

AdvanceVT Leadership Development Programs
Final Assessment
November 2010

Each academic year from 2004-05 through 2007-08, *AdvanceVT* offered faculty women opportunities to develop leadership skills and to enhance their visibility in the university. Among respondents to *AdvanceVT*'s 2005 Faculty Work-Life Survey, 47% of the tenured and tenure-track women indicated that they aspired to a leadership position beyond their current position compared with only 31% of the male respondents, and 77% of the women versus only 55% of men indicated an interest in opportunities to develop their leadership skills. However, only 29% of the women faculty and 48% of the men agreed that it is possible to hold a leadership position at Virginia Tech while balancing work and personal responsibilities, and even fewer (18% of women and 24% of men) believed that it is possible to maintain an active research program while in a leadership role. *AdvanceVT*'s leadership programs were designed to address women faculty members' interest in leadership development as well as concerns about balancing demands of research and family with a leadership role.

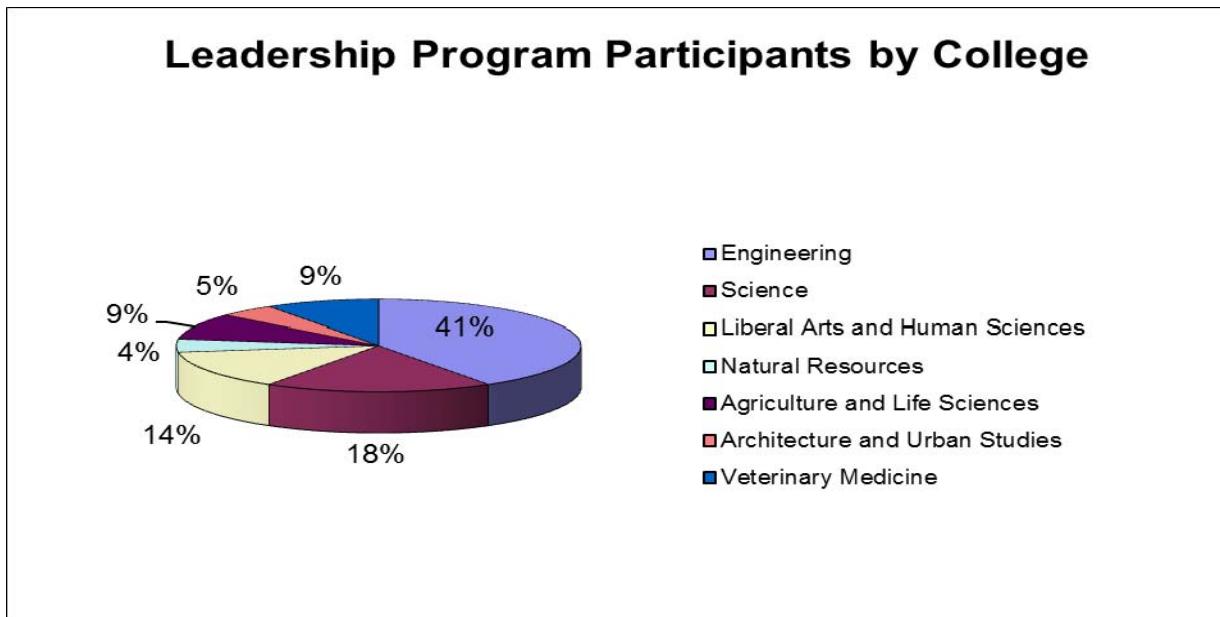
AdvanceVT originally planned to fund two half-time placements each year for senior women faculty in the colleges of science and engineering to develop leadership skills. Examples of anticipated activities included shadowing a research center director, having a special administrative assignment in a college or university office, shadowing an administrator at another university for a limited time, enrolling in skill-building workshops, having a special assignment for planning a research direction for a college or department, or serving as an assistant department head. These leadership fellowships would be competitively selected by a committee based on proposals submitted by a faculty member and endorsed by the department head and the host of the proposed fellow. Because few proposals for leadership fellowships were received early in the program, *AdvanceVT* decided to also develop and offer an intensive leadership coaching program for a small number of tenured women faculty. The program selected three cohorts of women from across the university who demonstrated an interest in and potential to assume leadership roles for individualized coaching and skill development. Both fellowships and the leadership development program were offered during years three through five of the grant.

Assessment Activities

Leadership development program participants were interviewed after completion of the program. The interview protocol can be found at the end of this report (Appendix A). Participants answered questions pertaining to their perceptions of the program and its impact on their individual careers and skill development, as well as how the program could be improved. Questions included "*What motivated you to apply to and participate in the AdvanceVT Leadership Development Program?*" and "*What types of skills did you hope to gain by participating in the program?*" Interviews took place either in person or over the phone and were recorded and transcribed. Leadership fellows were asked to submit a brief report at the end of their fellowship discussing their experience and anticipated impact on their career progression and aspirations.

Program Participants

Twenty-two (22) individuals participated in one or both of these programs over the course of the grant. (Two individuals participated in both the Leadership Development Program and the Leadership Fellowship.) Participants were all tenured female faculty members representing seven of the university's eight colleges.



Leadership Development Program Feedback

Leadership Development Program

The *AdvanceVT* Leadership Development Program selected three cohorts of five to eight women each from across the university who demonstrated an interest in and potential to assume leadership roles for individualized coaching and skill development. Each woman completed a 360-degree assessment, obtaining input on her leadership skills from colleagues. Working with a coach, each participant then created a development plan to capitalize on strengths and address developmental needs. Follow up meetings over the course of the year monitored progress and provided additional coaching. *AdvanceVT* also sponsored a series of workshops to build specific leadership skills, including resolving conflict, negotiation, and communicating with power and influence. Workshops utilized both on campus experts and outside consultants. Leadership Development Participants were invited to participate in the university's annual orientation for new department heads and academic leaders, organized by the Office of the Provost.

In follow up interviews, participants indicated that they were motivated to participate in order to learn about the skills and attributes necessary to undertaking a leadership position. In addition, several mentioned that the program would give them the opportunity to "test themselves", to discover what their strengths were, and reflect on their challenges.

"I thought it would be a wonderful opportunity to further develop my leadership skills."

Participants were asked how the program influenced their goals for a leadership position. Each participant mentioned that the program helped them to understand what the parameters and expectations for a position are, but they were still unsure what their goals were for a leadership position. One participant stated:

“I think that [a leadership position] probably seem[s] more tractable. It’s made it seem more like something I would want to do.”

On a 1-10 scale (1=fell short of expectations, 10=exceeded expectations), the majority of participants indicated that the program met or exceeded their expectations, while indicating that there was always room for improvement. Suggested improvements focused on the desire for more informal networking activities and fewer formal gatherings with speakers. Some participants commented on the highly structured nature of the workshops.

“I would have benefited from having more frequent interactions with my peer cohort or my peer and the next group. I think we had too many formal events and settings that someone kind of presided over and were a little bit stilted and we didn’t get enough of that sitting around talking. Maybe the group could do together some kind of project or focus that brought them together in a more frequent setting. I would have liked to see more interaction with the women going through the leadership program.”

All of the participants interviewed remarked on the value of the 360° assessment to understanding their current skill sets and what they needed to improve upon. They believed that this not only would facilitate future leadership positions but would also be useful in their current positions. The negotiation seminar was also a favorite among participants.

“Really that one-on-one work, doing the 360 degree analysis of sitting down and really paying attention to the feedback that I got...was so important to helping me to interpret things and encouraged me to go back and talk to some of the people who evaluated me about what might have been meant about these different answers and what examples that might illustrate why I got some of these ratings and then she provided me some resources and talked it through and homework activities.”

The interviews also sought tangible impacts on participants’ careers as a result of the program. The following outcomes were highlighted by participants:

“The program has prepared me to pursue positions and I have started to look. I feel like I am coming from a place of strength in pursuing a leadership position.”

“I recently moved into administration. The [LDP] helped me feel comfortable about making a decision to move to administration.”

“It kind of tagged me as someone in my department who had leadership interest and skills and I think that in part because of the work with AdvanceVT I was an Assistant Department Head last year and now I’m serving as interim department head this year.”

“[It] opened my eyes to a number of things I wasn’t doing and now maybe take more personal risk, I handle criticism better and really separated my sense of self-worth from my performance on the job.”

Broadly, program participants observed changes in their understanding of what leadership positions entail and considered themselves more prepared than before to undertake such responsibility. However, many noted that the time commitment involved in leadership roles, in addition to the normal expectations of a faculty member, prevented many of them from moving further into administration and executive positions at the university at that time.

Leadership Fellows

Leadership Fellowships were awarded to six women faculty members over the course of the grant, two in 2004-05, three in 2006-07, and one in 2007-08. Fellowship recipients developed a research center, designed a graduate program, organized a research symposium, and participated in state government relations activities. Fellows also worked with leaders in their departments to develop programs and policies that improved departmental climate and to review curriculum.

Leadership Fellows submitted brief reports describing their fellowship experience and its impact on their career plans. All fellows felt that the experience was valuable and enhanced their ability to pursue leadership roles should they choose to do so.

“The fellowship experience thus far has been more insightful and rewarding than I expected. The personal interactions and connections which I have been able to make will enhance my ability to direct a center should I decide to do so.”

“I believe there will be other opportunities for leadership in the future, however, it is clear that I have to continue to work on balancing service with research and teaching; it is just much too easy to commit to doing more than you are truly capable of, especially when a family with two small children is also part of the mix.”

“Overall, I found the experience very beneficial. It increased my understanding of the role this office plays in the day to day functioning of our college and stimulated my desire to pursue an administrative position in this office.”

“In summary, this fellowship has resulted in multiple tangible benefits for me in advancing my career. I have expanded my internal and external network ... I have also gained confidence in dealing with ... issues that may come up regarding my goals... This fellowship has also increased the likelihood of me obtaining an administrative position and being successful in it.”

Findings & Discussion

All participants indicated that they benefited from the programs and that the experience overall was very positive. Participants in the Leadership Development Program cited the personal, one-on-one time with the project leader as most valuable. Experiences with the project leader allowed

participants to reflect on their personal abilities and skills and highlighted areas of leadership they could improve in.

While all participants indicated that their leadership skills and confidence to pursue leadership opportunities increased, few of the participants expressed a desire to pursue leadership positions in the immediate future. This decision was mostly due to advice about promotion within faculty ranks (most leadership development program participants were associate professors at the time of the program). Participants felt that it would be more beneficial to be promoted to professor before seeking an administrative leadership position. There also appeared to be a little disillusionment about administrative roles being more involved than originally imagined. All participants indicated the possibility of pursuing leadership roles in the future. It is important to note that leadership in other forms was pursued by some participants. While not formal administrative positions, taking on leadership within a department by developing a new policy or serving as a principal investigator for a grant was attributed to the skills developed by participating in the program.

Of the 22 women who participated in the programs, three have since left Virginia Tech, one to become a dean at another institution. In the two years since completion of the two programs, among those participants still at Virginia Tech, five have been promoted to professor, two are currently department heads, two are serving as interim department heads, two are associate department heads, and one is serving as a program officer at the National Science Foundation.

Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. What motivated you to participate in the *AdvanceVT* Leadership Program?
2. What types of skills did you hope to acquire by participating in the program?
3. On a scale of 0-10, with 10 meaning “exceeded your expectations” and 0 meaning “it fell short of your expectations,” to what extent would you say the program has met your expectations?
 - a. What does the number you suggested reflect?
4. In what ways has the program influenced your goals for leadership positions in the future?
5. What part of the leadership program have you found to be most personally valuable?
6. What part of the leadership program has been least valuable or useful to you personally?
7. Can you identify any tangible outcomes to your own career that you attribute in whole or part to your participation in the leadership program?
8. If you had to do it all over again would you participate in the program?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Not Sure
9. What advice would you offer other VT women who are considering participating in the program?
10. Do you have any suggestions about ways that program can be improved?
11. Have you actively applied for a leadership position within or outside of Virginia Tech during the past year?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Not Sure
12. Are you applying to a leadership position in the near future?
13. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences in the leadership program?