Leadership Development Program:  
Empowering Women Faculty at Virginia Tech as Leaders and Scholars  
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Introduction

The AdvanceVT Leadership Development Program is designed to increase participants’ leadership aspirations and to prepare them for a variety of leadership roles in higher education, focusing on the transition from senior faculty to academic leadership. The program selects a cohort of women from across the university who demonstrate an interest in and potential to assume leadership roles for individualized coaching and skill development.

The participants begin by identifying their current strengths and areas for development using a 360 assessment instrument. Based on the feedback provided by that assessment and a structured interview, each woman works with a coach to create an individual development plan to capitalize on her strengths and address development needs. Follow up meetings over the course of the year monitor progress and provide additional coaching.

In conjunction with the program, AdvanceVT sponsors workshops to build specific leadership skills, including negotiation and conflict resolution, power and influence, and time management, utilizing both on campus experts and outside consultants. AdvanceVT also hosts leadership development lunches for faculty covering a wide array of topics related to the roles, responsibilities, and rewards of being an academic leader and providing an opportunity to network with current university leaders across colleges and departments.

In addition to the coaching program, six senior women faculty members received fellowships to complete self-designed leadership development experiences. These projects ranged from curriculum review and reform to government relations and developing a mentoring program. See www.advance.vt.edu for more information.

Need

AdvanceVT’s 2005 Faculty Work-Life Survey gathered data on attitudes towards leadership that demonstrated the need for this program.

Survey items related to leadership included:
- Aspirations of Virginia Tech faculty members towards leadership positions,
- Perceptions about the representation of women and minorities in leadership roles, and
- Views about the possibility of maintaining a balance between leadership and other responsibilities.

Interest in Leadership

47% of women and 31% of men who responded to the survey expressed interest in a leadership position beyond their current position, such as a department chair, center director, or dean.

Balancing Leadership with Other Responsibilities

As shown below, 48% of male respondents but only 24% of female respondents agreed that it is possible to hold a leadership position at Virginia Tech while balancing work and personal responsibilities. 24% of males and 16% of females believe it is possible for leaders to maintain an active research agenda.

Assessment

Eighteen tenured women faculty members have participated in the program to date. Interviews were completed with the thirteen women who participated in the program in 2005-06 and 2006-07. Overall, the program provided the participants with confidence to pursue leadership positions and ultimately that they have the skills to do well in such positions.

- The Cohort Experience: Almost all of the participants mentioned the importance of connecting with the other women in their cohort for support, collaboration, and mentoring, and expressed a desire for more cohort related activities.

Future Plans

Due to the success of this initiative, AdvanceVT is seeking to expand it into a Virginia Faculty Women’s Leadership Network. This network would take the AdvanceVT Leadership Development Program model and disseminates it statewide in collaboration with the Virginia Network, a statewide organization of women administrators whose mission is to identify, develop, advance, and support women in higher education, and four partner institutions, including two other universities and the Virginia Community College System.

I share the viewpoint of many of my female colleagues that leadership would be more appealing if there were better representation of women in those positions, I would like to see that happen at Virginia Tech. *  
- Female Faculty Member

“The program was instrumental in my success here. I knew I could learn more professionally by participating in the program. I hoped it would make me well-rounded.”  
- Leadership Development Program Participant

To date, participants in the program have moved into a variety of leadership roles as assistant/associate department head, department head, and dean; others have taken on leadership of departmental committees and special initiatives.

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