

TRANSFORMATIONS

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FALL 2008 EVENTS

◆ *AdvanceVT* welcomes faculty and university administrators to participate in our Leadership Luncheon on **October 17, 2008**, noon to 1:30 pm in the Old Guard Room at The Inn. The luncheon speaker will be Charlotte Borst, professor of history and former provost of Rhodes College.

◆ On Wednesday, **October 22, 2008**, noon - 1:30 pm, in GLC F, *AdvanceVT* invites graduate students

and postdocs to participate in a Graduate Lunch Seminar with professors Martha Ann Bell (Psychology) and Elisa Sotelino (Civil and Environmental Engineering) to learn about academic publishing, what journal editors look for in papers, how to be a good reviewer, and why you might want to be a journal editor someday.

◆ Faculty and university administrators are encour-

aged to participate in our Leadership Luncheon on **November 18, 2008**, noon to 1:30 pm in the Old Guard Room at The Inn. The luncheon speaker will be Peggy Meszaros, William E. Lavery professor of human development and former Virginia Tech provost.

Please RSVP for all of these events at www.advance.vt.edu.

DEPARTMENTAL CLIMATE COMPENDIUM NOW AVAILABLE ON THE WEB!

Creating a Positive Departmental Climate at Virginia Tech: A Compendium of Successful Strategies was developed as part of the *AdvanceVT* Departmental Climate Initiative (DCI). The Department Climate Committee collected policies and practices from a variety of sources to provide department chairs and heads with opportunities to learn about departmental issues at Virginia Tech, to understand more fully the ways in which these issues manifest themselves within departments, and to share both successful and unsuccessful strategies illustrative of the different approaches departments have taken towards promoting effective, efficient, and pleasant work environments.

The purpose of the compendium is to help make departments places in which faculty, staff, and students live, work, and prosper with the utmost success. It draws from results of an initial 2006 DCI survey, follow up *AdvanceVT* workshop discussions of existing strategies, 2005 Faculty Work-Life survey data, a literature review, and materials from other institutions. The compendium focuses on five critical areas that emerged from these sources: creating a sense of intellectual community, providing for fair and full evaluations of staff and faculty, improving communications to insure clarity and mutual respect and understanding, building more effective departmental policies, and helping department members achieve an effective work-life balance.

The compendium has been broken down into individual web pages for easier viewing and searching and can be found at www.advance.vt.edu.

TRANSFORMATIONS

THE MEANING OF MENTORING: BLACK FEMALE DOCTORAL STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES

Researchers have found that Black students who have quality mentoring relationships have an increased likelihood of persisting in academia and accomplishing their professional goals (Brown, Davis, & McClendon, 1999; Luna & Cullen, 1998; Tinto, 1993). There continues to be a need to examine and improve opportunities for effective mentoring and resulting contributions to student success. This article presents the results of a current study and offers suggestions for those involved in mentoring roles.

Our team of investigators used a qualitative method of inquiry to examine the impact of mentoring on the academic success and career goals of six Black female doctoral students at Virginia Tech. Data were collected from a series of two face-to-face interviews with each participant. The students ranged in age from mid-twenties to mid-fifties and were in various stages of their graduate programs. They were enrolled in the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences, the College of Science and the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences.

A multi-stage iterative analysis resulted in the four themes listed here. (a) Mentees have high expectations of the mentoring relationship. Participants responded to the

question "What attributes are important in a mentor?" They listed, among others: open dialogue, nurturing, insightfulness, understanding the role of a mentor, and honesty. One woman acknowledged "[mentees] are very needy people." (b) Mentees recognize that self-motivation is the main factor for their success. A participant voiced "I think personally I was going to persist anyway", and another stated "I still continue to



press on and I can still continue what I need to do despite not having a mentor." (c) Mentees consider the mentoring relationship mutually beneficial. A participant described, "If you are going to be a mentor...you have to have the attitude that if your mentee succeeds then you succeed." (d) Despite the demographic similarities of the mentees, their experiences with mentoring varied greatly. Some participants thought of their mentors as very close, "like family," and others described a more

limited relationship or avoided the mentor as much as possible.

Implications for mentors include the need for open and explicit communication in the mentoring relationship. This type of communication helps both the mentor and mentee avoid making assumptions about the wants and needs of each other. In addition, mentees expressed a need for the mentor to initiate the mentoring relationship. They acknowledged having limited

experience with establishing relationships that result in both personal and professional growth, thus guidance from the mentor is necessary. Additionally, mentees value mentors of various races and disciplines. They recognize that not all mentors mentor in the same way, and find value in any opportunity for support and guidance. From these conversations, it is clear that positive mentoring is perceived as a critical factor in the need and desire for success of these Black women.

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2008 VIRGINIA TECH FACULTY WORK-LIFE SURVEY

Virginia Tech is committed to maintaining a work environment in which all faculty members can succeed. *AdvanceVT* has used the results of a 2005 faculty survey to guide many changes over the last several years, including new and revised policies and programs related to dual career hiring, stopping the tenure clock, modified duties, a new part-time tenure-track option, expanded child care options, and leadership development programs. These changes have already made Virginia Tech a more attractive place for talented new faculty recruits and helped promote the professional development and work-life balance of all faculty members.

It is time now to take stock of where the university stands in 2008 and to determine next steps. Input from faculty is very important in assessing how the changes are affecting academic culture at Virginia Tech and determining priorities for future efforts.

2008 Faculty Work-Life Survey Key Points

- In early 2005, a faculty work-life survey collected data on perceptions of university and department climate and culture, faculty recruitment, work-life balance, and leadership.
- Findings from the 2005 survey are available at http://www.advance.vt.edu/Measuring_Progress/Faculty_Survey_2005/Faculty_Survey.htm.
- All full-time teaching and research faculty members at all Virginia Tech locations will be asked to complete the 2008 Faculty Work-Life Survey.
- We will compare responses to the 2008 survey with those from 2005 to see where there have been changes; and use those findings to set priorities for continuing efforts to improve the work environment for faculty.
- We plan to present findings at the Advancing Diversity conference on January 12, 2009.
- The survey was developed by *AdvanceVT* with input from the Commission on Faculty Affairs and the Black and Hispanic Caucuses. The Virginia Tech Center for Survey Research is coordinating the survey and will keep all responses strictly confidential.
- Most questions provide participants with a Likert scale in order to identify responses that most closely resemble their experience.
- The survey inquires into faculty experiences in the following areas: 1. The university; 2. Individual departments; 3. Productivity; 4. Work-life; 5. Recruiting; 6. Job Satisfaction, and; 7. *AdvanceVT*.
- We will analyze the responses by gender, faculty rank, time at Virginia Tech, race/ethnicity, college, and department.
- We will never report the results in a way that could reveal an individual's identity. If there are less than 5 responses in any particular category, they will not be reported.

In order for the findings to be meaningful, we need a high response rate. *Please encourage your colleagues to complete the survey!*

Contact Peggy Layne at playne@vt.edu if you have questions regarding the survey or visit www.advance.vt.edu to see the results from the previous survey.

2008 NEW WOMEN DEPARTMENT HEADS

Virginia Tech welcomes three new women department heads this fall, bringing the total to fourteen.



Anju Seth, formerly professor of business administration at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, was appointed the R.B. Pamplin Professor of Management and the head of the Department of Management in the Pamplin College of Business.

Barbara G. Ryder, formerly professor of computer science at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, was appointed J. Byron Maupin Professor and head of the Department of Computer Science. She is the first woman to serve as a department head in the history of the nationally ranked College of Engineering.



The College of Agriculture and Life Sciences has named **Susan Hutson**, previously professor of biochemistry at the Wake Forest University School of Medicine, head of the Department of Human Nutrition, Foods and Exercise.

AdvanceVT welcomes and congratulates these pioneering women!

CONGRATS TO TONYA SMITH-JACKSON 2008 ADVANCING WOMEN AWARDEE



On September 16, 2008, *AdvanceVT* co-hosted the annual Welcome Reception for women faculty, administrators and graduate students at Virginia Tech. The event gives current members of the university an opportunity to meet new colleagues and network across colleges, departments, and institutes.

Presented by the Women's Center annually since 1995, the Advancing Women Award recognizes individuals who make a difference in support of women at Virginia Tech. The award may be given to students, faculty, and staff members whose work promotes the advancement of women and/or addresses the needs and concerns of women. Recipients are chosen by a committee comprised of past award recipients and other members of the campus community.

At this year's event, Tonya Smith-Jackson, associate professor of human factors engineering and ergonomics in the department of Industrial and Systems Engineering at Virginia Tech and *AdvanceVT* Co-PI, was recognized for encouraging women, especially those from underrepresented groups, to achieve their goals as they prepare for careers in engineering and academe.

AdvanceVT is a comprehensive program to promote and enhance the careers of women in academic science and engineering at Virginia Tech through institutional transformation. Elements of *AdvanceVT* include:

Pipeline: Advancing Women into Faculty Careers

Recruitment: Increasing the Representation of Women

Leadership: Empowering Women as Leaders and Scholars

Institutional Change: Updating Policies and Changing Culture

Go to www.advance.vt.edu to learn more about the initiative.