

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

Roseanne Foti, Associate Professor; Peggy Layne, *AdvanceVT* Program Director, and Ane Turner Johnson, Graduate Assistant, Virginia Tech

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.



Elisa Sotelino, Professor, Civil & Environmental Engineering and 2007 Leadership Development Program participant

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 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.

Issues 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

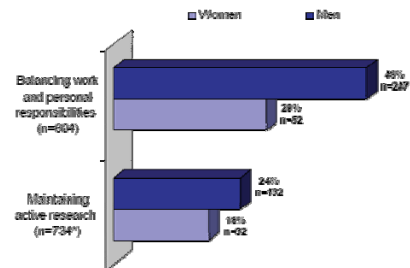
47% of women and 31% of men who responded expressed interest in a leadership position beyond their current position, such as a department chair, center director, or dean.



Left to right: Roseanne Foti, Associate Professor, Psychology, and Leadership Development program coordinator, Mary-Leigh Wolfe, Professor, Biological Systems Engineering and 2005 LDP participant, and Vicky Soghomonian, Associate Professor, Physics, and 2006 LDP participant.

Balancing Leadership with Other Responsibilities

The figure below shows the percentage of male and female faculty who agreed that it is possible to hold a leadership position at Virginia Tech while maintaining an active research agenda or balancing work/personal responsibilities.



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 the confidence that they are able 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 for support, collaboration, and mentoring, and expressed a desire for more cohort related activities.

❖ **One-on-One Coaching:** Almost all of the participants reported that the one-on-one sessions with a coach were particularly valuable because of the opportunity to reflect on their own skills and abilities and get feedback.

❖ **Personal Interaction:** 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.

"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

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.

"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

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.

"Institutional transformation will occur at Virginia Tech as more women and underrepresented minorities enter visible leadership positions on and off campus. However, individual faculty are only going to be motivated to take on this challenge if they feel that the benefits outweigh the burden and risk to them and their careers."

- Female Faculty Member

Acknowledgments

AdvanceVT would like to thank the National Science Foundation (Grant #HRD 0244916) and Virginia Tech. *AdvanceVT* is a National Science Foundation funded program designed to increase the participation and success of women in academic science and engineering careers. Any opinions, findings, conclusions or recommendations expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation.