UNH Non-Tenure Track Faculty Perceptions of Department Influence, Fit, and Fairness: Findings from the 2013 Annual Climate Study

Goal of UNH ADVANCE and the Annual Climate Study

The goal of UNH ADVANCE is to improve faculty climate and academic leadership through increased fairness, transparency, and clarity of recruitment, retention, and promotion and tenure policies and practices. UNH ADVANCE is funded through the National Science Foundations (NSF) ADVANCE initiative to increase the participation and promote the career advancement of primarily women faculty in the disciplines of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) and the Social and Behavioral Sciences (SBS). While the focus of NSF funding is on tenure-track faculty, the UNH Institutional Transformation project aims to transform our community as a whole and we recognize that non-tenure track faculty are key community members in these efforts.

In November 2013, the UNH ADVANCE research team administered an on-line survey to all full-time tenure track and non-tenure track faculty members at the three UNH campuses (Durham, Manchester, and Concord). The survey asked questions about respondents’ teaching, research and service workloads, their perceptions regarding degree of influence, fit and fairness in their departments, and their work satisfaction, work stress, networks, and intention to leave UNH. The survey was available for five weeks.

The purpose of the annual UNH ADVANCE faculty climate survey is to:

- Evaluate the impact of UNH ADVANCE initiatives on the UNH climate over time
- Generate a campus-wide dialogue about climate issues

Purpose of this Report

This report is the third in a series of reports on the analysis of the data generated by the 2013 climate survey. It focuses on three variables related to perceptions of departmental climate: influence, fit, and fairness for non-tenure track faculty at UNH. While both tenure track and non-tenure track faculty received and responded to the survey, survey results will be evaluated and reported separately. This is due to differences in the nature of faculty workloads (e.g., full time teaching, full time research, or a mix of teaching, research, and service) between tenure track and non-tenure track faculty. (See UNH ADVANCE reports 2014-1 and 2014-2 for results on tenure track faculty.)

Results are presented for large groups of participants in keeping with requirements that data for groups less than ten will not be reported. Thus we were unable to report analyses by college because many cell sizes were too small. Given the small samples of faculty in different positions (for example 24 research faculty responding, 18 clinical faculty responding), we were unable to analyze these sub-groups specifically because dividing further by gender and by discipline would create group sizes less than 10. We hope future climate surveys will have greater respondents to enable such analyses. For the purposes of this report, and to preserve large enough numbers so that data is not potentially identifying, we define non-tenure track broadly to include research and clinical faculty, lecturers, and adjunct faculty.

Department Climate

Organizational climate is the atmosphere or ambiance of an organization or unit as perceived by its members. It is reflected in the organization or unit’s structure, policies, practices, demographics of its membership, observed behaviors that are getting rewarded, supported, and
expected, and quality of personal interactions. Climate is partly a function of an organization’s culture, the shared beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions that shape behavior and distinguish members of one group of people from another. While characteristics of organizational climate are relatively observable and changeable, organizational culture is often likened to an iceberg because it is deeply rooted with a substantial portion hidden under the surface. Positive climate has been linked to job satisfaction, motivation, and performance in organizations (see Schneider, Ehrhart, & Macey (2013) for a comprehensive review).

Climate often feels more chilly for underrepresented group members, especially if they represent less than 20% of total unit membership (Greene, Stockard, Lewis & Richmond, 2010). For example, when women faculty are underrepresented in a department, they are significantly more likely than men faculty to report negative experiences, less influence, and unfair treatment, and to be less satisfied with their positions. Since women and other underrepresented groups often represent less than 20% of the faculty in UNH academic departments, and much less than 20% in STEM disciplines, improving department climate necessitates addressing the conditions that make the climate for women and members of other underrepresented groups particularly chilly.

Findings

Description of the Sample

Out of the total of 509 faculty members who responded to the 2013 climate survey, 198 were non tenue track, and 311 were tenure track corresponding to 39% and 61% respectively. The 198 non-tenure track faculty who responded represent 54% of the 366 non-tenure track faculty at UNH in 2013. In terms of gender, women and men non-tenure track faculty responded to the survey in similar proportions to their representation at UNH. Specifically, 56.3% of non-tenure track faculty who responded to the gender question were women and women make up 53.5% of non-tenure track faculty at UNH and, 43.8% of those who responded to the gender question were men while men make up 46.5% of non-tenure track faculty at UNH. The distribution of non-tenure track faculty who chose to indicate their discipline in the survey is relatively consistent with their representation at UNH (i.e. STEM= 29.6% vs 32.2%; SBS= 11.3% vs 8.7%; Non STEM = 59.1% vs 59.0%).

Perceived Influence in the Department

Influence was measured using 16 items adapted from Settles, Cortina, Malley, and Stewart (2006) and climate surveys from other ADVANCE programs, including the University of Michigan, the University of Wisconsin, Virginia Tech, and the University of Maine. The items assessed faculty members’ perceptions of their influence within the work environment on a scale from 1 to 4, with 4 being “tremendous influence”. For example, faculty members rated how much influence they have over curriculum decisions,
selecting graduate students, selecting a new department chair, securing equipment needed for their research, obtaining money to travel to professional conferences, allocating committee assignments, which courses they teach, and which professional activities they engage in. Factor analysis with promax rotation yielded a single factor labeled “influence”. Scale reliability analysis yielded a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.94, far exceeding the 0.7 criterion established by Nunnally (1978) for the full sample of participants.

Results indicate no significant difference (p = 0.7958) in perceived influence by gender for UNH non-tenure track faculty across STEM, SBS, and Non-STEM disciplines, with women non-tenure track faculty reporting having similar levels of perceived influence in their departments (Mean = 2.14) compared to men (Mean = 2.16). By discipline, women also reported similar perceived influence (i.e., STEM women = 2.43, STEM men = 2.49; SBS women = 2.09, SBS men = 1.88; and non-STEM women = 2.05, non-STEM men = 1.96).

**Fit within the Department**

“Fit within the department” was measured using 7 items adapted from August and Waltman (2004) and surveys from other ADAVANCE programs, including the University of Illinois at Chicago, the University of Nebraska at Lincoln, and Virginia Tech. Faculty were asked to rate their agreement on a scale from 1 to 4, from strongly disagree to strongly agree, with statements including “I feel excluded from informal networks in my department”、“people in this department deliberately undermine my work”, “I received enough feedback on my progress toward tenure and/or promotion”, and “I have considerable opportunity for independence and freedom in how I do my work”. Factor analysis with promax rotation yielded a single factor labeled “perceived fit in the department”.

Scale reliability analysis yielded a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.86, exceeding the 0.7 criterion established by Nunnally (1978). Results indicate that there is no statistically significant difference between men and women non-tenure track faculty at UNH on the basis of perceived fit in the department (i.e., STEM women = 3.11, STEM men = 3.01; SBS women = 3.16, SBS men = 2.95; and non-STEM women = 3.02, non-STEM men = 3.01).

**Fairness within the Department**

Fairness was measured using 6 items from the University of Nebraska at Lincoln’s ADVANCE survey assessing faculty members’ perception of the fairness of the distribution of teaching, advising, and service assignments, the evaluation of their scholarly performance, salaries, and the process and criteria used in promotion and tenure. Respondents rated the fairness of each item on a scale of 1 through 4, where 1 indicates “very unfair” and 4 indicates “very fair”. Factor analysis with promax rotation yielded a single factor labeled “perceived fairness”. Scale reliability analysis yielded a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.85, exceeding the 0.7 criterion established by Nunnally (1978).

STEM women non-tenure track faculty reported lower perceived fairness (Mean = 2.54) compared to men non-tenure track faculty (Mean = 2.90). This difference was marginally significant by conventional standards (p = 0.09). For both SBS and non-STEM disciplines there was no significant difference in perceived fairness between women and men non-tenure track faculty. On average, in SBS, both men (Mean = 2.97) and women (Mean = 2.67) non-tenure track faculty perceived similar levels of fairness. Similarly, in Non-STEM, both men (Mean = 2.58) and women (Mean = 2.52) non-tenure track faculty perceived similar levels of fairness, on average.
Discussion

Findings on gender differences among non-tenure track faculty in individual perceptions of departmental influence, fit, and fairness indicate no statistically significant differences between men and women, with the exception of fairness for women non-tenure track faculty in STEM. In contrast, ADVANCE report 2014-2 indicated that tenure track faculty women had significantly lower perceived influence and fairness than men tenure track faculty. The current results suggest that different institutional change strategies may be needed to address climate perceptions among non-tenure and tenure track faculty.

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References


