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AdvanceVT continues to monitor implementation of faculty work-life policies and look for additional ways to support faculty career development. This issue of Transformations summarizes findings from two recent internal studies.

WORK-LIFE POLICIES

Virginia Tech has implemented a suite of work-life policies to assist faculty members with balancing the demands of an academic career with their personal life. In the summer of 2013, *AdvanceVT* surveyed and interviewed faculty members who had used the policies to assess the impact of the policies on their careers.

Methods

Faculty members who used the modified duties and tenure clock extension policies between 2006 and 2013 were invited to complete a brief survey. The response rate was 38% and the 64 respondents represented all 8 colleges at Virginia Tech.

Six faculty members who completed the survey were selected for interviews along with 4 department heads who had experience working with the policies and 3 members of promotion and tenure committees. Of the 13 faculty members interviewed, six were men and seven were women. The interviewees represented the colleges of Engineering, Business, Science, Agriculture and Life Sciences, and Liberal Arts and Human Sciences.

Survey

The online survey focused on faculty perceptions about:

- How supportive and accommodating the institution and department were of faculty members' personal obligations.
- Colleagues' support for using work-life policies.
- How much knowledge department heads have about work-life policies.
- Whether Virginia Tech has done enough to inform faculty about work-life policies.

Interviews

The interviews focused on faculty members' experiences using the policies and solicited suggestions for improving work-life balance at Virginia Tech.



TRANSFORMATIONS

WORK-LIFE POLICIES

Highlights of Findings

- Faculty members found value in the university's policies because they allow for greater work-life balance and change the culture in the institution.
- Faculty members feel supported by the availability of work-life policies and encouraged to enjoy non-work related events.
- Having the tenure clock-extension policy readily available to both female and male faculty members has helped decrease gender-based stereotypes.
- There is a lack of understanding about how the modified duties policy can be used, especially for reasons other than the birth or adoption of a child.
- People with non-traditional family situations (e.g., a disabled spouse) do not always feel supported by the work-life policies.



“Virginia Tech has done a very good job of highlighting that men can do extended duties as well as women you know, and other things are important in considering as well, trying to be as equitable as possible.”



Recommendations

- Provide workshops for new department heads about policies and include non-traditional examples of how they can be used.
- Present information about work-life policies at department meetings on a regular basis to increase knowledge about ways to use the policies.
- Provide a service that connects faculty members with community organizations/services that help address family needs (e.g., home care).
- Explore emergency childcare for faculty members. Having this type of service would allow for faculty members to have more flexibility at home and support their career progression.

SUPPORT FOR MID-CAREER FACULTY

Since 2009, Virginia Tech has held annual workshops for associate professors on preparing for promotion. In summer and fall 2013, *AdvanceVT* surveyed and interviewed faculty members who had registered for one of these workshops to learn more about their career progress and professional development needs.

Methods

Associate professors who had registered for a promotion to professor workshop between 2009 and 2012 were invited to complete a brief survey. A total of 111 participants responded, for a response rate of 55%.

Eleven faculty members who completed the survey were selected for interviews, along with 5 department heads. Faculty members represented the following six colleges: College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, College of Architecture and Urban Studies, College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences, College of Natural Resources and Environment, College of Engineering, and College of Science.

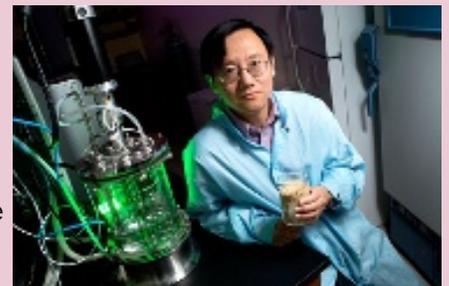
Highlights of Findings

- More women than men reported a negative perception of their level of productivity, availability of role models, mentorship, and personal determination.
- There is a strong relationship between faculty members’ productivity, role models, mentorship, and personal determination and their expectation of promotion regardless of gender or academic discipline.



Faculty members described institutional support, available resources, clarity of promotion policies, workload, work-life balance, and feedback from department heads, deans and colleagues as factors that have impacted their career advancement.

- *Institutional Support:* Faculty members said that attending the promotion to professor workshops motivated them to advance their career and re-evaluate their dossier. Policies and practices such as research leave and available funds to attend international conferences in order to build scholarly reputation were helpful in promoting their scholarship and professional growth.



"... [the workshops] helped me with the dossier. I still had to work really, really hard after that but I found them useful when I was going through them."

- *Resources:* Department heads described resources such as financial aid (dean’s fellows program and travel funds) that are available for mid-career faculty members to assist them in their work.

"The college has a dean’s fellows program that is really targeted at ...associate professors in the first couple of years. It provides recognition, and the college provides \$5,000 for the first three or four years to support their research."

SUPPORT FOR MID-CAREER FACULTY

- Clarity of promotion process:** Participants perceived a lack of clarity in the promotion process. They received mixed feedback from department heads, deans, and promotion and tenure committees. Despite department heads having conversations with faculty members concerning promotion, the criteria for promotion are perceived as ambiguous and not clear. Women especially reported being pushed into more service commitments than the men.

"The requirements are very vague... There are no requirements."

- Work-life balance:** Work-life balance issues affected women participants more negatively than men. For women who were mothers, their biggest challenge was juggling work and family responsibilities.

"...I didn't have a choice because the person who I was working with on a committee, ...planned to do this big summer program, left the university when I was eight months pregnant. This program is happening and I had to do it, but I didn't want to. It was literally dropped in my lap."

Recommendations

- Be sensitive to the service component of faculty work and the disproportionate demands of service often placed on women compared to men.
- Improve communication of tenure and promotion guidelines to faculty members. Faculty members should receive consistent information on the promotion criteria and process.
- Host mentoring and promotion to professor workshops on a regular basis.



AdvanceVT assists Virginia Tech in preparing, recruiting, and retaining high quality and diverse faculty. To accomplish this mission, programs are designed to facilitate success in scholarship, teaching, engagement, and administration for a wide range of audiences.

Elements of *AdvanceVT* include:

- Recruitment and Retention
- Networking and Mentoring
- Building a Supportive Community
- Preparing the Future Professoriate

AdvanceVT publishes university statistics annually and newsletters each semester. To view previous newsletters and university statistics or to obtain information on programs and events, please visit

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