

VT Science and Engineering Department Heads

What can department heads do to increase the research productivity of S&E faculty?

2003-2004 Interview Findings:

32 Faculty Interviewed

- 11 New S&E Faculty
- 21 Associate S&E Faculty

There were 7 common responses from faculty about ways department heads could increase their research productivity.

1. Clear Communication of Department Policies
2. Recognize Work/Life Issues
3. Input on Course Scheduling
4. Distribute Responsibilities Equally
5. Teaching Load Reductions
6. Recognize Value of Different Types of Research
7. Availability of Resources

Clearly communicated department policies and procedures are important to many faculty members.

❖ Many faculty feel uninformed about important department policies.

“There is a ‘nothing written down’ trend in our department. I have no idea what some of the policies are. I am not saying that the policies are all bad. It is just that no one even knows what they are.”

An awareness and respect for issues associated with work/life balance is important to faculty.

- ❖ Department events sometimes conflict with outside responsibilities of faculty.
- ❖ Faculty feel that scheduling flexibility in department events would be helpful.
- ❖ For many faculty, spousal employment is an important concern.

Faculty input on the scheduling of classes was mentioned frequently.

- ❖ Input on class schedules is important for faculty productivity.

“It was extremely important to me that my department head did little things like scheduling all of my courses on Tuesdays and Thursdays so that I could do research and have time for my family. I was much more productive that semester.”

Equal distribution of responsibilities and application of department policies is important to faculty's perception of fairness.

- ❖ Faculty members feel that department responsibilities and policies aren't always equally distributed across faculty.
- ❖ This hinders their ability to focus on research and teaching.

"It is important that the department head not overload you on committee assignments or other commitments. Do your job, but do not let yourself be overloaded. Women are in short supply and we tend to get put on all the 'woman' committees. Then our research suffers."

Faculty perceive teaching releases as critical to their success at certain stages in their careers.

- ❖ Releases from teaching can enhance faculty research productivity at certain times particularly approaching tenure review.
- ❖ Releases are also important during certain family related events.

"One thing that really is helpful is just the consideration that I may need a release from teaching during the first year after the birth of my first child. The fact that I knew I was supported in my department, even if I didn't use the release, helped increase my research productivity a great deal."

Recognizing the value of all research is also important to faculty.

- ❖ Some faculty felt that non-mainstream research doesn't receive the same amount of respect from department heads and other faculty.
- ❖ Faculty need to feel that their research interests are supported by the department.

"Our department doesn't value any topic that isn't mainstream. This hurts faculty who want to research different areas, like women's issues, or new areas of research."

Faculty research productivity is directly impacted by the availability of resources.

- ❖ The allocation of space was an important consideration for many faculty.
- ❖ The availability of equipment and graduate student support were also important considerations.

"I wish I had office space for my students. Our department has flexible space and most faculty have space for their students. I think it would improve my research to have a steady place for my advisees."