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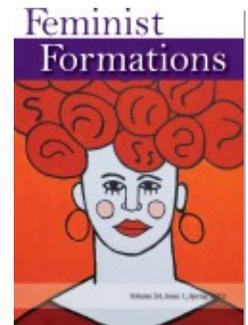
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Leveling the Playing Field for Women in Tenure and Promotion

SUE V. ROSSER

This report addresses the ADVANCE initiative at Georgia Institute of Technology, aimed at improving the conditions and the chances for advancement of science and engineering women faculty. This initiative, funded by a five-year National Science Foundation (NSF) grant, was motivated by local findings of gender differences in curriculum vitae (CVs), the quality and quantity of mentoring, and the knowledge of and responses to tenure and promotion expectations and requirements. ADVANCE entails covering topics of interest and concern to all faculty, such as case studies of promotion and tenure; training to remove possible subtle gender and racial biases in promotion and tenure decisions; and developing ADEPT, a web program for faculty and administrators, as well as family-friendly policies and various practices that assess, promote, and guide the advancement of women faculty.

Keywords: women science and engineering faculty / tenure and promotion / ADVANCE initiative / practices and policies

My experiences as a feminist and a scientist, including 23 years as director of Women's Studies in three very different institutions, where my tenure home has ranged from biology departments through family and preventive medicine to anthropology, provided me with positive preparation for most challenges that deans face. Three factors prove useful on a daily basis for dealing with the diverse constituencies: understanding and dealing with diversity; looking at situations through the intersections of race/ethnicity, class, gender, sexualities, and other forms of identity; and discerning systems, power, and hierarchy along with other feminist baseline educational knowledge. Such constituencies include faculty, staff, students, peer deans, the provost and the president within the institution with whom the dean interacts, as well as donors, alums, and community leaders outside the university.

For me as a director, understanding the perspective of the college on hiring, tenure and promotion, budget resources, indirect cost revenues, priorities, interdisciplinarity, collaborations, and other matters proved key to making the case for Women's Studies on these issues. The more that I could do to present Women's Studies in the categories, language, and ways that the dean understood and defined these issues and that the other departments/units in the college presented them, the better the chances were for Women's Studies to receive appropriate resources and treatment.

For example, in cases of promotion and tenure, as director I needed to demonstrate how the cases in Women's Studies fit the classic criteria of research, teaching, and service valued by the college. I provided the acceptance rate or listing of top tier journals in Women's Studies, since that was standard practice in science and other departments for judging the quality of refereed publications. I explained how supervision of the women's studies internship students or practicum in activist service constituted teaching similar to that in schools of social work, nursing, or education where supervision of students who work under the guidance of professionals in the community has a longer tradition of counting as teaching. I drew parallels between a faculty member in Women's Studies who served on the executive board of the local battered women's shelter to faculty members in business who serve on the board of a local hospital or to serving on boards of professional societies in terms of real-world expertise and knowledge gained. My colleagues recognized that these years of experience in making some of the nontraditional aspects of Women's Studies fit the criteria of academia helped me as dean to see issues from a variety of perspectives and present them in ways likely to garner the resources and acceptance that benefited both individuals and the college. In these ways, they viewed my feminism as a positive contribution to my administrative skills as dean.

Gender Differences in Curriculum Vitae

My vantage point as a dean provided me with a perspective to see some issues that often arise in the tenure and promotion process that may impact women particularly negatively, relative to their male counterparts. These issues had been evident to me neither as a faculty member who had successfully negotiated the tenure and promotion process at a few institutions, nor as a chair who had shepherded faculty in their bids for tenure and promotion.

As a dean, I see hundreds of curriculum vitae (CVs) each year from faculty at different stages of their careers, ranging from applicants for tenure-track and research positions at all ranks, faculty in the college for which I serve as dean during annual evaluations, as well as all faculty from all colleges within the institution each year who come up for tenure and promotion. Recommending individuals at other institutions for positions, promotions, and professional awards each year ensures that the issues do not reflect peculiarities for women at my home institution.

The relative similarity or uniformity of the men's CVs compared to those of women struck me immediately when I began to see large numbers of curriculum vitae from both men and women. Of course, the CVs of men varied in their content in terms of research and teaching focus and

included some variety and variance in numbers and quality of publications, teaching evaluations, and service. Although an occasional outlier among the male CVs stood out as especially strong or unusually weak, most of the men fit a bell curve without too much variation from the mean.

In contrast, the CVs of the women showed much more variation and could be described most accurately as a bimodal distribution. Many women substantially outperformed both their male and female peers in at least one, and often all areas of teaching, research, and service. Other women remained at the other tail of the distribution, lagging considerably behind both their male and female colleagues.

Because I knew many of these women, I realized that most of them had no idea how far they deviated from the norm of their professional peers. Neither the superstars nor the women at the other end of the spectrum recognized how much their CVs differed from the bulk of those of their peers and the impact this would have on their promotion and tenure potential. The women whose CVs fell on the left tail of the curve faced the most immediate problems likely to derail their promotion and tenure, and I considered what supports, structures, and programs might be implemented to facilitate their cases in time for promotion and tenure. I also recognized that the unaware superstars might benefit from a reality check, since they might not be seeking and receiving the same awards, rewards, and recognition as other individuals achieving at their level.

I then contemplated the broader questions of why the CVs of the men fit a bell curve while the CVs of women fit a bimodal distribution and what, if anything, explained the extreme differences between these two groups of women faculty. In short, why did the men appear to be getting and responding fairly uniformly to the messages about expectations for promotion and tenure, while women seemed not to receive the message or at least responded in widely disparate fashion to the messages?

Although I realized that possible differences in background training upon hiring, start-up packages, and even outright discrimination might contribute to such differential responses, I tended to eliminate these, knowing the culture of our institution and the desire to consider an explanation that could be addressed at this stage of their career. Differences in mentoring received by men and women faculty came to mind as a possible explanation, since receiving and comprehending messages about expectations appeared to characterize the difference. Somehow, most men seemed to get it and many women appeared not to get it, either wildly exceeding or falling quite short of the norm.

Both male and female faculty at our institution in most colleges, and certainly in the college where I am dean, are assigned a faculty mentor. However, I had observed on many occasions, and encouraged new hires to take advantage of, the numerous opportunities for informal mentoring that occur through social interactions, research collaborations, and

service on key committees. I recognized that the many valuable tidbits about “what really counts around here” conveyed and absorbed during these informal occasions often proved more insightful and accurate than the information conveyed by formal mentors.

Aware of the national research documenting that gender differences are greatest at medical, Research I, and Research II institutions (Long 2001), I also knew of climate surveys indicating that women talked with colleagues about their research less frequently than their male colleagues did. I also knew the evidence indicating that although women on average serve on more committees than their male peers, the committees on which the women serve may not be the important or key committees. This information, coupled with the knowledge that like most Research I institutions (Long 2001), the percentage of tenure-track women at our institution remained at about 20 percent, made me wonder about the number and quality of social interactions that our women faculty had with their male colleagues. Piecing this information together, I suspected that our women faculty did not receive the same quality and even quantity of informal mentoring as their male peers and wondered whether this might be at least partially responsible for why men got the message about expectations for tenure and promotion and women might not.

Simultaneously with my considering the overall differences in CVs of men and women faculty, I worried about another phenomenon that I had witnessed at the level of the institution-wide promotion and tenure committee. Occasionally, I had been present at discussions of cases of promotion and tenure where I had questioned whether subtle instances of racial and/or gender bias had influenced the outcome of the case. All of these cases were borderline, required considerable discussion, and resulted in relatively close votes. I should emphasize that in no instance did I witness overt sexism or racism, nor did such subtle factors ever emerge in a clear-cut case or one in which an individual of another race or gender with a very similar record to a White male’s had received a different vote or decision.

At times, in a very difficult case in which an individual came up for tenure in the seventh year or later than the norm, having taken a leave for family reasons or to pursue a project in a developing country or historically Black college or university, I had wondered whether this had influenced the evaluation and votes by my colleagues on a subtle level. Did they accept such leaves or question them as indicators that the individual might not be committed and focused as a scientist, engineer, or scholar? Did they genuinely understand that stopping the tenure clock meant that year(s) should not be counted, or did they unconsciously increase their expectations and add another year(s) to the denominator when calculating the quantity of publications since the Ph.D. or post-doc? I wondered if the deans, college promotion and tenure representatives, and members of the

department promotion and tenure committees needed exposure to the research documenting how subtle biases, stereotypes, and messages from broader society can influence discussions and decisions in professional situations in unconscious ways.

ADVANCE

In 2001, during my second year as dean, I saw an opportunity to obtain some resources that might enable Georgia Tech to develop a comprehensive set of programs that would improve mentoring, as well as the system for promotion and tenure, thereby enabling the women. In fiscal year 2001, the National Science Foundation (NSF) launched the ADVANCE initiative, funded at the level of \$17 million initially. ADVANCE has two categories to include institutional, rather than individual, solutions to empower women to participate fully in science and technology. NSF encouraged institutional solutions, in addition to the individual solution permitted under the category of Fellows Awards, because of “increasing recognition that the lack of women’s full participation at the senior level of academe is often a systemic consequence of academic culture” (NSF 2001a, 2). Under ADVANCE, Institutional Transformation Awards, ranging up to \$750,000 per year for up to five years, promote the increased participation and advancement of women (NSF 2001a).

In October 2001, the first eight institutions receiving ADVANCE awards were announced (NSF 2001b): Georgia Tech, New Mexico State, the University of California–Irvine, the University of Colorado at Boulder, the University of Michigan, the University of Puerto Rico, the University of Washington, and the University of Wisconsin–Madison. Hunter College joined the first round of ADVANCE awardee institutions in early 2002.

To initiate the institutional transformation necessary to advance women to senior ranks and leadership positions, Georgia Tech’s proposal to ADVANCE included five major threads. These five major threads also exemplify the steps I thought would be useful for solving some of the issues I had observed.

1. Termed professorships to form a mentoring network

One tenured woman full professor in each of four colleges with disciplines funded by NSF became the designated ADVANCE Professor. The title and the funds of \$60,000 per year for five years associated with the ADVANCE Professorship conferred the prestige and funds equivalent to those accrued by other endowed chairs at the institution. This sum also meant that \$1.2 million of the \$3.7 million grant went directly to support the ADVANCE Professors in keeping with the NSF notion that the ADVANCE grants

should be substantial to recognize the importance of activities to build workforce infrastructure. Because Georgia Tech is a research university, the Principal Investigators (PIs) of the grant particularly recognized the necessity for ADVANCE Professors to sustain their research productivity while undertaking a mentoring role. ADVANCE Professors often used funds to pay for graduate students or post-docs to support their research.

Each ADVANCE Professor developed and nurtured mentoring networks for the women faculty in her college. The focus of the mentoring activities varied among the colleges, depending upon the numbers, ranks, and needs of the women. In the College of Engineering, a large college with about 42 women out of 400 tenure-track faculty, isolation constituted a primary issue in many departments. The lunches arranged by the ADVANCE Professor with women faculty from the college provided an opportunity for them to meet women in other departments and develop social and professional networks. A popular professional networking opportunity included evaluation of the curriculum vitae of junior faculty by senior colleagues to assess their readiness for promotion and tenure and/or gaps that must be addressed for successful promotion to the higher rank. The ADVANCE Professor often helped to explain and mediate problematic issues in some schools with the chair and dean.

In the smaller College of Computing, with eight of 60 women as tenure-track faculty, many of the women had young children, so many of the lunches and activities focused on explication of family-friendly policies and strategies to balance career and family. In the College of Science, lunches and activities centered on grant-writing workshops and other means to establish successful laboratory research. In Ivan Allen College, where 40 percent of the tenure-track faculty are women, the ADVANCE Professor chose luncheon themes on publication and scholarly productivity. Although all four ADVANCE Professors held luncheons and mentored individual women faculty, each focused the initial activities upon those issues she perceived as most problematic and/or critical for achieving tenure, promotion, and advancement to career success for the women in her particular college. By the fourth year of the grant, the professors developed more cross-college activities, expanding programs and initiatives particularly successful in one college to women at all colleges on campus.

2. Collection of MIT Report-like data indicators

To assess whether advancement of women really occurs during and after the institutional transformation undertaken through ADVANCE, data must be collected for comparison with baseline data upon grant initiation for several indicators. Georgia Tech proposed in its grant to collect data on eleven of the following twelve indicators that NSF eventually required all

ADVANCE institutions to collect by gender: faculty appointment type; rank; tenure; promotion; years in rank; time at institution; administrative positions; professorships and chairs; tenure and promotion committee members; salaries; space; and start-up packages.

3. Family-friendly policies and practices

Recent studies document that balancing career and family constitutes the major difficulty for tenure-track women faculty in general (Mason and Goulden 2004) and women science and engineering faculty in particular (Rosser 2004; Xie and Shauman 2003). Competition between the biological clock and the tenure clock becomes a significant obstacle for women faculty who delay childbearing until they receive a tenure-track position. For women faculty in science and engineering, significant time away from their research makes it less likely they can successfully achieve tenure in a research institution. The dual career situation becomes an additional complicating factor for women scientists and engineers—62 percent are married to men scientists and engineers (Sonnert and Holton 1995). Given the dearth of women scientists and engineers, the reverse situation does not hold since that would mean few men scientists and engineers would be married because there are not enough women scientists for them to marry. To facilitate the balancing of career and family, perceived overwhelmingly by women scientists and engineers (Rosser 2004), particularly those of younger ages, as the major issues, Georgia Tech instituted the following family-friendly policies and practices: stop the tenure clock, day care, active service/modified duties temporarily to allow reallocation of percentages of time assigned to teaching, research, and service to adapt to an emergency or change in life circumstances such as birth or adoption of a child, and lactation stations for nursing moms to express milk or breastfeed their babies. The specific details of these policies can be accessed under Family and Work Policies at the ADVANCE website (ADVANCE 2005).

4. Mini-retreats to facilitate access to decision makers and provide informal conversations and discussion on topics important to women faculty

Research has demonstrated that women faculty tend to have less access and opportunities than their male colleagues to speak with the decision makers and institutional leaders (Rosser 2004). Often this unintended discrimination and lack of access result from women's absence from informal and social gatherings. To ensure access of tenure-track women faculty to the senior leadership of chairs, deans, provost, vice presidents, and president, the PIs of the Georgia Tech ADVANCE grant organized two-day mini-retreats during each year of the grant. Focused on topics of interest

and concern to all faculty, such as case studies of promotion and tenure, training to remove subtle gender and racial bias in promotion and tenure decisions, and effective strategies in hiring dual career couples, these retreats have provided opportunities for the tenure-track women faculty to interact with the institutional leadership and express their opinions/views on matters of mutual interest.

5. Removal of subtle gender, racial, and other biases in promotion and tenure

In my role as dean, my close involvement with the promotion and tenure process provided insight into subtle ways in which unintended subtle biases might influence decisions on promotion and tenure. For example, I observed that in some cases when the tenure clock had stopped for a year for a valid reason such as childbirth, the clock appeared not to stop in the heads of colleagues, as they considered the individual for promotion and tenure. They seemed simply to expect an additional year's worth of papers, talks, and productivity to be added.

To address this issue, the PI who was the provost appointed a Promotion and Tenure ADVANCE Committee (PTAC) to assess existing promotion and tenure processes, explore potential forms of bias, providing recommendations to mitigate against them, and to elevate awareness of both candidates and committees of expectations and best practices in tenure and promotion. After one year of studying the research documenting possible biases due to gender, race/ethnicity, ability status, as well as interdisciplinarity, the committee developed nine case studies with accompanying sample CVs. Each illustrated one or more issues or areas where possible bias might impact the promotion and tenure decision. After discussion of these case studies at a mini-retreat, the refined versions served as the basis for an interactive web-based instrument, Awareness of Decision in Evaluation of Promotion and Tenure (ADEPT), designed by colleagues in the College of Computing. Individuals can use ADEPT to participate in a virtual promotion and tenure meeting, where depending upon their response, the meeting takes different directions and generates different outcomes in promotion and tenure. The web-based instrument, along with best practices from PTAC, and resources on bias can be accessed by clicking PTAC in the ADEPT website (ADEPT 2005).

As I write this article, we enter our fifth and final year of the \$3.7-million National Science Foundation (NSF) ADVANCE grant. Preliminary data and results suggest that the activities associated with the five threads of the ADVANCE grant may have helped to make distribution of the CVs and tenure and promotion results for the male and female faculty more similar. Although mentoring activities of ADVANCE and the ADEPT tool addressed this directly, the other three threads facilitated these objectives

indirectly. The long term impact and true test will come in future years, after the NSF funding ends.

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