



PRINCIPLES FOR BEST PRACTICES:

A Collection of Suggested Procedures for Improving the Climate for Women Faculty Members in Science and Engineering Departments

Prepared for University of Michigan ADVANCE Departmental
Transformation Grant

By Jean Waltman and Carol Hollenshead
The Center for the Education of Women

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Well-conceived policies and procedures often help create a supportive climate for faculty. Over the past year or more—primarily through interviews, focus groups, and direct e-mail requests—we have been asking women faculty members to describe specific programs or general behaviors that contribute to a climate that supports their academic career success and satisfaction.

The following summary describes (often using their own words) what the women have told us. The examples represent three important general principles of effective leadership. One is *transparency*: Making all kinds of information available and easy to find. Two is *uniformity*: Leveling the field and dealing equitably with all faculty members. Three is *assistance*: Giving attention to the needs of faculty, offering mentoring and other types of help.

The overall message is a strong one: While no specific practice like those described in this report is likely to change the atmosphere in a department or unit, administrators who apply the touchstones of *transparency, uniformity and assistance* when developing or reviewing policies and procedures can create environments within which all faculty members flourish. In addition, because each academic unit is unique, administrators may either find that some of the following practices are not appropriate or decide that they need to tailor the practices to their particular situations.

We have organized this report according to the problems women faculty members most often speak about—(1) unsatisfactory hiring and initial negotiating patterns, (2) inadequate explanation of and access to relevant university and department information, (3) a lack of mentoring, (4) unclear or poorly managed review and tenure processes, and (5) an unwillingness to accommodate whole-life needs, especially family and childcare responsibilities. We have further identified each practice according to how many of the three themes of transparency, uniformity, and assistance it specifically addresses. For the most part, the faculty members are describing practices they have experienced here at the University of Michigan, although a few of the practices are ones that current or former UM faculty members have encountered at other research universities. This list of best practices is not a long one. As we proceed, we are likely to discover new suggestions to add.

I. Issues related to Hiring and Negotiation. Often newly hired faculty members are unsure about the things they can expect and ask for as part of their initial employment packages. Or they are promised (or believe they are promised) things that they later do not receive. Best practices in this area lead to open, good-faith negotiations that clearly outline what options new people can and cannot expect to receive.

- Some department chairs negotiate for resources with a list of requested items from potential new hires. According to a faculty member from one such department:

“Before the second visit/interview, the Chair requested that I draw up and forward to him a list of equipment that I would need to conduct my research. Before our interview, he reviewed the list to determine what equipment was already available ("used" or as community property). Then, during our interview, he told me what community equipment would be available to me, what "used but working" equipment would be deeded to me, and the sum of money that he had determined would be sufficient to allow me to purchase the remaining items (based on the cost estimates that I had provided). This distribution was negotiable; one costly item that they expected I would share with the other members of the department was in fact something my lab would use heavily and would therefore need to purchase new. Once I explained the situation, the Chair agreed and the cash portion of my start-up package was adjusted accordingly.” (Transparency, Uniformity, Assistance)
- Certain negotiated agreements can be especially valuable for new women faculty members. Some departments allow a new hire to take off the first semester, delay teaching, delay start of the tenure clock, or reach other agreements to help with the transition to professional life. In addition, some departments provide start-up funds until the grant money can “kick in,” or they offer administrative, accounting, and technical assistants to help faculty members in the sciences to run their labs. (Assistance)

II. Issues related to Providing Information. Once here, new faculty members need all types of information, from where to get door keys, to how to access the Faculty Handbook and other written and web-based documents, to where in the library to find lists of faculty members’ salaries. Some departments have processes that make such information gathering easier.

- They have established communication systems and web sites that not only include relevant policies and procedures but also provide answers

to questions both new and veteran faculty members might have about the department. As one chair explained,

“I went to all of the new faculty members and asked, ‘What are the things you really wanted to know when you came here, or what you think you would have wanted to know?’ And I made a list of these things, and then they [new faculty members] were matched with faculty members in the department, and we gave the list to the faculty members and to the new people who had just arrived—in the hopes that they could then use it as the basis for starting a conversation. I’ll be interested to see how that works, but it’s spread over a lot of people.

Q: “So you gave the tenured faculty the questions?”

A: “Yes, and also the people who were just starting out. And we’re going to modify the list. We also ended up putting it on our little, internal web site. So, if they forget their questions, they can go there.” (Transparency, Uniformity, Assistance)

- They have special programs for new faculty members that consist of off-campus retreats at the beginning of the year and/or series of workshops throughout the year—intended to give new faculty lots of valuable formal and informal information. As one example,
“We have a program where new faculty get together for lunch meetings, which I thought was great because it gives you information about different offices—the minority office or information about the honors program and different things. And you get to be with the Dean, and you get to meet the other new faculty. So I thought it was a positive experience.” (Transparency, Assistance)
- They optimize the information-gathering process by having the chair or some other senior department member meet individually with each new faculty member. During these one-on-one meetings—usually held after the faculty member has been on campus for a short while—the senior colleague can answer specific questions that have arisen for the junior faculty member and offer additional relevant information. (Transparency, Uniformity, Assistance)

III. Issues related to Mentoring. Mentoring helps insure that no one is allowed to “fall through the cracks.” Instead, one or more persons take it upon themselves—whether on their own initiative or as part of a formal mentoring program—to provide instrumental and emotional support and advice.

- Some formal mentoring programs consist of committees of between two and four senior faculty advisors for each new faculty member. The faculty member can meet with her/his committee as often as s/he wishes, and with one or more of the committee members at any given time. For example,

“We have mentorship committees with whom we meet once or twice a year. This is invaluable. They read things for us, give advice on where to publish, what research projects to really pursue, general professional development issues like how to network.... Mine helped me to feel integrated in the department and clear on what I need to do to achieve tenure.”

“The committee does not seem to have any charge given to it. But in my case, I communicate with members of my committee on a regular basis, from weekly to monthly.... We can call meetings of the committee as often as we like and can meet with members individually as often as we like. I think the committee is supposed to exist for the period up until tenure.” (Assistance)

- Some units establish other types of official mentoring programs for new faculty. The programs may consist of group meetings (“over lunch provided by the college—very important”) with school/college administrators. In one such program,

“A senior faculty member facilitated monthly meetings focused on a topic of interest to junior faculty. He would either provide specific information himself or bring in an expert. For example, one meeting was devoted to issues in publishing...led [by] a journal editor. Another was devoted to writing grant proposals, and another to the tenure review process. It was understood that the meetings were opportunities for the junior faculty to express concerns and frustrations and that these would not go beyond the room. Later on, we also had each junior faculty person share an in-progress manuscript for constructive responses from the other members. That was helpful in informing all of us about each other’s work. It also helped us understand the diversity of theoretical orientations and professional agendas.” (Transparency, Uniformity, Assistance)
- Another mentoring format calls for more senior colleagues to reach out to their assistant and associate faculty members, offering to mentor them. The mentors raise such questions as “Where are you going?” and “What are you doing next?” Other department chairs call in associate professors to talk about their plans for promotion to full professor. (Uniformity, Assistance)
- According to various others we spoke to, valuable mentoring often consists of senior faculty members keeping their eyes on junior colleagues, i.e. stopping by their offices with questions like, “What are you spending your time on?” or “Are you writing proposals?” Ideally, department chairs “actually go out of their way to spend time with individuals, to go and talk to individual faculty members on a fairly

regular one-on-one basis. Somebody who does it well makes it look like it's a purely chance meeting.” (Assistance)

- Several people told us that mentoring is likely to be more effective when it is documented and when the people acting as mentors are rewarded for and/or held accountable for the task:

“Their intentions are very good but the reality is that, once somebody is assigned to be a mentor, there's got to be somebody else who makes sure that all the mentors are doing their jobs. And I think that very often the administration of the department will just say, ‘Well, I've assigned a mentor so now I can wash my hands of it.’ And maybe on their annual review, the chairman will, in their 15-minute meeting, give some kind of [mentoring] advice. I think the mentors need to be pushed and reminded... I'm not sure I would call it ‘accountability,’ but at least they need to be prodded and asked, ‘Did you do it?’”

“As soon as you get there you [should be] assigned someone as a mentor. The person actually knows that they're assigned! And then in annual reviews—activity reports to fill out each year—the senior faculty member actually has to discuss their mentoring activities on the activity report... [And] something that may actually be a little more effective would be to have the junior people say what mentoring they've received [from their mentor].” (Assistance)

- Some UM colleges have created offices especially intended to support women faculty members; or they have incorporated such functions into already existing offices. These are places where women faculty and staff can go for questions related to salary, career opportunities, promotion, and other issues, and where they can obtain help with problem solving. (Transparency, Uniformity, Assistance)
- Several women have suggested that the university establish an office on campus where faculty members can go to safely, sympathetically, and efficaciously report grievances and get official help with problems within their departments and colleges. [Many women faculty members do not believe such a place now exists.] (Uniformity, Assistance)

IV. Issues related to Review and Tenure Policies. Transparency is nowhere more important than around issues related to annual and third year reviews and the tenure process. Best practices in these areas address the problems of the lack of specificity in review documents and the lack of clearly explained and equitable tenure procedures.

- Some UM schools have detailed, specific third-year review processes:

“One thing that was very helpful—as much as it was frustrating at some level—is that we developed a very involved mid-term review process.... It’s a hard and fast review as opposed to a formative review. And so they make us do it as [if it were for tenure review]. We have external reviewers and the like. And this is a new process they’ve started, because the old one was more formative than summative.” (Uniformity, Assistance)

- Departments may establish award committees, with junior and senior committee members appointed by the chair. A faculty member described one such program as follows: Each January, all faculty members complete an annual report form, describing their research programs and such activities as teaching assignments; committee service; numbers of advisees; collaborations; conferences attended; guest lectures presented; numbers of manuscripts and abstracts published; and current funding status, including grants pending. Two committee members, acting as primary and secondary reviewers, prepare a written summary of each report, including all teaching evaluations. At committee, the primary reviewer describes the person's progress, drawing attention to any achievements and/or problem areas. The committee members discuss and possibly amend each written report and then submit it to the Chair, who uses the committee's assessment as the basis for the annual conference with each faculty member. Frequently members of the committee discover situations that place a particular member at risk, and together the group makes specific recommendations to the Chair and to the individual to reduce that risk.

“An important feature of the review process is that all junior faculty members serve on the P&A committee before their own packages are due to be evaluated. In this way, they learn the range of productivity and service characteristic of both junior and senior faculty. In addition, they see first-hand that the process is fair, open and compassionate.” (Transparency, Uniformity, Assistance)

- The more concrete the annual- and third-year reviews, the better:
“One thing [I had at UM] was an annual meeting with the chair, so in theory you’re supposed to get progress reports. But what they do here [at current institution] is actually write you something each year. And they actually try to make the statements fairly concrete. They will say, ‘You need to improve your teaching’ or ‘You need to publish more papers.’ Those kinds of concrete statements, rather than the sort of ‘feel good’ things like ‘We value you.’” (Assistance)
- The practice in some departments is to place new faculty members onto the tenure portfolio committee, to allow them to watch the process. As one faculty member described such a program,

“The tenure portfolio gets put together by the college and then it gets judged by the college. The committees that help the candidates put their portfolios together have tenured members, but they also invite a number of junior members to attend these meetings. And every first year faculty is part of this committee. I wasn’t a voting member, but I saw an entire portfolio. I saw how they talked about it. I saw how they chose external reviewers and what the letter looked like that went out to them—and all kinds of details that I never would have even thought of asking.... So you go through every single step, and you get to read the entire portfolio. And they discuss the personal statement: what’s good about it, what’s not... I know some departments do the kind of mentoring where you see a portfolio of someone who went through and got promoted last year or something. This was even better than that because you actually went through the steps together.”
(Transparency, Uniformity, Assistance)

- Administrators may routinely link a junior faculty member with a senior colleague who acts as advocate during the tenure process. (Assistance)

V. Issues related to Departmental/College/University Policies. At various institutional levels, administrators have created and adapted policies and practices in order to ease the stress of academic life and increase research productivity. Women faculty members value these practices, both large and small, as ways to balance the many aspects of their lives: research, teaching, service, and family responsibilities. For example, University administrators—recognizing that women faculty members are a scarce commodity in some areas of the institution and thus are often called upon for extra committee service, advising and teaching—award competitive \$5,000 Career Development funds for faculty members who are doing greater-than-average amounts of non-teaching service that draws them away from their scholarly agenda. Other such helpful programs include these:

- LS&A offers a nurturing leave for faculty members in their fourth year. This leave is an entitlement for everyone, consistent across the college and not dependent upon individual negotiation. It gives all tenure-track faculty members one semester off from university responsibilities, in order to concentrate on their research. (Uniformity, Assistance)
- Some departments tailor the official UM modified duties policy to make it more beneficial.
They may very substantially decrease a faculty member’s committee work for the semester of modified duties: One woman described her experience as follows: “The way the policy reads in the books is good to begin with, but I think its implementation in my particular unit was excellent. For example, the policy states

that you still have to keep up with committee work and things of that sort. My committee work assignment for that term that I reduced my duties was minimal. And that was something that the department chair has to be credited with, I guess. I did do more committee work in the preceding and following terms to make up for it, but I think that was well worth not having to do much of it during the term that I was trying to reduce my duties.” (Assistance)

They may also make sure to provide adequate coverage for faculty members on modified duties: “We believe that it’s important that women are able to take the time necessary (as well as new fathers) and not be under pressure from their colleagues who are asked to provide coverage. Our incentive program provides generous financial remuneration for coverage.” (Assistance)

- Department administrators schedule no meetings before 9 a.m. or after 5 p.m., in order that parents can better manage their lives to coincide with their children’s. (Assistance)
- Department administrators set a reasonable time limit for service on time-consuming committees, while—at the same time—insure that women get a chance to serve on important committees. (Assistance)
- Department administrators give junior faculty members some priority in teaching assignments. As one faculty member explained,
“The teaching assignments [in my UM department] were seniority based. So, if you once taught a course, you tended to keep it. Here [at current institution] teaching assignments give priority to the most junior people, to find out what they want to teach. And in fact some schools actually explicitly have a form that the junior faculty fill out for what they want to teach... Of course, that [may] make for ‘icky’ teaching loads for senior faculty, but I think it’s a lot healthier for junior faculty development.” (Assistance)