

SUPPORTING FACULTY DURING LIFE TRANSITIONS

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Introduction

One of the most cited advantages of a faculty career is its flexible schedule. As long as they are productive, faculty members can set their own work schedules and, in some cases, work locations. However, it has been demonstrated that this flexibility blurs the boundaries between work and life and, typically, results in less time for the personal lives of faculty (Bailyn 1993; Hensel 1991; Sorcinelli and Near 1989; Williams 2000a; Williams 2000b; American Association of University Professors 2001). Consequently, the same flexibility that was an advantage can become a burden as a personal crisis can easily consume a tremendous amount of time.

Studies on faculty stress have identified lack of time, family needs, and pressure to do the research needed for promotion as the most common sources of stress among university faculty (Barton, Friedman, and Locke 1995; Gmelch, Willse, and Lourich 1986; Jacobs and Winslow 2004; Grant, Kennelly, and Ward 2000; Thompson and Dey 1998). For many faculty members, a substantial amount of the time spent on campus is devoted to teaching and service, while evenings and weekends are used for research and writing. Children, major illness, hidden disabilities (Bertz 2003) or caring for an elderly parent all detract from the time available for research and writing. Often the time used to attend to major transitions in personal lives would otherwise be spent on research needed for promotion and advancement.

‘Spillover’ between the time demands of a faculty career and family responsibilities has a high correlation with faculty satisfaction with both life and work (Sorcinelli and Near 1989) and causes more stress for women faculty than it does for men faculty (Davis and Astin 1990; Wilson 2001; Thompson and Dey 1998; Gatta and Roos 2002). Although a supportive spouse or partner can alleviate some of the stress, women still bear most of the responsibility for care-giving, and men and women make very different trade-offs in how they allocate their time (Valian 1998).

Mason & Goulden (2002) found that faculty career transitions that coincide with child-bearing are particularly costly to women's advancement and promotion. According to their study, women who had babies within five years of earning their doctorates exhibited lower rates of earning tenure compared to men who had babies in the same time period. The gap in tenure attainment between men and women with early babies is 24% in the sciences and 20% in the humanities and social sciences.

Given that the average age of granting a PhD is 33 (Mason and Goulden 2002) and the average age of all assistant professors is 40 years old (Jacobs 2004), an increasing number of faculty can no longer afford to delay family formation until the attainment of tenure (Armenti 2004; Blackburn and Hollenshead 1999; Gatta and Roos 2002; Varner 2000). Recognizing the impact of mid-career life transitions on faculty, the American Council on Education (2005) published "An Agenda for Excellence: Creating Flexibility in Tenure-Track Faculty Careers," which calls on universities to find creative ways to permit flexibility in faculty careers that will facilitate life transitions.

The nature of faculty work makes transitions difficult regardless of gender. Nevertheless, women faculty members tend to shoulder much of the work surrounding transitions. Moreover, faculty in science and engineering fields face an additional challenge due to the nature of their research. Science and engineering research is often time sensitive and may require significant start up effort to establish results. Major disruptions in work productivity due to difficult transitions can result in a loss of research results or momentum that can be career-ending in science and engineering. The gender disparity in experiencing transitions, coupled with these characteristics of science and engineering research, provide the context for programs to support faculty undergoing transitions. The initiatives described here grew out of programs to support

women faculty in science, engineering, and mathematics. Recognizing that transitions affect all faculty, though, programs to support faculty encountering difficult transitions should benefit all faculty, regardless of gender. These programs provide another example of how initiatives initially conceived to help those who are differentially disadvantaged result in improved resources for all.

As part of its National Science Foundation (NSF) ADVANCE Program, in 2001 the University of Washington (UW) established a Transitional Support Program (TSP) to alleviate the negative impact the lack of time due to major life transitions has on faculty careers. The TSP awards grants of \$5,000 to \$38,000 to outstanding science, engineering, and mathematics (SEM) faculty in the midst of major life transitions, such as the birth or adoption of a child, personal medical needs, family illness, and/or caring for an elderly parent. The TSP also helps faculty members who need a modest level of support to advance from assistant to associate professor, associate to full professor, or into positions of leadership. The primary focus of the program is to help faculty as they deal with the stress and challenges of balancing an academic career with a personal life.

What follows is a synopsis of UW's ADVANCE Program at the University of Washington; a description of how the TSP was implemented; a summary of evaluation results; an overview of similar programs at other institutions; and the outlook for institutionalizing the program after the grant period ends. Recommendations on how to best replicate the program at other institutions are also provided.

UW ADVANCE

The University of Washington was one of the initial nine universities selected for a National Science Foundation ADVANCE grant in the fall of 2001. The UW has a Carnegie ranking of

Doctoral/Research University/Extensive and for the past thirty years it has been the number one public university in the country in receiving federal support for research and training. Its female science and engineering faculty members are recipients of numerous national awards including NSF Young Investigator awards, NSF CAREER Awards, Presidential Early Career Awards and Sloan Research Fellowships. The UW ADVANCE project was designed to build upon existing strengths at the university while serving as a catalyst for institutional transformation. The project's vision as articulated in the original proposal is "a campus in which all SEM departments are thriving, all faculty are properly mentored, and every SEM faculty member is achieving to his or her maximum potential."

The UW ADVANCE program created a Center for Institutional Change (CIC) that is advised by a joint leadership team from the College of Engineering and the College of Arts and Sciences. The leadership team includes deans, chairs and faculty members from both colleges, the associate dean of the graduate school, the vice president for minority affairs and the vice president for human resources. Academic departments participating in the program include all ten within the College of Engineering and all eleven departments in the College of Arts and Sciences' Science Division.

The number and percentage of female ladder faculty (in ADVANCE departments) in each college are shown below in Table I. Ladder faculty at the University of Washington includes tenure track faculty and a special category of faculty who are without tenure by reason of funding (WOT).

TABLE I

UW ADVANCE LADDER FACULTY, FALL 2004

	Total	Female	% <i>Female</i>
College of Engineering	206	33	16.0%
College of Arts & Sciences (Science Division)	255	35	13.7%
Total UW ADVANCE	461	68	14.8%

Implementing the TSP

The Transitional Support Program (TSP) at the University of Washington was implemented in Fall 2001. From the beginning, it was decided that the program would be competitive; a variety of circumstances and proposed remedies would be considered; the selection process would be managed solely by the CIC Director and the ADVANCE Principal Investigator; the request for proposals would be offered multiple times per year; and participation in an evaluation process would be mandatory for all recipients. The program is open to both men and women faculty in ADVANCE departments who are undergoing transitions.

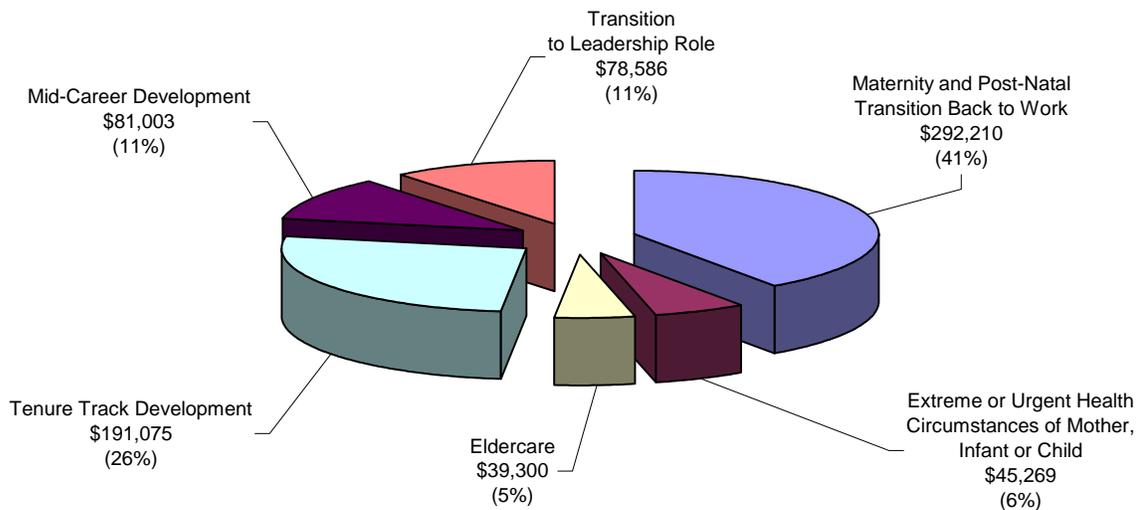
In an effort to avoid perceptions that the program is remedial, the ADVANCE leadership team decided upon a competitive application process. It was hoped that the competition would signal to recipients and their colleagues that the award is given only to outstanding faculty members who are deserving of the honor. To enhance the prestige of the award, recipients are called ADVANCE Professors. Applicants must submit written statements about the type of transition they are experiencing; how it has impacted their career thus far; and how an award will help to advance their career during the transition. A letter of support from the department chair is

strongly encouraged. If, however, the applicant indicates that lack of support from his/her chair has contributed to his/her ability to endure the transition, a letter of support is not required.

Through Spring 2005, 36 faculty members from participating SEM departments have been designated as ADVANCE Professors. TSP grants totaling \$727,443 (including UW matching funds) have been awarded to faculty members in participating SEM Departments. While most awards have been given to female faculty members, two awards from UW matching funds have been given to male faculty members with significant family responsibilities and/or crises. Recipients reflect the diversity of faculty in participating departments, and include 4 Asian/Pacific Islander, 1 African American and 1 Latina/o faculty members.

As shown in Figure 1 below, the transitions experienced by ADVANCE Professors have been as varied as the remedies proposed.

Figure 1: TSP Funding by Categories, 2001-2005



Faculty are advised not to include information about a medical condition in the TSP application but to work with the UW's Disability Services Office to obtain a letter affirming that a qualifying medical condition exists. Faculty medical leave must be used first in the case of

personal medical conditions. If a faculty member's transition situation changes unexpectedly (i.e., a failed adoption or pregnancy), the award is reevaluated and the award is adjusted as appropriate to the new situation. All applications are confidential and the CIC Director is extremely discreet on who is consulted when seeking remedies.

As applications are reviewed, the CIC Director works very closely with the applicant and his/her department chair to develop cost-effective remedies. Graduate or post-doctoral student support has been one of the most popular remedies for faculty who need more time for research. One significant outcome of the CIC Director and department chair collaboration on remedies has been the leveraging of award funding. Many of the department chairs have matched TSP awards with in-kind support, cash contributions, or course releases to provide the ADVANCE Professors additional time for research.

Decisions on TSP awards and remedies are left solely to the CIC Director and the UW ADVANCE Principal Investigator. The autonomy and flexibility in decision-making enables the Director to negotiate remedies with department chairs with little bureaucracy. Once a decision to grant an award is made, very little administrative action is needed to execute the negotiated remedy.

Another benefit of the tight decision-making process is that the request for proposals can be offered three times per year with deadlines in November (support for Winter Quarter), February (support for Spring Quarter), and May (support for Summer and Fall Quarters). Male and female faculty members in UW ADVANCE are sent quarterly email announcements about the program and its deadlines. The UW ADVANCE web site has deadlines listed for each quarter to allow faculty to plan ahead and a budget tool to help them calculate the costs of release time and/or graduate support.

Applicants are notified of their selection by the CIC Director and reminded that they will be required to participate in the program's evaluation process. The evaluation is managed by the Center for Workforce Development at the University of Washington. The evaluation is structured to provide feedback to program managers that is used to improve program management and delivery. The evaluation consists of an initial interview with all recipients and annual follow up emails requesting a statement on the impact that the award has had on their research productivity and/or career advancement.

The TSP has been able to fund most requests that fit within the broad definition of life transition, which includes health or family-related transitions, transitions to new career positions, and transitions to positions to leadership. Requests for sabbatical support or to write textbooks were not funded. In cases where the application did not fit the program, the CIC director phones the applicant directly. In several cases, the proposal was reframed and then funded in a later round.

While it could be useful to have more input on funding decisions, using a smaller review committee ensures that memory remains in the system and that the grant recipients receive their funding very quickly. In several cases where the chair was not supportive of a faculty member, a request for a letter from the chair was waived.

The TSP program at the University of Washington has a narrower definition than some other grant programs offered at other institutions (See the TSPs at Other Institutions Section for descriptions of other programs). While more broadly defined grant programs can address a variety of issues, the UW program is targeted more narrowly to highlight the importance of support faculty undergoing transitions. Doing so recognizes that faculty lead multi-dimensional lives, and that these dimensions are not compartmentalized. Faculty productivity is impacted by

such personal transitions. Moreover, at the University of Washington, support of this type was typically elusive unless a department chair or dean knew how to navigate the institution to obtain financial support for critical faculty transitions. A narrowly defined program such as this one provides a clear recognition of the institution's commitment to supporting faculty, and releases the burden of justifying how critical events in a faculty member's life affect his/her work.

Evaluation Results

As part of the program evaluation, all ADVANCE Professors are interviewed one year after the receipt of the grant, and asked to complete annual follow-up surveys. The surveys collect information about milestones achieved, publications, research grants or leadership positions obtained since receipt of the grant. In addition to collecting the same kind of information about productivity, the interviews provide an opportunity for recipients to reflect on how their colleagues responded to the award, any negative repercussions related to asking for help during the transition, and whether the academic department changed how it handles transitions as a result of his/her experience. Although there are currently thirty-six recipients, three have left UW and eleven report that they are not at a point in which they could evaluate the impact of the award.

Interviews and surveys from the remaining twenty-one the recipients indicate that the program has greatly contributed to their productivity.

A brief summary of achievements is as follows:

- Six ADVANCE professors who were Assistant Professors at the time of their award have been promoted to Associate Professors. Three who were Associate Professors have been promoted to Full Professor.

- Eight ADVANCE professors have taken on new positions of leadership including directors of research centers, leadership of editorial board, co-chair of the national conference, service on national committees, and chair of a discipline society section. This result is in addition to the four TSP grants given specifically to support transitions to leadership positions.
- A total of sixty-five publications were produced by the twenty-one respondents after receipt of their TSP awards.
- Fourteen of the twenty-one (67%) have been awarded new research grants since being named ADVANCE Professors.
- Three ADVANCE Professors have received NSF CAREER awards, two of whom were awarded TSP grants to support their transitions back to work after maternity leave.

Interviews with the initial set of recipients provided important feedback about how department climate and the chair influences implementation of the grant, and how the faculty members themselves attempted to structure the transitional support in a manner to avoid bias from colleagues. Most recipients indicated that the rationale for the funding they received was invisible to their colleagues due to the discretion and understanding of the department chair. Recipients who described their chair and department as very supportive reported no concerns about negative repercussions.

Negative repercussions were reported by two recipients as an outcome of poor communication on the part of the chair, or other faculty members feeling like the recipient was not carrying his/her share of departmental load. While others did not report negative repercussion, two additional recipients reported taking action to avoid bias. These recipients intentionally focused on the need to structure their request for assistance in such a manner that

departmental duties were not shifted to their faculty colleagues. They asked for research personnel rather than course releases as a means to avoid negative repercussions from colleagues. One additional recipient indicated that the transitional support was not viewed as negatively as stopping her tenure clock.

An unintentional consequence of the TSP has been the informal mentoring of those who submit funding requests, regardless of whether or not the request is selected for an award. When applications have not been selected for a TSP award, the CIC director has facilitated the applicant's introduction to other campus resources and programs. In a few cases, the CIC director has been able to work with the applicant and/or other managers to solve the transition concern with little or no funding.

Post-grant Implementation

The NSF ADVANCE project goal is to transform the institution rather than provide programs that terminate with the grant funding. Thus the project has undertaken several strategies to create lasting impact.

In June 2004, the CIC, in cooperation with the University of Washington's Office of the Provost, extended the TSP to the entire UW campus, an important step in institutionalizing ADVANCE's programs and activities. The UW-wide program is much more restrictive than the ADVANCE TSP. It offers financial support to help outstanding faculty maintain their productivity while experiencing potentially career-threatening crises such as severe personal illness extending beyond the standard leave; severe or acute family illness; childbirth complications; or other critical situations. The funding is for course release and/or research support. The goal is to help these faculty members not completely lose ground in their research during such times of crisis. Unlike the ADVANCE TSP, the new program is also available to

research faculty and WOT (without tenure) faculty. Economically, investing a small amount of resources in this manner makes sense; the cost to a University of having a productive faculty member stop conducting research can be huge. In addition, the program sends a message to the faculty that the University makes it a priority to help its faculty balance work and life.

As previously noted, for faculty in science and engineering, an extended period away from one's research, due to work/family conflict, can be career-ending if grants run out, students find other advisors, lab space is taken away, etc. To help sustain and institutionalize the ADVANCE TSP for science and engineering faculty, the ADVANCE Team has initiated conversations with College and University Development officers to investigate potential foundation support.

In addition to the institutionalization of the program, the CIC director provides chairs and deans with feedback about the impact of the program on faculty productivity. In quarterly leadership training sessions, decision-makers are reminded of the leverage provided by the relatively inexpensive TSP awards. Chairs have been encouraged to develop similar remedies for potentially terminal associate faculty members.

Evaluation results are being used to inform institutional policy changes related to transitions. In the second year of the ADVANCE grant the UW received an Alfred P. Sloan Foundation Grant (Grant #2003-5-3 DLC) to examine part-time tenure track models for faculty members. The grant allowed the institution to review existing policies and craft a flexible policy that faculty might use during transitions. The ADVANCE evaluation process has also identified concerns about the use of an existing tenure clock stopping policy at the university. Faculty expressed reluctance to use the policy because of negative perceptions about the impact on their relationship with departmental colleagues. This issue was discussed at length during a quarterly

leadership workshop with department chairs, deans, and emerging leaders; and chairs now recognize the need to be proactive about creating flexible solutions to transitions.

TSPs at Other Institutions

Among the 19 ADVANCE institutions, at least five have implemented Transitional Support Programs similar to the one at the University of Washington. Examples can be found at the University of Michigan, Utah State University, the University of Wisconsin-Madison, the Earth Institute at Columbia University and Case Western Reserve University.

The University of Michigan's ADVANCE program created the Elizabeth C. Crosby Research Fund to help meet career-relevant needs of individual instructional track faculty in science and engineering if meeting those needs will help increase the retention or promotion of women scientists and engineers. The funding is available to support a range of scholarly activities, including expenses for specialized childcare when it impacts the ability to continue scholarly activities.

Utah State is piloting a Transitional Support Program for female faculty members in the Colleges of Agriculture, Engineering, Natural Resources and Science. The program is open to tenured and tenure-track women whose research has been delayed or interrupted (or who anticipate an interruption) by family or other responsibilities, such as childbirth, adoption, eldercare or divorce. The overall goal of the program is to help female faculty keep their research programs on track through difficult periods and to reestablish research programs after interruptions. Finally, the department must provide matching support directly through matching funds or indirectly through reduced work assignments.

The University of Wisconsin-Madison implemented a Life Cycle Research Grant Program, now called the Vilas Life Cycle Professorship program. The funds are available to faculty and

permanent PIs at the University who are at critical junctures in their professional careers when research productivity is directly affected by personal life events. Faculty may apply for varying amounts and academic purposes. The support may be used for release time, research support, conference travel, or other needs and lasts up to one year. The Life Cycle Research Grant Program was institutionalized in May 2005 through a 6.4 million dollar endowment from the Vilas Trustees.

The Earth Institute at Columbia University has implemented Transition Support Grants to assist women scientists in maintaining their research productivity during common transitions. The grants are not intended to provide supplemental support for family care. They provide partial support for a post-doctoral scientist, research assistant, or adjunct professor to assist women scientists in their ongoing research projects or take over teaching responsibilities so that a faculty member can focus on her research. The awards are intended to ensure that the research does not diminish and that women scientists can continue their research when limited by family or life transitions.

Case Western Reserve University has an ADVANCE Opportunity Fund to maximize the chance of success for women faculty at Case by providing support of current or proposed projects and activities where funding is difficult to obtain through other sources. All women faculty, including instructors and research faculty, are eligible to apply. Opportunities include seed funding for research, bridge funding when ongoing research funding has been suspended, grants to support writing of books, travel grants, childcare costs to attend a professional meeting, or grants to conduct research at another institutions.

Recommendations for Replication

The TSP program at the University of Washington has been implemented to be flexible and responsive to the needs of faculty members. A variety of remedies have been used and recipients have included male faculty members. Program evaluation indicates that in each case, the TSP recipient has increased his or her research productivity. Based on the experiences encountered during the implementation of the program at UW, the following recommendations are offered to institutions interested in replicating the program.

1. Be sensitive to faculty members who are concerned about bias from colleagues and those who want to structure awards to avoid such bias. When necessary, help faculty members craft remedies that do not create the impression that their workload is being transferred to other faculty in the department.
2. Consider adaptability of the model to the scale and culture of the institution. The program can be implemented at the department level or university-wide depending on interest and the amount of funding available. The culture of the institution might influence the scale of the program as well as the population that might be eligible for participation in the program.
3. Include chairs and deans in the program planning and development stage. Chairs and deans are more likely to support a program when they are involved in its design. Their involvement will also lessen the need to explain program goals and/or justify requests for their assistance in the development of remedies.
4. Build flexibility into the language used to solicit proposals. Rather than limiting transitions to a specific list, flexibility in language will allow the program to respond to variations in the type of transitions that faculty may experience.
5. Strongly encourage or mandate that applicants include a letter of support from their department chair in the application materials. If the chair provides a letter of support, they

will be forewarned about the type of transitional assistance needed. The letter is also a clear indication that the chair will be amenable to finding a solution to the faculty member's concerns.

6. Communicate clearly with all parties about how the award will be implemented. Unclear communication contributes to negative repercussions in the faculty member's relationship with his/her chair and colleagues.
7. Include language that allows for a reassessment of the award if the circumstances of the transition change substantially from those described in the application. The ability to increase or decrease awards will allow the program to better respond to faculty needs. Changes in circumstances such as unexpected assistance from a family member, a miscarriage, a delay in adoption plans or quick recovery from illness could change the type of transitional support needed at any point during the award period.
8. Be cautious about program eligibility based solely on gender. Major life transitions impact both genders and in many dual career families the male partner does share equally in caregiving responsibilities.
9. Establish an expectation that recipients will assist in the evaluation process. Doing so sends a message that a tangible outcome is expected at the end of the grant period. Further, faculty members are aware of the importance of accountability for program funds and know ahead of time that they must cooperate with program evaluators.

Summary

The presence of a Transitional Support Program has been extremely valuable for faculty productivity and morale. During the evaluation process, many of the TSP recipients noted that for the first time in their faculty careers they felt as if the institution were invested in their

success. The availability of the program acknowledges that the institution values balance in faculty lives. The program at the University of Washington serves as a model for other college and universities seeking ways to support faculty during difficult transitions.

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