



Diversifying



the Workforce

Breaking Down Barriers for Women Faculty



Five years ago, Montana State University welcomed its first female president and its first female provost. At the time, the university was one of only four institutions classified as very high research activity by the Carnegie Foundation to have women in both of the top leadership positions. But Montana State (MSU) was suffering from a lack of diversity within faculty ranks, particularly a lack of women faculty in the STEM disciplines. In fact, 13 of MSU's 21 STEM/social and behavioral science (SBS) departments had fewer than three women faculty, and two departments had none. With more than 300 faculty in STEM/SBS, fewer than 19 percent were women. Soon after they arrived on campus, President Waded Cruzado and Provost Martha Potvin initiated a focused effort to turn this trend around.

ADVANCE Project TRACS

In 2011, the president and provost assembled a 15-member steering committee to study MSU and the capacity for change, with an eye toward applying for an ADVANCE grant from the National Science Foundation. NSF's ADVANCE program aims to increase the representation and advancement of women in academic science and engineering careers. ADVANCE encourages colleges and universities and the broader STEM community to address

various aspects of STEM academic culture and institutional structure that may differentially affect women faculty and academic administrators.

MSU's ADVANCE proposal steering committee, comprised of university administrators, department heads and faculty members, was charged with identifying initiatives that could transform the culture of the campus to best allow women

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faculty to flourish. The team pursued an inclusive and iterative process for planning the proposal's scope, initiatives and outcomes. Three initiatives were selected to be included as part of the project: enhancing research capacity and opportunity, enhancing work-life integration and enhancing cultural attunement. The team dubbed the endeavor ADVANCE Project TRACS (Transformation through Relatedness, Autonomy and Competence Support).

“For us, the ‘Project TRACS’ name invokes the metaphor of a runner’s track, whereby women faculty in male-dominated departments may find themselves in the outside lane, with hurdles to overcome and a longer distance to run,” says Dr. Jessi Smith, psychology professor at MSU and director of ADVANCE Project TRACS. “The initiatives we’re putting in place are designed to provide psychological need support for women faculty and will hopefully help to remove these hurdles, advancing women to an equal starting point and reducing the accumulation of disadvantage.”

The National Science Foundation found merit in MSU’s proposal, and the university was awarded a grant in September 2012 to fund the development and implementation of ADVANCE Project TRACS.

HR’s Role in Facilitating Culture Change

MSU’s human resources organization has been heavily involved in two of the three ADVANCE Project TRACS

Since the inception of ADVANCE Project TRACS in 2012, more than half of MSU’s new hires in STEM/SBS have been women.

initiatives — enhancing work-life integration and enhancing cultural attunement — and the chief human resources officer is a key advisor for the project.

Enhancing Work-Life Integration

Human resources has worked with the Project TRACS team to implement several new programs and build upon existing ones to provide more flexible solutions for work-life integration.

- **Sick Leave Donation Pool** – It takes new faculty hires about three years to save up enough sick leave to cover an extended family caregiving leave. Conversely, many faculty members who have been at MSU for years have accrued hundreds of sick leave hours. The new sick leave donation program allows those with leave to donate into a common pool, which eligible MSU faculty and staff can draw on as needed (the previous donated sick leave model allowed for “direct grants” of leave only, from one named donator to one named recipient). Human resources worked with the university’s family advocates to design and implement the new program.

- **Dual Career Community Placement Liaison** – MSU’s dual career community placement liaison (who also serves as a member of the HR team) supports dual-career couples where the non-academic partner seeks employment. The liaison works to build relationships with local businesses and organizations with the goal of facilitating on-campus and off-campus employment opportunities for partners. Thus far, the liaison has provided non-academic job search assistance for more than 50 partners.
- **Faculty Partner Accommodation Program** – The ADVANCE Project TRACS team works closely with departments, deans, the provost and human resources to create the opportunity for an accompanying faculty partner to be considered for a tenure-track position under certain conditions. More than 30 tenure-track faculty have benefited from an academic partner accommodation. “Without a doubt, recruiting and retaining a diverse faculty means accommodating partners,” says MSU chief human resources officer Dennis Defa. “In a small setting such as Bozeman, Montana, there must be buy-in and willingness to see the benefit to the entire campus instead of the short-sighted limitations of a given department/unit.”
- **Montanastate.Care.com Network** – The goal of this network is to coordinate the family care needs of all benefits-eligible employees, which disproportionately impact women who often have primary caretaking responsibilities. By providing employees free membership to the Care.com network, MSU ensures that its workforce has access to services such as occasional and back-up care, senior care, childcare, pet care, house care and reference and background checks. There are currently nearly 300 registered users on Montanastate.Care.com.

Enhancing Cultural Attunement

Through several tools, resources and programs, ADVANCE Project TRACS, with help from human resources, aims to promote respectful communication, sensitivity to the dynamics of relationships within a culture, and respect for the values and beliefs of cultures.

- **Institutional Education/Training** – ADVANCE Project TRACS organizes and engages faculty, staff and administrators in campus-wide conversations about unconscious bias in general and specific places in which gender bias is prevalent (e.g., work-life issues). These workshops and programs are partially funded by the vice president for administration. Over the last three years, ADVANCE Project TRACS has hosted more than 32 events, with nearly 1,000 faculty, staff and administrators in attendance.
- **“Broadening the Search Process” Toolkit and Training** – With the assistance of human resources and best practices from other ADVANCE grant programs, a toolkit was created that provides training modules for search committee members; access to family advocates who meet with faculty job candidates to discuss campus culture, MSU’s focus on work-life integration and to answer questions; assistance with the creation of ads/solicitations; and guidance for campus visits and offer letters. Printed materials are distributed to all searches on campus, not just those within STEM, and HR has adopted portions of the toolkit for its staff-related searches as well. “Search committees that receive search-intervention training interview significantly more women than those that don’t go through the training,” says Defa. “In 2012-13, committees that received training were 6.3 times more likely to make an offer to a woman candidate than committees without training, and the woman candidate was 5.8 times more likely to accept the offer.” Since the trainings began in late 2012, 51 percent of MSU’s new hires in STEM fields have been women.
- **Equity Advocate Program** – Equity advocates serve the MSU community by promoting and enhancing fairness, equality and inclusiveness for all faculty and staff. The current cohort includes 24 faculty and

staff members from a variety of departments across campus. The equity advocates attend, on average, one training per month to gain new skills and learn about new resources. These trainings are sponsored in part by the vice president of administration and the office of the provost. “ADVANCE data from the first two years of faculty surveys demonstrate that a majority of faculty feel the equity advocate program is important to them and important to the future of their department, showing the positive impact this program has had in a very short time,” says Defa.

Partnerships and Collaboration

The ADVANCE Project TRACS initiative is very much a collaborative effort, with departments and units that in the past may not have typically interacted with one another now partnering to provide services, resources and support. The initiative has also spawned other projects and programs aimed to increase diversity within the MSU workforce.

The proposal for the NSF ADVANCE grant was the impetus for the creation of the President’s Commission on the Status of University Women, which seeks to evaluate and improve issues related to diversity and gender equity. Since its creation in 2011, the commission has established a policy review process and online portal; assisted ADVANCE with the creation of the equity advocate program; created awards to recognize faculty, staff and students who are working to advocate for gender equity and diversity across campus; and established several subcommittees that focus on assessment, communication, policy review and recognition. The executive committee of the Commission serves as the advisory council for ADVANCE Project TRACS, and the subcommittees will continue to sustain the initiatives of the project following the grant’s conclusion.

The office of planning and analysis has formed a lasting partnership with ADVANCE Project TRACS by creating an equity data analyst position. The position is funded by the office of the president, and 25 percent of the incumbent’s



For its ADVANCE Project TRACS initiative, Montana State University received CUPA-HR’s 2015 Inclusion Cultivates Excellence Award. Thanks to the generous support of The Chronicle of Higher Education, MSU will receive a \$6,000 contribution to its endowment or a scholarship fund. The award will be presented at the CUPA-HR Annual Conference and Expo, September 27-29, in Orlando, Florida.

appointment is dedicated to working with ADVANCE to update and communicate diversity data for the campus. This position also leads the President's Commission on the Status of University Women assessment committee, which oversees department head diversity self studies and publishes that data for deans and department heads to utilize in making their environments more inclusive.

Human resources has supported ADVANCE Project TRACS on many fronts, as indicated above. Says project director Jessi Smith, "HR has continued to be a strong advocate of bigger, more diverse candidate pools and more equitable recruiting. The HR organization has been exceptional to collaborate with, and its constant presence on campus through search trainings and at ADVANCE events has helped to demonstrate the transformation occurring on campus as a result of this partnership."

The provost, indicating the institutional commitment to the program and the support it offers faculty and staff, funds the family advocate program and also assists with funding for the Montanastate.Care.com program.

The MSU Alumni Foundation has expanded its fundraising efforts to include ADVANCE. There is now a donor supporting the Women in Science Distinguished Professor Award which recognizes and celebrates a strong researcher, mentor and teacher, and the Foundation is currently fundraising to create an endowed professorship to support women in STEM.

Several MSU deans started the Advancing Equity Dean's Council, in which they gather periodically to discuss equity issues facing their colleges and brainstorm solutions to create a more inclusive campus. "The creation of this council shows the culture change that is occurring at the university leadership level," says Smith. "The work these deans continue to do is having a positive impact on their respective colleges as demonstrated by the institutional commitment many of them have made in terms of their time commitment with ADVANCE Project TRACS-related work, their sponsorship of ADVANCE events and trainings, and the work they require of their department heads to expand their thinking as it relates to diversity."

The ADVANCE team is also working with the Center for Faculty Excellence (CFE) to determine the most effective way to grow the programming of ADVANCE as it relates to

enhancing research capacity and opportunity. The director of the CFE is an active contributor to the research capacity team and works collaboratively to determine successful, sustainable solutions for the programs associated with this initiative.

Spreading the Word

The ADVANCE Project TRACS team has been busy not only implementing programs and resources on campus in support of the initiative, but also sharing knowledge gleaned from the project and related research across the state of Montana.

Smith has presented sessions on unconscious bias and broadening hiring practices at two local human resources conferences and presented a session on women's pay inequity at Montana's inaugural Equal Pay Summit last year, which was sponsored by the Governor's Equal Pay for Equal Work Task Force. Additionally, Smith assisted a small team of state leaders in their application for a federal Department of Labor paid leave grant, which they received in September 2014. Montana was one of four states to receive funding to research the feasibility and economic impact of creating a state paid family leave program. The Montana Department of Labor and Industry will continue to partner with ADVANCE Project TRACS and the work-life integration team to share data and best practices.

Smith also presented the keynote address at a conference for State of Montana executive branch managers and supervisors and several state agency directors and HR staff, where she shared ADVANCE Project TRACS data to assist these individuals with broadening their search practices and creating more inclusive work environments. And the Department of Military Affairs (DMA) for the State of Montana incorporated language from MSU's Broadening the Search toolkit into all DMA job advertisements.

"With ADVANCE Project TRACS, we're making an impact not only at MSU, but throughout the state of Montana," says Smith. "By putting in place programs and offering resources to enhance research capacity and opportunity, work-life integration and cultural attunement at our university, we've successfully deployed a holistic workplace intervention to diversify our faculty ranks within STEM and SBS. The culture shift and transformation we've seen as a result has been palpable. And other organizations are taking notice." 