

## Dismantling Bias Conference Series

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### Department Chairs as Change Agents, Cleveland State University's ADVANCE Adapt Project

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## **Department Chairs as Change Agents, Cleveland State University's ADVANCE Adapt Project**

Below, we describe the FLAGS (Faculty Leaders Advancing Gender Equity in STEM) initiative at Cleveland State University (CSU). The three-year FLAGS project is sponsored by the NSF ADVANCE Adaptation program. It provides professional development opportunities for STEM department chairs to enhance the knowledge skills needed to address gender equity in their departments.

### **Previous ADVANCE involvement, other equity initiatives**

The ADVANCE program aims to increase the representation and advancement of women in academic science and engineering careers. Previously CSU actively participated in two NSF ADVANCE projects (IDEAL and IDEAL-N), which resulted in improvements in gender equity and academic culture through implicit bias training for search committees and strengthening faculty family friendly policies. Currently, CSU is in the first cohort of the NSF INCLUDES ASPIRE project. These projects, along with the establishment of the Diversity Institute which supports research and action to promote diversity goals, are indicative of CSU's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion across the university.

### **Building a Case for Change**

Preliminary investigations of gender equity at CSU identified gender differences in many areas, such as wage growth, laboratory space assignments, perceptions of workload, and potential stigma arising from practices such as pausing the "tenure clock" when adding new children to

one's family. We also explored the data for intersectionality, examining differences by race and age. These findings are supported by recent research (see for example Bilimoria et al., 2008; Hardy et al., 2016; O'Meara et al., 2017)

We identified three foci for our ADVANCE Adaptation grant: 1) Increasing awareness of work-nonwork balance; 2) improving the departmental climate around gender equity, and 3) promoting faculty agency and advocating for faculty (e.g., encouraging faculty to apply for awards and merit raises).

We decided to focus our efforts on the director/chair of the academic unit, as they have the potential to influence many work-related climate issues through their leadership style, advocacy, formal recommendations, and role as a mentor to faculty members. Direct managers such as chairs have been recognized for their potential impact on work outcomes, such as those we focus on. Major and Lauzun (2010, p. 71) write, "As the most proximal representative of the work organization and the authority most involved in an employee's daily work activity, the supervisor or immediate manager is in a critical position to influence work-family conflict," and Hammer et al. (2007, p. 169) call the supervisor "the linking pin between the availability of formal family-supportive organizational policies and practices... and informal family-supportive organizational culture and climate." Although they specifically talked about work-family conflict—one of three areas of focus—we argue that they can similarly influence all the areas we identified.

Baseline data were collected from all faculty in Spring 2021 using a comprehensive survey. Follow up surveys are planned for Spring 2022 and 2023. Preliminary analyses identified

a strong positive relationship between tenure clock stigma perceptions and faculty members' hesitancy to pause the tenure clock.

In Spring 2021, the first of three cohorts of approximately 10 (volunteer) department chairs or associate deans engaged in professional development activities related to our three themes. Then, supported by a small grant from our program, they will design, implement, and evaluate a department-level initiative designed to impact one of the target issues.

Our comprehensive evaluation plan assesses participants' reactions, learning and acquisition of knowledge and skills, as well as institutional support and overall project outcomes. Evaluation data are collected through surveys, interviews, focus group data, and quantitative data on recruitment, retention, wage growth, and other indicators.

### **Impacting Faculty Personnel Policies**

CSU recently initiated a plan for restructuring and growth, which includes substantial reorganization of some academic units. This presents a perfect opportunity for our project to have a much greater impact on workload policies and college bylaws than we envisioned during the planning process because the new college structure necessitates rewriting these documents. Several Cohort 1 members are deeply involved in the restructuring process.

Given the restructuring changes at CSU, our project team will closely monitor the collected data and continue to collect data past the funding period to capture the impact of restructuring as well as the long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on this project. We also plan to open our model up to departments across the university after our initial focus on STEM.

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