An Integrated Coaching and Mentoring Program for University Transformation

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PURPOSE AND INTRODUCTION

Higher education researchers and university administrators alike are increasingly concerned about the persistent dearth of women faculty, the overall glacial advancement of women, and the existence of a glass ceiling in academic science and engineering fields. The sources of these problems may be traced to individual psychological processes (gender schemas) and systematic institutional barriers, resulting in perceptions of a chilly climate for women scientists and engineers in academia (Sandler and Hall, 1986), the experience of subtle discrimination by women faculty (Blakemore, Switzer, DiLorio and Fairchild, 1997), the slow but steady accumulation of disadvantage over the course of women's academic careers (Valian, 1999), and the flight from academia by women scientists and engineers at every step in the educational pipeline.

Today, leading universities are beginning to undertake comprehensive remedies to address these problematic attitudinal and structural issues. Prominent within the approaches being implemented are a variety of coaching and mentoring initiatives aimed at helping women faculty succeed, particularly in the early and middle stages of their careers, and at helping key upper- and mid-level university leaders (deans and chairs) in changing the culture of their academic units. We believe that the combined focus of short term coaching targeted at empowering personal and professional development together with long term mentoring and sponsorship can help women faculty succeed in academia. Targeted coaching initiatives designed to assist academic decision-makers such as deans and department chairs in understanding their roles in creating inclusive, supportive environments can also help curb the leaky pipeline of faculty women in sciences and engineering. In this report we describe the activities, challenges, and successes of a unique multi-level, integrated coaching and mentoring initiative at our university.

Coaching is the art of facilitating the performance, learning and development of another (Downey, 1999). Coaching is fundamentally focused upon assisting an individual achieve goals that will enhance his or her learning and professional growth as well as advance the organization's objectives. As Sherman and Freas (2004:7) recommend, "systematically coordinating one-on-one coaching interventions that serve a larger strategic objective" fosters cultural change that benefits the entire organization.

Traditional mentoring is a long-term relationship providing advocacy and advice on an individual's career development, to help one learn the ropes in their chosen field and to provide support for upward mobility (Kram, 1985). Mentors can be especially critical for women in organizations, as they can provide assistance and advice on how to succeed in their professions even as members of a numerical minority (Burke & McKeen, 1990; Ragins, 1989). Mentoring has been specifically proposed as a way to enhance the careers of female faculty, who may have difficulty in obtaining career guidance or otherwise feel left out of the informal social networks that provide necessary information about how to navigate academia (Gibson, 2004).

Based on the unique advantages posed by both coaching and mentoring as a complementary, integrated systematic intervention, we utilized the following conceptual framing. Coaching is defined as empowerment aimed at academic performance improvement, career development, and faculty leadership enhancement. Mentoring is defined as the transfer of knowledge, wisdom, and sponsorship (both general and disciplinary) aimed at providing access to important academic and scientific resources and networks.

INTEGRATED PROGRAM OVERVIEW

We took a dual approach with our intervention strategy: transformation of the attitudes and behaviors of key change agents (deans and chairs) and empowerment of women faculty to proactively and collectively address the issues affecting their academic progress within their disciplinary environments. We began a five-year integrated program involving executive coaching of individual Science & Engineering deans and chairs, career and leadership development coaching of women faculty, and mentoring of women faculty.

This dual approach combines two powerful developmental strategies for corporate success and applies it to women in academia. First, we create mentoring committees for each female faculty member at the assistant and the associate professor levels, and a development committee for each female faculty member at the full professor level. Mentoring committees are charged with assisting and advising junior faculty regarding grants, publications, pre-tenure leave, committee service, student advising duties, and departmental promotion and tenure expectations. Development committees focus on departmental leadership and impact within their fields.

In combination with the mentoring committee activities, professional executive coaches provide performance and career-related advice, and leadership development for women faculty, deans, and chairs. Each coachee is helped to identify their career and leadership vision, goals, plans, and actions. The coach gives advice, resources, and feedback on how best to accomplish the identified vision. The duration of coaching sessions is approximately one year, with an average of 6-8 sessions for women faculty and 10-12 for chairs. For deans of the schools and colleges, the coaching intervention duration is 2 years for approximately 15-18 sessions. While the conversations and the pace of the coaching sessions are unique to each individual, there is a recommended series of topics to be discussed in each session.

The executive coaching initiative complements the mentoring program for women faculty members by providing a widened network for success, and by assisting participants to best utilize their mentoring committees. Within academia, the increased workloads and tenure requirements along with reduced resources makes the formation of such networks a viable approach to increase the success of faculty members (de Janasz & Sullivan, 2002; de Janasz, Sullivan & Whiting, 2003).

Preliminary results have been most encouraging to date. Anecdotal evidence from women faculty indicate that they have utilized their broadened networks to obtain a variety of valuable job and career supports, including assistance on tenure package write-ups, review of their *curriculum vitae*, classroom teaching performance assistance, visits to external universities, invitations to panel discussions at conferences, and advice to more effectively manage their labs, post-docs, and graduate students.

PRELIMINARY RESULTS – Women Faculty

Pre and Post Mentoring/Coaching Intervention Evaluations Year 1 Mentoring and Coaching Intervention Data	Pre-intervention (N=11)	Post-intervention (N=7)
Item	**Mean**	**Mean**
1. Are clear about career direction and goals in the next 5 years	3.25	3.43
2. Are able to clearly articulate your career direction and goals to others	3.25	3.43
3. Have exercised initiative towards attaining your career goals	3.33	3.71
4. Have taken proactive steps to increase your scholarly visibility	2.33	3.57
5. Are clear about the role of a mentor	3.58	3.14
6. Have actively sought mentoring from within your department	3.33	2.86
7. Have actively sought mentoring from outside your department	2.42	3.00
8. Mentor other colleagues in your department	2.42	2.14
9. Mentor students/postdocs in your department	3.67	3.57
10. Exert influence in your department	2.17	2.71
11. Exert influence in your discipline/field	2.08	2.57
12. Feel successful in your department	2.33	2.57
13. Feel successful in your discipline/field	2.58	2.71
14. Feel a sense of control over your work and environment	2.50	2.57
15. Are able to balance multiple priorities and effectively use your time	3.00	3.00
16. Your current career opportunities	2.67	2.43
17. Your career progress to date	2.92	2.57
18. Your overall academic/scholarly contributions	3.00	2.57
19. The colleagueship you provide in your department	2.91	3.33
20. The leadership you provide in your department	2.64	3.00
21. Your likely career success in the next 5 years	2.70	2.71
Scale: 1- Not at all, 2 – To some extent, 3 – To a moderate extent, 4 – To a great extent		

CONCLUSIONS

Our comprehensive coaching and mentoring program is unique for 2 specific reasons. It encompasses multiple professional developmental activities (i.e. coaching and mentoring, development planning, strategic thinking) and is targeted at multiple levels within the university hierarchy (i.e. junior and senior women faculty, department chairs and deans).

The implications for women faculty of our coaching and mentoring initiatives are already evident at this early stage. Women faculty are becoming more aware of the need to be strategic in planning for their long-term academic career success. They recognize the critical importance of establishing a network of individuals in their respective disciplines who can help them gain access to resources necessary for academic achievement.

The preliminary impact of our intervention for department chairs and deans has resulted in a greater awareness of the institutional biases toward women that may exist in traditional academic systems. Thus, working with the system leadership to highlight existing issues of gender inequity and to develop strategic plans to work at both the individual and the systems level is critical to realizing lasting organizational change.

Organizations are systems of patterned behaviors, and cultural transformation is a slow process. Profound and sustained change occurs when there are shifts in the norms, mental models and shared assumptions leading to a transformation in the systems and the practices of the departments and schools within the university. Our multi-level integrated coaching and mentoring program is designed to support a shift in the perspectives and mindsets of faculty members, department chairs and deans. We believe changes in the gender schemas of a critical mass of university faculty and administrators can effectively result in a cultural revolution impacting the entire university system.

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