Engaging Department Chairs: A Critical Link in STEM Faculty Success

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Background

The multi-year efforts of the Women in Science and Engineering at Oakland University (WISE@OU) program confirmed the critical importance of department chairs in all aspects of STEM faculty development. In our last year of NSF funding, WISE@OU chose to prioritize information and resources for department chairs.

Chairs’ Retreat

The Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) and the Office of the Provost, with the support of WISE@OU, hosted the inaugural Chairs’ and Program Directors’ Retreat in August 2015. The retreat was supported by Provost and Deans, Provost and Deans, Provost and Deans, Provost and Deans, Provost and Deans, Provost and Deans, Provost and Deans, Provost and Deans, Provost and Deans, Provost and Deans, Provost and Deans, Provost and Deans, Provost and Deans, Provost and Deans.

Chair Training Topics

WISE@OU, via our experiences with faculty and from interactions at national NSF ADVANCE Workshops, developed the following list of training topics for department chairs.

- STEM chairs could use special assistance in:
  - Improving search pools
  - Facilitating new faculty launch
  - Writing substantial support letters to grant agencies
  - Equalizing load among diverse faculty
  - Supporting interdisciplinary research (multiple PIs)

Chairs and Mentoring

While WISE@OU instituted interdisciplinary cohort mentoring for junior STEM faculty in 2013, only 40% of newly hired STEM faculty reported receiving mentoring in their department. (WISE@OU Survey, 2014)

- Remediation mentoring deficit is primarily, the responsibility of department chairs.

Addressing the Issue/Phase 1: In December, 2014, WISE@OU hosted Dr. Deborah DeZure from Michigan State University, who discussed effective practices in mentoring and provided handouts to help chairs evaluate and develop mentoring programs to meet their departmental needs.

Addressing the Issue/Phase 2: In January 2016, WISE@OU hosted a mentoring workshop, providing examples of mentoring across campus, at the school level, at the department level, and through individual initiatives.

- We also discussed a framework for designing and specifying mentoring models. This framework helps articulate what opportunities, resources, and support may already be available for fostering a faculty mentoring program. (Dawson, P. Educational Researcher: 43: 137-145, 2014)

Chair Feedback On Workshops and Plans to Address Mentoring Challenges:

- “I left pleased to know about and understand other approaches that seem to have more potential for our situation.”
- “I plan to talk with faculty about organizing a cohort model…I think this idea will be well-accepted by all.”
- “Team mentoring is a good way to compensate for having only a few senior faculty.”

Contact Information

Visit our website at www.oakland.edu/advance. WISE@OU is funded by an NSF ADVANCE PAID grant, award number 1107012. Email: ldevreug@oakland.edu or kmoore@oakland.edu.

Phone: 248-370-4516 or 248-370-2338

Chairs’ Resource Guide

Resource Guide Contents

- The Roles and Responsibilities of the Chair/Program Director
- Top Things To Know
- Faculty Support Services
- Student Support Services
- Academic Programs
- Other Information

Who to Contact When…

- Important Dates
- Important Policies/Procedures

Followed the retreat, four “Chairs’ Forum” sessions were hosted by CETL during the academic year and addressed Tips for New Chairs, Managing the Role of Chair, and Dealing with Difficult People and Situations.

Chairs and Mentoring

While WISE@OU and our collaboration with the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning made training opportunities a reality on campus. While the Provost did support the Chairs Retreat, there is not yet a funded program in place to support future activities.

WISE@OU has provided exemplary models to the provost: University of North Texas Chair Academy: facultysuccess.una.edu/office-of-the-provost/ and Boise State Resources for Department Chairs: academics.bsu.edu/dept/chairs.

Progress Made

Over the course of the year, attendance at our events and discussion of relevant chair-training topics has grown on campus. Even workshop-averse STEM chairs are starting to attend.

Feedback from chairs encourages these efforts to continue:

- “I am very glad that you have initiated this process.”
- “…these opportunities for chairs are very important.”
- “Great ideas, long overdue.”

Continuing Support for Chairs

The above efforts have resulted in additional chair-focused initiatives:

- Beginning in fall 2016, a Chair Fellow (an experienced former chair) will support the coordination of resources, services, and leadership training opportunities for chairs and program directors.
- Chairs now have online access to the Resource Guide, which will be updated by the Chair Fellow.
- A second Chairs’ Retreat is scheduled for August 2016. One area of emphasis will be the Chair’s role in faculty recruitment.
- The WISE@OU program will provide a workshop on implicit bias based on University of Washington LEAD-It-Yourself training program.

Challenges

Chair support at Oakland University was initiated by WISE@OU and our collaboration with the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning made training opportunities a reality on campus. While the Provost did support the Chairs Retreat, there is not yet a funded program in place to support future activities.

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