NSF ADVANCE at Virginia Tech

Funding Agency: National Science Foundation
Funding Level: $3,500,000 over 5 years

Objective

AdvanceVT is a five-year program designed to increase the participation and advancement of women in academic science and engineering careers through comprehensive and creative strategies aimed at institutional transformation.

Overview

Consistent with the goal of institutional transformation, AdvanceVT programs and activities extend university wide, with a particular focus on Virginia Tech’s Colleges of Science and Engineering.

Initiatives

Pipeline Element: Advancing women into faculty careers
- Mission: Increase the number of women electing to pursue academic careers through empowerment and skill building programs.
- Activities: Preparing the future professoriate, postdoctoral and graduate fellowship programs, brown bag lunch seminars, lecture series receptions, focus groups and skill building workshops, and a graduate student career preparation conference.

Recruitment Element: Increasing the representation of women
- Mission: Increase the representation of women at all ranks in science and engineering by working with search committees and building early and long-term connections with highly qualified women.
- Activities: Resource database for recruiting, search committee education and support, visiting scholar lecture series, and building connections between Virginia Tech and outstanding women potential faculty candidates.

Leadership Element: Empowering women as leaders and scholars
- Mission: Increase the number of women in administrative and technical leadership positions in science and engineering.
- Activities: Distinguished lecture series for visiting women researchers and scholars, administrative and technical leadership placements, research grant support, and faculty leadership development program.

Institutional Change Element: University Policies and Climate
- Mission: Implement policy changes that remove barriers to success and nurture the development of every faculty member to her or his fullest potential.
- Activities: Review existing policies and procedures, study policy implementation and effectiveness, draft and move new and/or revised policies through university governance, compile and publicize successful strategies for creating and maintaining positive climate in departments, educate department heads and other university leaders on unconscious bias and diversity issues.

Selected Results

- The number of women tenure track faculty in the College of Engineering increased from 26 in 2003 to 40 in 2007, and the number of female full professors doubled.
- Professor of physics Beate Schmittmann became the first female department head in the College of Science in August 2006.
- Dual career hiring guidelines and a dual career assistance office are now available.
- Sixteen untenured women faculty in science and engineering have received research seed grants to enable them to develop more competitive proposals for external funding. Two subsequently received NSF CAREER awards.
- Thirteen tenured women faculty have participated in AdvanceVT’s leadership development program. One is now a dean at another institution, another a department head at Virginia Tech.

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Products

- Faculty work-life survey identified factors contributing to job satisfaction and issues of concern regarding recruitment, leadership, and university and departmental climate.
- Revised university policy on stopping the tenure clock now provides automatic extension of probationary period for new parents.
- New modified duties policy permits tenured or pre-tenure faculty to request a semester of modified duties at full pay to accommodate special family or personal health circumstances.
- New part-time employment policy allows pre-tenure faculty to request a part-time appointment for one semester up to two years for family or personal health reasons and tenured faculty to request term or permanent part-time appointment for personal or professional reasons.
- New work-life grant program provides temporary financial assistance to departments to enable them to continue support for graduate students during pregnancy and childbirth.

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