

Appreciative Inquiry Faculty Focus Group Findings

The ADVANCE Transformation Award is a 5-year NSF grant that has been awarded to California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, with the intent of fostering the advancement of women and diverse faculty in academic science and engineering careers.

This topical explores the results of the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005) STEM faculty focus groups from Spring 2007.

By Jill E. Nemiro, Ph.D., Psychology & Sociology Department,
ADVANCE Grant Co-PI

■ ■ ■ Appreciative Inquiry Method

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is an approach to institutional change with the intent of building on what organizations are already doing well, rather than trying to pinpoint problem areas and fix what is not working. The overall goal of these focus groups was to ascertain the current strengths of recruiting and career development efforts for new faculty in these colleges, and to build recruiting and career development efforts around what is currently working well at CPP in these areas, rather than trying to fix what does not work. A typical AI includes four stages, three of which focus on brainstorming, and one which involves implementation:

AI brainstorming:

- Discovering: Identification of organizational processes that work well
- Dreaming: Envisioning of processes that would work well in the future
- Designing: Planning and prioritizing processes that would work well

AI implementation:

- Developing: Implementation and evaluation of proposed design activities

In Spring 2007, faculty from the Colleges of Engineering and Science were led through the first 2 stages of AI in 8 focus groups. Participating departments included: Aerospace Engineering, Chemical and Materials Engineering, Civil Engineering, Electrical and Computer Engineering, Engineering Technology, Industrial and Manufacturing Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, Biology, Chemistry, Computer Science, Geology, Physics, and Math and Statistics.

In Engineering, 40 faculty members (7 were women) participated, and in Science 39 (15 were women) participated. Cal Poly Pomona AI Focus Group participation rates, by gender (relative to the total number of faculty in each college) were 79% female and 54% male in Engineering, and 59% female, and 29% male in Science.



At a Glance

- *“Being flexible in terms of the required experience and/or degree necessary for a position yielded a wider applicant pool.”*
- *“The need to get applicants that ‘fit’ in the context of a teaching university was stressed.”*
- *“...departments that offered collegial, supportive environments, mixed with opportunities for mentoring and collaborating with colleagues on research were viewed as strong...”*
- *“Finding ways to increase the sense of ‘campus community’ at CPP...”*

The Way To ADVANCE

www.csupomona.edu/advance
advance@csupomona.edu
909.869.4289



ADVANCE at Cal Poly Pomona
3801 West Temple Ave.
Building 9-169
Pomona, CA 91768

Faculty Recruitment Findings

Stage 1 Discover: Current Strengths in Recruiting

Faculty shared a variety of recruitment strategies that their departments used to successfully solicit a good applicant pool. First, job position announcements crafted with broadly worded descriptions of minimum and pertinent requirements allowed for more flexibility in the recruitment process. In particular, being flexible in terms of the required experience and/or degree necessary for a position yielded a wider applicant pool. Additionally, by advertising faculty positions early in the academic year (or even better, in summer) and by advertising thoroughly in a variety of recruitment sources (e.g., ads in professional publications and newsletters, using online job tools, and recruiting at professional conferences), a stronger applicant pool was created.

“...recruitment has moved from what was once more local, informal and less organized to a more consistent and organized process,”

A major strength in current recruitment practices was the use of what was referred to by some faculty as “proactive or contact-based recruitment techniques.” These techniques included asking for referrals from industry contacts, contacting interested alumni, and encouraging applicants from past faculty searches to re-apply. Another major strength was incorporating into the recruitment process “the personal touch.” To do this, some departments prided themselves on hosting candidate dinners with many members of the department faculty (rather than just the search committee chair). Also, providing job candidates with the opportunity to gain a realistic job preview during on-site interviews proved to be beneficial. For some, recruitment has moved from what was once more local, informal and less organized, to a more consistent and organized process, with more timely approval for hiring decisions as well. The climate and philosophy of some departments and the number of current existing female departmental faculty (especially in Math and Statistics) were viewed as a recruitment strength.

Stage 2: Dream How Faculty Recruiting Can Improve

Although proactive, contact-based recruitment was viewed as a strength in the Discover stage, focus group participants still felt more could be done in this area to increase the number of women and faculty of color recruits. Strategies included a more proactive pursuit of industry contacts for referrals, mentoring part-time faculty (with the idea that they would develop into tenure-track faculty), proactive tracking of CPP alumni, networking with women chapters in professional societies, and sponsoring current CPP female faculty to hold career days and/or workshops to attract potential recruits. Some focus group participants suggested starting recruitment strategies even earlier in the pipeline, including offering support and financial incentives to current female Ph.D. candidates, mentoring current CPP students to persuade them to pursue Ph.D. degrees, and offering programs in high school to encourage young women to move into academic careers in STEM disciplines.

Cal Poly Pomona STEM faculty focus groups envisioned a variety of incentives that could attract a larger and more diverse applicant pool, including:

- Salary: competitive salaries (competitive with industry and other institutions)
- Realistic workload
- Sufficient office and lab space
- Housing assistance
- On-campus child care that serves faculty
- Consistent family-friendly university policies
- Increased maternity leave

The need to get applicants that “fit” in the context of a teaching university was stressed. To do this, a set of tools to communicate and share information with potential job applicants so “they may evaluate us as we do them” were suggested, including: linking electronically to the job announcement sample “attractive” application packets and narratives (or FAQs) on what typical CSU faculty do; crafting a clear statement that describes a department’s RTP process; making applicants more aware in the recruitment stage of campus resources (e.g., internal grants that support teaching and/or research); and educating applicants on CPP’s diverse student population.

■■■ Career Development Findings

Stage 1 Discover: Current Strengths in Career Development

Across the eight focus groups, there was much consensus with respect to university resources that aid faculty in developing their careers. Those resources include: the Faculty Center for Professional Development, various internal grants, release time opportunities, ORSP support, and university service and external service opportunities.

At the departmental level, those departments that offered collegial, supportive environments, mixed with opportunities for mentoring and collaborating with colleagues on research were viewed as strong in assisting with faculty career development. For women faculty, the existence of female departmental faculty and the incorporation of family-friendly departmental policies (e.g., not scheduling departmental meetings in the late afternoon or evening, flexibility with respect to scheduling, allowing for “stopping the tenure clock”, etc.) were key strengths. In addition, a variety of factors were shared that led to career satisfaction including autonomy in professional activities, the ability to teach in areas of interest, satisfaction in working with students, and opportunities to work in local industry.

Stage 2 Dream: How Career Development Can Improve

Many of the same factors mentioned as dreams in faculty recruitment were repeated in career development, including a manageable workload, competitive and equitable salaries, competitive start-up packages, and sufficient lab and office space. If one word can summarize many of the improvements for career development, it is MORE of what we already have, more internal grants, more release time, and more sabbatical opportunities.

Mentoring also emerged as a dream for faculty career development. Faculty felt a need for formal mentoring (e.g., assign a senior faculty mentor to each new tenure-track faculty member). In particular, more mentoring for junior faculty from their senior level colleagues in completing RTP documents was suggested.

The caliber of current students also worked its way into the dreams for faculty career development. Being able to recruit higher quality and better prepared students, expanding graduate programs, incorporating more active use of online and hybrid courses, and building stronger ties with industry were all seen as ways to assist in faculty career development. Finding ways to increase the sense of “campus community” at CPP and to move away from what was referred to as the “day-hop” attitude of students was also stressed.

Having a department with active and engaged faculty was viewed as a key factor to develop junior faculty. Unfortunately, a feeling of “no voter power” even in the context of shared governance has led to what was referred to by some as “dispirited faculty.” More alignment between faculty and administrators’ expectations is needed.

■■■ Useful Tips for Faculty Recruitment & Career Development

In the design stage, participants were asked to brainstorm specific long-term and short-term activities to achieve the dreams previously generated. Out of this discussion, a series of useful strategies and tips for faculty recruitment and career development emerged.

Faculty Recruitment

- Start early
- Advertise thoroughly
- Use contact-based strategies
- Add the personal touch
- Promote dual-career opportunities

Career Development

- Use campus resources
- Look for ways to get more
- Nurture, mentor, and support our own
- Encourage collaboration
- Assist with work/life balance

■ ■ ■ Learnings from Other ADVANCE Institutions

Faculty of color face several obstacles in academia, including social isolation, insufficient minority membership on faculty search committees, heavier teaching and service demands, lack of mentoring, a hostile work environment, and feeling they have to constantly prove they are worthy of their position (University of Michigan, 2002, 2004). In STEM disciplines, women face additional challenges, as compared to their male colleagues, including less robust negotiated contracts, less formal mentoring, exclusion from informal mentoring social events, higher service demands (but not necessarily in leadership positions), more reported gender discrimination (particularly in promotion and space allocation), and more negative departmental work climates (University of Michigan, 2002, 2004).

Many of the dreams and tips (summarized in the preceding sections) discussed in the AI focus groups are evident in the resources below. Each resource provides examples of practices that influence change in higher education that ease the burdens of women and minority faculty in STEM domains.

Faculty Recruitment

Recruiting Women Scientists and Engineers

University of Michigan ADVANCE, www.umich.edu/%7Eadvproj/UM_Recruiting_poster.pdf

Developing and Implementing Work-Family Policies for Faculty

AAUP Academe Online, www.aaup.org/AAUP/pubsres/academe/2004/ND/Feat/04ndsulli.htm?PF=1

Creating a Positive Departmental Climate: Principles for Best Practices

University of Michigan ADVANCE, www.umich.edu/%7Eadvproj/principles.pdf

Career Development

Mentoring and Institutional Transformation: A Formalized Mentoring for STEM Faculty

New Mexico State University ADVANCE, www.advance.vt.edu/Advance_2006_PI_Mtg/NMSU_Mentoring.pdf

Balancing Family & Academic Work

AAUP Issues in Higher Education, www.aaup.org/AAUP/issues/WF/

Supporting Women Scientists and Engineers

University of Michigan ADVANCE, www.umich.edu/~advproj/UM_Supporting_poster.pdf

References

Assessing the academic environment for women scientists and engineers. University of Michigan ADVANCE project report, Sept. 26, 2002.

Assessing the academic work environment for faculty of color in Science and engineering. University of Michigan ADVANCE project report, January, 2004.

Bilimoria, D. & Jordan, C. Geer. *A Good Place to Do Science: An Exploratory Case Study of an Academic Science Department.* Case Western Reserve University ADVANCE project report.

Cooperrider, D. & Whitney, D. (2005). *Appreciative inquiry: A positive revolution in change.* San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers