

# **N** University of Nebraska–Lincoln

## UNL Announce

### Electrical Engineering earns inaugural Advance award

Four years ago, Electrical Engineering had 19 tenure-line faculty and seven other teaching faculty. All were men. A concerted effort to recruit women faculty to the department has paid off; now three of 23 tenure-line faculty are women and a fourth woman teaches in a part-time capacity.

The department's efforts earned it the inaugural ADVANCE-Ne Initiative Award, conferred by the chancellor, in recognition of its efforts to recruit and retain women in STEM (science, technology, engineering or math) disciplines at UNL. The award carries a \$1,000 prize and will be officially recognized at a public reception 3:30 p.m. Jan. 27 in the Van Brunt Visitors Center.



Department Chair Jerry Hudgins said increasing the number of women faculty and students has been a personal priority since he came to UNL seven years ago. About 6 percent of the department's undergraduates are women although the national average hovers near 10 percent, he said. Women faculty could provide role models and mentoring for female students, he said, plus help improve the faculty.

"It just goes hand in hand," Hudgins said.

The low numbers of women in electrical engineering is an endemic problem, Hudgins said. The small numbers of undergraduate women mean the pool of doctorates is quite small, and they are highly sought after by universities and industry. Hudgins believes UNL's targeted recruitment efforts, aided by ADVANCE, coupled with new universitywide family-friendly policies, were keys to successfully hiring women engineers.

Hudgins said the most important factor was identifying prospective women candidates and encouraging them to apply. The discipline has the largest professional technical society in the world, the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, with about 390,000 members in academia and industry. His faculty relied on networking through the society, at professional meetings and through contacts at other institutions and industry.

"I really think building personal relationships is best," Hudgins said. "You get to know people and you can let them know what's going on here. And then when an opportunity arises, you can encourage applicants so that your pool is good. You have to be kind of vigilant and you cannot just wait for people to find you. You have to go to them."

Hudgins said UNL's family-friendly policies are a selling point that helps recruit new faculty and also enriches opportunities for existing faculty. ADVANCE's dual-career support was important in at least one of the department hires.

"We have lots of young faculty, real world-class faculty, who have kids, so family policies help them as well. Even older faculty who may have issues dealing with elderly parents appreciate family policies," Hudgins said. "It's a big deal for our faculty and it just improves the overall work atmosphere."

Hudgins said UNL is developing a reputation as a good place for faculty.

"Once you get a reputation for being accepting, progressive and open, then that word spreads and people are interested," he said.

Hudgins speculated that he would use the \$1,000 prize to support recruitment efforts. His goal is to have at least five women in tenure-line positions in the next few years.

The department was cited for its formal mentoring program for new faculty, for its commitment to support pre-tenure faculty to travel to meetings and grant-seeking activities and for its formal leadership development through participation and leadership of important departmental committees.

Four other departments were nominated for the award. They are Biochemistry, School of Biological Sciences, Mathematics and Mechanical Engineering.

- Kim Hachiya, University Communications

More details at: <http://go.unl.edu/it4>

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