

2004-2005 *AdvanceVT* Leadership Development Program Assessment Report

Interviews were completed with seven women who participated in the *AdvanceVT* Leadership Development Program in 2005-06. The interviews were conducted between January 23 and February 15, 2006. Four participants were interviewed in person and three over the telephone, according to the interviewee's preference. Each interviewee signed an informed consent form. The interviewer compiled field notes at the completion of each interview, and the field notes were sent to each participant for their review. The participants made very few changes to the field notes, attesting to the quality of the data.

The following is a summary of the responses to the interview questions. Summaries are reported in the form of "majority" responses, meaning most of the participants noted this idea, and "minority" responses, meaning at least one individual expressed this idea.

Question #1: What motivated you to participate in the *AdvanceVT* Leadership Program?

Majority report:

- Personal interest in future leadership roles
- Interest in building on leadership skills and abilities (conflict management, motivating people, negotiation, operational aspects, i.e. budgeting)
- To gain a better understanding of the responsibilities that coincide with a leadership role
- Understanding the climate at Virginia Tech and how to negotiate a position within this climate

Quote: "I thought it would be a wonderful opportunity to further develop my leadership skills."

Minority report:

- Meeting other women faculty who are interested in leadership roles
- Networking
- Learning from those that have had leadership experience
- Interest in examining own personal strengths and weaknesses

Question #2: What types of skills did you hope to acquire by participating in the program?

Majority report:

- Managing people (conflict management, how to motivate people)
- Skills involved in management responsibilities (i.e. budgeting)
- Time management and organizational skills (when and how to say "no")
- Negotiation
- Gaining a better understanding of leadership at Virginia Tech

Quote: "I was interested in getting a detailed understanding of how leadership works at Virginia Tech."

Question #3: On a scale of 0-10, with 10 meaning "exceeded your expectations" and 0 meaning "it fell short of your expectations," to what extent would you say the program has met your expectations?

- Two participants rated the program “3.” These participants indicated why they rated the program low:
 - The program did not provide enough “expert knowledge” and time for discussion with people currently in leadership roles.
 - There were not enough opportunities for interaction with cohort.
 - There was not much information about the leadership culture at Virginia Tech.
- Two participants rated the program “6.” These participants had both positive and negative things to say about the program.
 - How met or exceeded expectations:
 - Interaction with successful department heads
 - Assessment and feedback
 - Workshops
 - Deans and department head panel
 - How fell short in meeting expectations:
 - Operational information (i.e. budgets)
 - Not enough information on time management
 - Not enough information about applying for, interviewing for, and negotiating for leadership positions
 - Lack of connection and activities with cohort
 - Workshops did not necessarily provide the discussion that was necessary to really learn the details of leaders’ roles and responsibilities
 - Need more “hands-on” activities in learning about negotiation and conflict management
- The other three participants rated the program “8,” “9,” and “10.” Here is a summary of their responses:
 - The program met expectations, but did not necessarily meet personal goals
 - Impressed with the dedication of the people running the program
 - The networking opportunities assisted in future endeavors
 - The friendships that developed were especially important

Quote: “Everything that was done was good, but there should have been more.”

Question #4: In what ways has the program influenced your goals for leadership positions in the future?

Majority report:

- All but one participant indicated that the program influenced her interest in leadership positions in the future in a positive way.
- Participants voiced that their participation assisted them in the development of a more “solidified commitment” to a future leadership role.
- Almost all of the participants stated that as a result of the *AdvanceVT* Leadership Development Program they felt a personal recognition and confidence that they were able to succeed in a leadership role.

Minority report:

- Understanding of the positive and negative aspects of “leap frogging” into leadership roles
- An understanding of what things can be negotiated

- One individual indicated that her goals have changed, but she did not attribute her goals to her participation in the leadership development program.

Quote: “I was able to talk through my strengths and weaknesses and realize that I had the characteristics that would allow me to do well in a leadership position.”

Question #5: What part of the leadership program have you found to be most personally valuable?

Majority report (almost all of the participants noted both of these experiences as most valuable):

- The one-on-one meetings and skills scope exercise (enabled to look at self critically)
- Cohort interaction

Quote: “The one-on-one sessions allowed me to really look at myself from another perspective and reviewing the results with another person facilitated a more in-depth reflection. I was able to see others’ perspectives of my skills and action and what that might mean for me in relation to my leadership skills.”

Minority report:

- Networking opportunities
- Meeting with those in leadership position and getting their thoughts on their role
- Negotiation skills

Question #6: What part of the leadership program has been least valuable or useful to you personally?

Three participants could not identify any aspect that they felt was least useful or valuable. The others indicated (all minority reports):

- The one-on-one meetings
- The lack of available resources (like books)
- Not gaining a better understanding of the leadership climate at Virginia Tech
- More focus on how to counter-act leadership climate for women
- Time demands influenced how much time that could be put into the program

Question #7: Can you identify any tangible outcomes to your own career that you attribute in whole or part to your participation in the leadership program?

One participant stated that she can not identify any tangible outcomes and three others said it was too soon to tell. Other responses included:

- Confidence
- Applying for or acceptance of leadership positions.

Quote: “The program has prepared me to pursue positions and I have started to look. I feel like I am coming from a place of strength in pursuing a leadership position.”

Question #8: If you had to do it all over again would you participate in the program?

Six of the seven participants stated “yes,” one participant stated “no.”

Question #9: What advice would you offer other VT women who are considering participating in the program?

All minority report:

- The local aspect of the program is helpful.
- Might advise other leadership programs.
- It is important entering the program to “target a well-defined leadership goal.”
- The time commitment is significant and requires scheduling in time to devote to program.
- The program is a good overview for people interested in a leadership role.
- Participate in as much as possible, “all opportunities are wonderful.”

Question #10: Do you have any suggestions about ways that program can be improved?

Majority report:

- Expert led activities and examples on how to do certain skills
- More interaction with cohort
- More interactions with those in leadership roles (including opportunity to ask questions)

Quote: “Another cohort member took it upon herself to create a monthly luncheon for the cohort and this allowed for personal exchange, and for us to be able to mentor one another. This should be set up in the program, because if this one individual had not organized it, it would have been something I was missing.”

Minority report:

- Provide cohort with an organized plan for the year, including time commitment.
- Participants should be aware of and open to challenging feedback and change.
- More information on budgeting and management.
- More information on how to acquire a position (CV, where to look, etc.)
- Maybe a course buyout instead of summer salary to allow for more time to devote to program.

Question #11: Have you applied for a leadership position within or outside of Virginia Tech during the past year?

Five individuals indicated they had applied for a leadership position within the last year; three of these individuals also expressed they were already in a leadership role. One individual stated “no,” and another preferred not to answer.

Question #12: Do you expect to apply for a leadership position in the near future?

- Two individuals indicated they are not sure, given that they are in leadership roles currently. Three participants are planning to apply in the future.
- One individual is not sure, but is looking
- One individual preferred not to answer

Question #13: Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences in the leadership program?

Majority report:

- The luncheons organized by the cohort were particularly beneficial.

- Program was beneficial and a good opportunity and experience.

Quote: "I felt the program was wonderful all around. The leadership program was a way to feel connected and supported at Virginia Tech."

Minority report:

- The running of program seemed disorganized; there was not a sense of whole.

Summary and Suggestions

The Leadership Development Program provided the participants with a confidence that they are able to pursue leadership positions and ultimately that they have the skills to do well in these positions.

Overall, there is a sense that the cohort experience was valuable. Almost all of the participants mentioned the importance of connecting with the other women for support, collaboration, and mentoring. There was also a sense that more cohort related activities should be worked into the Leadership Development Program.

Almost all of the participants reported that the one-on-one sessions were particularly valuable because of the opportunity to reflect on their own skills and abilities and get feedback from a mentor.

Most participants stressed that they really wanted more personal interaction with those in leadership roles. They expressed a desire to have time to ask questions and get an understanding of the specific day-to-day responsibilities of being in a leadership role. The aspect of time was an issue for many participants. A couple mentioned feeling a sense of time pressures on the presenters leaving a feeling of being rushed and others mentioned that they felt like they should have spent more time on the program but they were influenced by their own time limitations.

A few participants really would have liked more information on the climate of leadership at Virginia Tech and skills in negotiating leadership roles in this climate.

Almost all of the participants felt that the program was a positive experience. Of those that noted anything negative about the program, typically these comments were related to personal (and very specific) goals that may not have been addressed by the program. One way to counter-act this might be to assess these goals at the beginning of the program and pair women up with a resource that might be helpful.