

ADVANCE- University of Nebraska

REPORT FROM THE EXTERNAL EVALUATOR

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As the External Evaluator for ADVANCE-Nebraska, my responsibility is to provide periodic assessments of the progress of the project as well as suggestions to enhance its impact and effectiveness. This report focuses on the first year and a half of the project. Following a brief overview of the accomplishments of ADVANCE-Nebraska to date, the report is organized around a discussion of Strengths, Issues for Consideration, and Recommendations.

This report is based on a two-day visit I made to the University of Nebraska in October, 2009, as well as a telephone conference with the Evaluation Team in January, 2010. The report also is informed by my review of the *2009 Annual Report for ADVANCE-Nebraska* and the *November, 2009 Activities, Data, and Evaluation Plan Report*.

During my fall, 2009 campus visit, I met individually with key institutional and project leaders, as well as with the Evaluation Team, the Internal Advisory Board, and the External Advisory Board. I also met with the Recruit and Promote-Nebraska Committees, and attended a half-day ADVANCE workshop for Deans and Department Chairs on “Best Practices for Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Workplace.” The visit also included attending a reception for “friends” of ADVANCE-Nebraska.

I met with the following people during the course of the visit: Dr. Mary Anne Holmes (ADVANCE Director and Co-PI); Dr. Barbara Couture (then PI and Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs); Dr. Julia McQuillan (Co-PI, Director of the Bureau of Sociological Research, and Associate Professor of Sociology); Dr. Nancy Busch (Senior Personnel, Associate Dean and Professor of University Libraries); Dr. Mindy Anderson-Knott (Senior Personnel, and Assistant Director of Survey, Statistics, and Psychometrics Core Facility); Dr. Evelyn Jacobson (Senior Personnel, and Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs/Faculty Scholarship); Dr. David Manderschied (Co-PI, and Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences); Dr. Namas Chandra (Co-PI, and College of Engineering Associate Dean for Research); Ms. Jill Hochstein (Senior Personnel, Project Manager for ADVANCE-Nebraska); Dr. Christina Falci (Senior Personnel, and Assistant Professor of Sociology).

Overview of ADVANCE-Nebraska Accomplishments to Date

With its start in September, 2008, ADVANCE-UNL is well underway. I have been impressed with the enthusiasm and commitment of the leadership team and with what they have accomplished within the first year and several months. The *2009 Annual*

Report and the *November 2009 Internal Evaluation Team Report* include thorough discussions of the program components and activities (as well as detailed data from internal evaluation efforts to date). Here I highlight some of the components that stand out: the launching of the Promote-Nebraska and Recruit-Nebraska faculty committees; workshops to present highlights of the on-going work of these committees to deans and department chairs; focus groups with search committee chairs; the launching of a dual career opportunity procedure; the launching of a Paths to Success Luncheon Series and several professional development workshops for faculty; the establishment of an ADVANCE-Nebraska website and a website for work-life balance issues; the establishment of a listserv and ADVANCE-Nebraska e-news that is distributed bi-weekly; connections with relevant units throughout campus; a research agenda on network structures in academic departments; and an extensive internal evaluation program.

Strengths

In my view, the ADVANCE-Nebraska program is extensive and innovative, designed to meet the needs and institutional culture of the University of Nebraska. In this section, I discuss aspects of ADVANCE-Nebraska that are particular strengths and deserve commendation.

1) Progress and Successes of the Recruit and Promotion Committees

The Recruit and Promotion Committees have been working very hard to address the goals of ADVANCE at Nebraska. The ADVANCE directors did a good job of identifying and appointing committee members who are very committed to the work they have been charged to undertake. I believe the provision of providing a stipend for committee members is wise, given the many competing demands on faculty members' time. Also impressive is the recognition by the committees that different departments have different circumstances, and therefore may need different messages and support.

2) Workshop for Chairs and Deans on "Best Practices for Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Workforce"

I had the opportunity to observe the excellent October workshop for chairs to prepare them to widen the pools of possible candidates for faculty positions. The well-planned workshop included a report from focus groups with new faculty about the role that department chairs play in the recruiting process. The workshop also included a review of the work-life policies that are available for all full-time faculty (including research faculty), and advice to chairs to encourage their faculty members to use the available policies. Presenters from the university and the local business community highlighted excellent selling points about Lincoln that search committees and chairs can use to help potential faculty members appreciate the living environment. A key point was that the university cares about the careers of the faculty and will help them grow and prepare for leadership positions, even if they eventually should make a move elsewhere.

The entire workshop was very organized, thorough, and filled with information. The time commitment invested by the chairs attending was respected and used wisely. My only suggestion is that, in the future, a little more time be made available for questions. This event was excellent in every way, and provided both visibility and credibility to the ADVANCE program. I believe those who attended must have felt they had learned useful information. I would expect that participants would be interested to attend other workshops and to indicate to colleagues the usefulness of ADVANCE events.

3) Policies at UNL

One topic of the Chairs' Workshop focused on a review of work-life policies at the university. This review highlighted a range of policies, including automatic interruption of the tenure clock with the arrival of a new baby and other situations, and no limits to the number of time that the tenure clock can be interrupted. Although not a policy, arrangements can be negotiated as needed for periods of part-time employment. Of note also is the wide eligibility standard for these policies and arrangements. UNL has attractive and appropriate work-life policies and is now coupling them with thoughtful attention to ensuring that faculty members know the policies relevant to their needs and hear a clear message that the university encourages use of the policies.

4) Support for Dual Career Situations

ADVANCE-Nebraska has been aggressive in supporting dual career situations that will help attract women to the institution. ADVANCE has succeeded in facilitating three such dual career appointments this past year.

5) Institutional Support for ADVANCE

The senior administration, particularly the PI and Senior Vice Chancellor at the time, Dr. Barbara Couture, has shown strong support for ADVANCE-Nebraska. (Dr. Couture has recently departed to assume a senior role at another university.) She personally participated in PI and Internal Advisory Board meetings and other events, clearly was very familiar with and supportive of the project, and viewed the goals of ADVANCE as closely linked with the strong institutional priority to diversify the institution. I hope that the new senior leader replacing Dr. Couture will continue to convey strong institutional commitment to ADVANCE and a personal willingness to be involved with the program. The visible involvement of the senior academic officer sends a strong message about the importance of the ADVANCE Program within the university's priorities and commitments.

6) ADVANCE-Nebraska's Organizational Structure

The PIs of the ADVANCE-Nebraska Program meet regularly and, individually and as a group, they are very enthusiastic about the project and its goals, and very collegial in their work for the project. Given the different backgrounds they each have, the program is enhanced by their collective knowledge and expertise. Their commitment and

involvement mean that the program has strong, active leadership. As Director and Co-PI, Dr. Holmes brings extensive knowledge and involvement with many colleagues across the university, her own experiences with the challenges of building a career as a woman scientist, and deep commitment to the goals of ADVANCE.

The Internal Advisory Board is very engaged and committed to the project. The Director and PIs try to use the time of the Internal Advisory Board as productively as possible. I have offered some suggestions pertaining to this Board in the section on Recommendations.

The Internal Evaluation Team is very ably led by Dr. Mindy Anderson-Knott and Dr. Nancy Busch. I have had several meetings in person and over the phone during the past year with the Evaluation Team to review and offer suggestions on their evaluation plan. They have identified project goals, activities to meet those goals, and expected outcomes pertaining to each goal, and have developed appropriate evaluation strategies. The team is careful and thorough in its data collection. In the Recommendations section of this report, I offer a few suggestions regarding evaluation.

The ADVANCE Program Manager, Ms. Jill Hochstein, is another key asset to the program. She handles the financials, the website, and event planning. With her prior work experience in the university's research unit, she brings great knowledge of the university and knows "how to get things done." Her involvement as Program Manager is very important to the success of ADVANCE-Nebraska to date and that anticipated in the future.

Issues to Consider

The ADVANCE-Nebraska Program has had a very strong start and has established a solid base on which to build. Here I list some issues that, based on my conversations, I believe should be considered as ADVANCE-Nebraska moves forward. I think consideration of these issues will contribute to the success and impact of the program.

1) Relationship of ADVANCE to the UNL Diversity Initiative

In addition to the ADVANCE Program, UNL has committed itself to an institution-wide diversity initiative. This initiative supports the institution's strong commitment to diversity, but it does not focus specifically on women in STEM fields. Some confusion seemed to be emerging in the fall in regard to the two programs. The ADVANCE office was called on to help with the coordination of a workshop associated with the Diversity Initiative, which raised some questions for the ADVANCE team. Such questions included: What is the relationship between these two institutional endeavors? To what extent should and can the ADVANCE team become involved with facilitating events whose scope goes beyond the specific focus of the NSF ADVANCE goals pertaining to women in STEM fields? Will chairs and deans in STEM fields be more attracted to programs designed specifically for STEM fields rather than to programs designed for leaders of all departments across the university? To what extent should the ADVANCE

evaluation team work on evaluation of programs specifically connected to the Diversity Initiative? My conversations with institutional leaders suggested that the university will be best served if ways are developed to ensure that the two initiatives are mutually beneficial. This probably means finding approaches through which the two initiatives connect around some efforts, where there are possible synergies, while also ensuring that the specific focus of ADVANCE on women in STEM fields does not become diluted. Close communication between the Office of the Senior Vice Chancellor and the Director of Advance will be very important.

2) Importance of Communication

The ADVANCE-Nebraska leaders are already working hard to ensure good communication among the committees and individuals associated with ADVANCE and between ADVANCE and other units and initiatives in the university. Continuing commitment to clear and regular communication is essential as the project continues. Specifically, as suggested in the previous point, the ADVANCE Director should arrange for regular meetings with a senior administrator representing the Vice Chancellor's office so the relationship between the Diversity Initiative and ADVANCE can be addressed in an ongoing way. Additionally, I heard some ADVANCE leaders mention that the two key committees—the Recruit Committee and the Promote Committee—may not always know in detail about each other's work. Finding ways for the two committees to stay informed in some detail about the work each is doing may help them as they proceed with their plans.

3) Faculty Involvement

While the ADVANCE Program is attracting department chairs to its workshops and has a dynamic group of faculty members involved in its two committees, an important next step is to ensure that the ADVANCE Program and its goals and activities are known widely throughout the institution. In any change process, early adapters get on board quickly and with enthusiasm. The greater challenge is usually how to attract the attention and the interest of well-meaning, busy faculty members who would benefit from involvement and would probably be quite interested, once they become involved. In some of the conversations that I had while on campus, I heard that faculty members in various departments do not discuss upcoming ADVANCE workshops (perhaps because they have not noticed announcements for them). I urge the ADVANCE leaders and committees to think about ways to continue to spread the work about ADVANCE among the faculty members on campus, and especially among those in STEM fields. The well-designed ADVANCE electronic newsletter is an excellent tool on which to build, but additional strategies may be needed to energize “regular faculty” to take note and participate in opportunities provided by ADVANCE.

4) Rising Expectations

An important early success of ADVANCE-Nebraska has been its role in helping find employment for partners in three dual career situations. These accomplishments will help

spread the word about ADVANCE and its goals and initiatives. At the same time, this track record has apparently raised expectations within some departments. Specifically, the Department of Engineering apparently has a number of faculty members with partners who may wish to tap into the efforts of the ADVANCE program to help with finding professional appointments. These expectations may tax the ability of the program to respond; at minimum, the rising expectations that accompany success may need to be considered by the Internal Advisory Board.

Recommendations

In the conversations and meetings during my visit to UNL, several suggestions emerged from those with whom I met. Additionally, some suggestions came to my mind that I thought might help the Advance team build on its successes (sometimes related to my knowledge of some other Advance programs and ideas they have found to be useful). These suggestions are presented here:

1) Discuss and disseminate the rationale for the ADVANCE program

- The PIs and Internal Advisory Board held a lively meeting while I was visiting in which they discussed the overall strategies and progress of the ADVANCE Program. Emerging from this conversation, participants suggested that more discussion on campus should be devoted to why recruiting, retaining, and promoting more women is an important goal. In discussing this issue, the PI/Internal Advisory Board group noted that the health of the nation requires talented men and women in STEM fields. Additionally, if Nebraska is to grow its economy and compete for a talented workforce, it must be a place that supports all potential employees. Another reason to attract women scholars is to provide role models for female students, whom the university wishes to attract. And to be a university that is competitive in attracting highly talented faculty, UNL must offer a workplace that welcomes women as well as men. The PI group expressed some concern that these reasons motivating the initiative are not being explicitly considered and disseminated by the two committees or by the overall project. Thus, the PIs, Internal Advisory Board, and the Recruit and Promote Committees may want to give explicit attention to framing “the right questions” and helping members of the university community understand more fully why ADVANCE-Nebraska is so important to the quality and excellence of the university, as well as important to well-being of the state.

2) Regularly review the work of the Recruit and Promote Committees

- As discussed, both these committees are working hard and making good progress. However, I heard mention of some overlap across the work of these two committees. While having two committees makes sense at this point (as each committee is gathering data and developing materials and workshops about its specific area of focus), in the long-term, once workshops and other

strategies have been developed and institutionalized, the university may need only one committee to address diversity in regard to both recruitment and promotion (this suggestion was raised by individuals who work on ADVANCE). I recommend that, annually, the PIs and the Internal Advisory Board review the charges to each committee, and the actual work they are doing, to determine if any adjustments are needed in regard to their work or membership composition, and whether it would be advantageous at some point for the two committees might function at some point as one.

3) Develop strategies to “get out the word” about ADVANCE

- A challenge for a major program such as ADVANCE that is addressing a complex problem is to find ways to talk about it to a broad audience. As one part of a strategy to make ADVANCE more broadly known across campus, I suggest that a short statement of the mission be prepared. Often such a short statement is called an “elevator talk”—a few sentences that can be said within the time it takes to ride an elevator that succeeds in conveying what the program is about and why it should be of interest to the listener.
- Another strategy would be to “map” by department the people who have been involved in ADVANCE programs. Such a map (updated over time) could be used to link faculty members who are interested in ADVANCE initiatives with others with similar interests who may be in different departments. The map could also identify faculty who may be called on to disseminate information about ADVANCE-Nebraska and its programs to others in their departments or colleges.

4) Consider the various ways of using Advance to develop leadership

- Develop a pipeline of faculty leaders: In addition to focusing on chairs and deans, the Advance Program should be attentive to cultivating a pipeline of faculty leaders who are developing leadership skills that will be useful when opportunities come for them to step into leadership roles. One way to do this is to use the “map” of allies of ADVANCE (mentioned above) to target faculty members to call on when leadership opportunities arise within ADVANCE (such as to facilitate a workshop). Of course, there should always be care in not overloading women faculty members with tasks that divert them from succeeding in their disciplinary roles, but drawing on faculty members for modest leadership roles can both “spread the word” about ADVANCE and help women faculty cultivate leadership skills. As faculty members in STEM fields succeed in achieving tenure, the ADVANCE Program could help them to see their roles in the broader institutional context and could highlight ways in which they could take on modest leadership opportunities.
- Consider on-going department chair professional development: Building on the successes with the Department Chair workshops, ADVANCE might consider

offering regular professional development opportunities for department chairs. Other universities have found that chairs are critical to establishing supportive environments for faculty members. Thus, on-going department chair workshops concerning key tasks chairs must handle are increasingly being offered at many universities.

- Ensure professional development for ADVANCE leaders: In addition to supporting the leadership development of chairs and of faculty members interested in the goals of the ADVANCE Program, I recommend that the members of the PI team (particularly those new to institutional-level administrative roles) develop individual plans for their own leadership development. For example, this might include regular meetings with more senior administrators to seek guidance and feedback, as well as plans for a personal reading program or for attending national workshops on strategies for women institutional leaders.

5) Clarify roles within ADVANCE

One issue that arose during my visit and in the subsequent phone meeting with the Evaluation Team is the role of the various groups within ADVANCE in terms of evaluation. With some members of the PI group and the Evaluation Team, I have discussed the following roles and responsibilities for each party:

- Internal Evaluation Team: The Evaluation Team is doing an impressive job of outlining the key goals and components of the ADVANCE-Nebraska project, identifying appropriate assessment approaches relevant to project goals and specific activities, and gathering and analyzing data. I would suggest that the responsibilities of the Internal Evaluation Team are to collect data regarding agreed-upon goals and program components, and to develop reports from those data that summarize the results. After analyzing data, the Evaluation Team needs to ask: “What does this all add up to? What, overall, do the data tell us?” Such summary reports should be provided to the PI/Co-PIs and to the Internal Advisory Board. The Internal Evaluation Team also will write a final five-year report based on their studies and findings over the years of the project,
- Director/Co-PIs: Drs. Holmes and McQuillan work very closely together and with the Evaluation Team. Thus, they are likely to review the detailed data analyses conducted by the Evaluation Team. They will also want to see summary reports of what the data “add up to.”
- Internal Advisory Board: Typically an Advisory Board wants to use its time judiciously, so that members are not over-taxed. Thus, in my experience, an Advisory Board would typically review summary reports about evaluation and only look at detailed data if they wished to explore a particular question or point. Their role is typically to consider the overall picture in terms of the direction of the project and to provide advice to the PI/Co-PIs about various decisions. Thus,

their interest in evaluation data would be in relation to how such data help them with their responsibility to give guidance about the direction and decisions facing the project.

- External Evaluator: I suggest, based on my experience with other ADVANCE grants, that my role as External Evaluator include the following: a) serve as a consultant who reviews the evaluation plans, findings, and summary reports prepared by the Internal Evaluation Team; serve as a “critical friend” (consultant/advisor) to the PI/Director/Co-PIs and the Evaluation Team to offer advice concerning resources and strategies; conduct qualitative interviews on campus mid-way through the project and at the end to gather data about overall impact that may be difficult for insiders to gather; write a five-year evaluation report (based on annual visits and interviews, as well as review of the findings from the Internal Evaluation Team) that discusses impact and lessons learned.
- External Advisory Board: The External Advisory Board can also serve in the role of “critical friends.” In such a role, they would review the progress of ADVANCE-Nebraska and read summary evaluation reports. They can be particularly helpful in framing important questions that the PI/Co-PIs should be considering at various stages in the grant. They can also draw on their expertise to offer suggestions of resources or strategies that they are aware have been successful in other projects. At some institutions, both with ADVANCE and other projects, project leaders have sometimes called on External Advisory Board members to serve as advocates with senior institutional leaders on behalf of the goals of the project. External validation can be helpful in supporting project goals.

6) **Consider the working process of the Internal and External Advisory Boards**

- Conversations during my on-campus visit and with the Evaluation Team over the phone raised questions about effective ways to organize and structure Advisory Committee meetings. I shared some suggestions based on my experiences co-chairing an Internal Advisory Board for the Office of Faculty and Organizational Development on my campus. I suggested that two meetings a semester would be useful (perhaps one as a four-hour retreat and the other scheduled as a two-hour meeting). The Director, with advice from the Co-PIs and the Evaluation Team, can identify several major topics/questions for consideration. Three topics work well for a two-hour period. We have found that the meeting goes well if the Director frames the issue for about 5 minutes, ending with a specific question about the issue on which she would like advice. Then the Chair of the Advisory Board has the job of facilitating the conversation, perhaps asking the Board to divide into small groups for about 15 minutes to discuss and then to report back, followed by a group discussion. At the end of each meeting (in which we have discussed about three issues), the Chair asks for suggestions for important issues that the Advisory Board would like to see on the agenda for future meetings.

- It is often challenging to keep in mind the “big” questions and goals while being very involved with extensive data collection and analysis. Thus, I recommend that at least once each year, the Director/PI group, the senior institutional leaders involved with ADVANCE, the Evaluation Team, and the Internal Advisory Board come together to revisit the major goals and benchmarks for ADVANCE-Nebraska. This may first involve revisiting (re-establishing) the major goals (such as number of hires of women, number of promotions of women, leadership roles held by women, patterns and reasons for departure, measures of institutional climate regarding women). Then I recommend a discussion of the progress toward these goals and the kind of impact ADVANCE is making. Such a discussion would require taking into consideration the specific evaluation findings that the Evaluation Team has been compiling.

7) **Consider of the Theory of Change guiding ADVANCE-Nebraska**

- From time to time, I recommend that the PI group and Internal Advisory Board consider what theory of change is guiding the project. That is, what do you want to achieve (goals) and what do you think will enable those goals to be reached (strategies or levers for change)? Having this kind of conversation at least once a year helps the leaders of a project such as ADVANCE think carefully about why they are doing what they are doing. What is the rationale for taking certain steps or having certain programs? Is there evidence from the evaluation data that the intended impact is occurring? Should the strategies being used be adjusted? Why or why not? It is easy to “do things” but effective change agents must also step back and ask why and how. This kind of conversation would also be appropriate to put on the agenda of the External Advisory Board.

8) **Look at other ADVANCE programs for ideas**

- ADVANCE-Nebraska leaders might find helpful ideas by looking into the strategies used by other Advance institutions to enhance recruitment and promotion efforts. The University of Washington has a tool kit for searches, I believe, and Michigan State University’s Advance Program (currently underway) is focusing on effective recruitment and promotion strategies. The University of Washington and MSU may also be helpful in terms of their experiences expanding ADVANCE efforts beyond the STEM fields (which may be relevant to the interactions between the UNL Diversity Initiative and the ADVANCE Program).

Concluding Comments

The ADVANCE-Nebraska Program has had a strong start. While adjustments are being made due to the move by the lead PI/Senior Vice Chancellor, it is clear that the Director, other Co-PIs, Program Manager, and Senior Personnel are all devoted to the success and impact of ADVANCE-Nebraska. I look forward to learning about the developments in

the project over the coming years as I provide consultative advice and assess progress and impact in my role as External Evaluator.