

NSF 02-121 ADVANCE Institutional Transformation Proposal

A Change in the Culture at the University of Rhode Island

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There is broad national concern about the under-representation of women in the science, engineering, math, and technology (STEM) disciplines. Beyond workplace equity, women faculty provide critically-needed role models for female students. Diversifying the practitioners in STEM fields will bring different perspectives, skills, and values to the fore, and will more responsibly integrate scientific practice with societal needs.

The University of Rhode Island (URI) proposes to use the ADVANCE Institutional Transformation initiative to increase the number and facilitate the career advancement of women STEM faculty, and improve the institutional climate for women scientists. Through a 5-year, multi-level approach, URI will:

1. substantially increase the number of ranked women faculty in the STEM departments,
2. provide existing women STEM faculty with career development and training opportunities,
3. improve social support services for women faculty,
4. systematically educate and promote awareness of women-in science issues at the individual, departmental, and administrative levels, and
5. develop and utilize a broadly applicable collaborative organizational change model.

The ADVANCE program at URI features a Pre-Faculty Fellows Program, in which qualified women doctorates will conduct research (with options for teaching) while being mentored and trained for a 1-3 year period. The intention is to hire them within this timeframe into tenure-track STEM faculty positions as they become available. Congruent with this program will be an infrastructure of enhanced support and training, which will also be offered to other women STEM faculty. This includes a year-long series of career workshops, a mentor training program, a topical lunch series, a social networking program, and visiting speakers. The ADVANCE Incentive Fund, eventually fully supported by URI, will provide awards to research endeavors that include women faculty collaborators, especially Pre-Faculty Fellows and junior faculty, and departmental or individual efforts that promote relevant climate or policy changes. In addition, proactive efforts will be made to provide quality support services for balancing work and family, including trailing spouse placement assistance and coordination with an ongoing childcare assistance program.

Overseeing the multiple efforts at URI will be an Advisory Committee, a Program Coordinator, a Leadership Team, and auxiliary faculty and staff who have demonstrated a commitment to these issues. Support from top administrators and a permanent ADVANCE Resource Center office with many sponsored campus activities will provide the foundation for a visible, influential presence on campus.

Developing a database through a comprehensive self-study will be the first step in a 5-year process of evaluation, action, and reporting, that will culminate in an organizational model for change potentially applicable to other institutions. The theoretical underpinning of the proposed program is the Transtheoretical Model of Change, one of the most influential models currently in use. Its fundamental premise is that organizational and behavioral change must be welcomed before it is to be successful. At the departmental and administrative levels at URI, meetings, workshops, and speakers aimed at gender equity education and awareness will be implemented, using a collaborative framework.

The efforts from the ADVANCE initiative will benefit all faculty at URI, will serve as a model for progressive action in Rhode Island and the Northeast, and will be a step towards the inclusion of more diverse perspectives in science nationwide.