are well

known. We may need to move beyond “fixing” those populations so they can be good enough to be accepted into the STEM community. What are the “right questions” to ask that will get at the data that reflects the strengths and value that the “missing” groups bring to the field?

### **Which activities are transferable to other campuses?**

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The Board is convinced that many of the activities may be transferable to other universities. As the ADVANCE leadership presents their data and activities at various professional meetings, it would be useful to track requests from other participants for information on the ADVANCE program and opportunities for transplantation of selected activities. Given participants prior affiliations with other institutions, it may be possible to identify potential partners for future transfer.

The Board especially likes the existence of the discussion groups (climate change, advancing women in leadership) women success circles, speaker series, search committee training, administrative fellows program, and leadership development for department heads on the Texas A&M campus. These are excellent ways to expand the conversation and to gain buy-in from the faculty/staff for the vision that is necessary for the university move in a positive direction.

### **Which activities are unique to Texas A&M?**

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None or very few may be truly unique to Texas A&M. That being said, Texas A&M is still a very “white” campus, and a campus steeped in masculine military traditions, Christian values, and family legacies. It is also a campus that is not embedded in a large urban setting. All of this makes it more difficult to recruit persons of color (at the faculty or student level), and those who are liberal, gay or lesbian, or feminist. It might be prudent for Texas A&M to develop unique programming to attract faculty who do not fit the white/male/military/ alumni/conservative Christian model.

One distinction might be the socio-economic influences of the communities from which many of Texas A&M’s students originate. One Board member’s experience as a faculty member at Ohio State was that having the majority of OSU students coming from Ohio had a distinct influence on the climate of the institution.

Among those activities that stand out as having at least some unique character the Board identified Fish Camp for freshmen, the honor code and the culture of politeness and respect.

## **How do you recommend institutionalization of ADVANCE beyond the NSF grant?**

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It appears that maintaining the actual presence of an ADVANCE Center—with known staff whom people across the campus call upon—might be very important to sustaining attention to these issues of climate, recruitment and retention, and success after the grant concludes.

Begin by making the ADVANCE Center and its small staff permanent. Some of the activities could be housed elsewhere on campus; for example, the administrative fellows program could be moved to the deans' or provost's offices (or whichever offices provide the administrative opportunities and benefit from this program). A second example is the mediation training program (discussed by Simon Sheather) which could be housed in Dean of Faculties and required for all new department heads.

Moreover, focusing now with each college on getting their buy-in for continued support of some of the activities will be critical to sustainability—and the nature of the best activities to support may differ across the departments and colleges. Focusing in on the key activity streams that worked best and giving some (even if small) central funding to them might be important, too.

Finding ways to encourage self-sustainability—such as occurred with the informal writing groups that faculty sustained on their own after some of the formal workshops—will also be useful. Making sure to tell the ADVANCE story and keep the website refreshed is important as well.

The ADVANCE programming seems largely framed as beneficial to women, which it is. However, a framing that might be more compelling to more people would emphasize that these programs benefit everyone: women, men, entire departments, Texas A&M, science, etc. Whole departments benefit from respectful climates and well-trained leaders, for instance. Recruitment efforts that tap the full talent pool advance scientific discoveries. This sort of framing might stimulate more buy-in to the ADVANCE activities (across the university and also at the state level), and help build support for making those activities continue beyond the life of the grant.

To promote even greater buy-in, the program should emphasize both the “business case” and “science case” for having a faculty that is diverse with respect to gender and race. Tapping the full talent pool is simply “good business.” And with diversity comes new ideas, innovations, discoveries, yielding “good science.” These arguments (with supporting evidence—see research on gender and diversity in organizations) must be repeated in many ways to many audiences, to dampen diversity resistance.

The university should consider moving the ADVANCE training beyond the 34 STEM departments to all 66 departments throughout the university. Incentives to departments for gender and ethnic diversity are already in place through the university's diversity plan but could be driven "lower" (e.g., to academic departments not just colleges) and expanded.

The ADVANCE effort could learn from past activities at MIT and the Citadel.

### **What are the emerging change models?**

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The university's diversity plan appears to have gained some traction as a change agent on the campus. How can the ADVANCE efforts complement and strengthen those engendered by the diversity plan? It is clear that the writing circle has demonstrated a self-sustainment capability. This may be a model that can be adapted to other elements of the ADVANCE activity set.

### **What is needed to prepare for the NSF site visit? What should be highlighted? What should the immediate focus be in order to be better prepared?**

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The social science study team is already preparing posters to present the research coming out of ADVANCE. Might those posters be on display in the ADVANCE Center, perhaps accompanied by brief presentations?

More faculty/staff input (testimonials are good but let them see the faces of the affected) should be accommodated if at all possible during the site visit.

Specific efforts should be made to show how the leadership team has responded to the recommendations of the first-year site visit by the Board. In addition, the team should demonstrate that they have put in place a strong communication plan of the activities, success, failures, obstacles, etc. of the ADVANCE program so far.