

# **Enhancing Department Climate: A Chair's Role Women in Science & Engineering Leadership Institute University of Wisconsin-Madison**

## **Enhance Basic Manners – Respect/Consideration/Politeness**

- Issue a policy statement that makes it clear that all individuals in the department – faculty, staff, and students – are to be treated with dignity and respect; that differential treatment of women and men, and minorities and non-minorities is not appropriate and will not be tolerated.
- Include showing respectful and considerate behavior to other departmental members and visitors in performance evaluations for both faculty and staff.
- Include, as an important element of showing respect and consideration, the need to address individuals by their appropriate titles. Program Administrators, for example, may prefer not to be called secretaries.
- Promote these policies by example.

## **Improve Communication**

- Clearly and honestly communicate departmental values, intentions, expectations – and act in accordance with them.
- Clearly communicate departmental policies and procedures.
- For all faculty members, academic and classified staff members, post-graduate students, and other student employees, provide written clarification of conditions of employment, including information on vacation time, sick time, and grievance procedures.
- Provide informational documents to graduate students that includes information about requirements, expectations, policies, procedures, and qualifications for applying for fellowships, project assistantships, etc.
- Clearly define qualifications and application processes for all faculty and academic staff position openings and promotions.
- Provide open and honest communication about how departmental resources are allocated.
- In communicating, be sure to include all people/voices across campus. Be sure to solicit perspectives from diverse groups of people.
- Promote collaboration and sharing of information
- Become aware of cultural and gendered differences in styles of communication, so that different styles of communication do not create problems. For example, many women tend to have a different communication style from men. If they speak in softer tones, seem more hesitant, or make hedging statements they risk not being respected, but if they speak authoritatively, they may be seen as “aggressive” and also risk not being respected. Women’s thoughts and ideas are often overlooked or downgraded for both of these reasons.

## **Build a Sense of Community**

- Give governance to all groups in your department. For example, make sure you have representation from the academic and classified staff, and from post-doctoral and graduate students at all departmental meetings. Consider giving these non-faculty representatives voting rights on certain departmental matters that effect them.
- Examine departmental committee membership and ensure that membership is diverse with respect to age, gender, nationality, race and ethnicity, etc.
- Examine departmental teaching assignments and insure that teaching requirements are appropriately and equitably distributed.
- Examine departmental events such as seminar series and sponsored conferences and ensure that presenters of various ages, genders, nationalities, races and ethnicities are included.
- Time departmental meetings so as not to exclude participation of specific groups. Parents, for example, are often unable to attend late afternoon meetings and events.
- As chair of departmental meetings, make sure that everyone has a chance to voice opinions or concerns. Be sure to acknowledge and attribute ideas, suggestions, and comments accurately.
- Publicly recognize and praise faculty, staff, and students who perform work on behalf of the department. For example, publicly thank individual faculty members who have contributed to efforts to recruit new graduate students into the department, staff members who have played an important role in organizing a departmental event, custodial staff who clean up after a departmental event, students who have served on special committees, etc.
- Promote inclusive behaviors. Promote inclusive language by example, i.e., avoid using only male pronouns when referring to a group composed of males and females; avoid using language that makes assumptions about marital status and/or sexual orientation.
- Whenever appropriate include academic and classified staff in departmental social events.
- Host regular social events. Though some events may be appropriate for faculty only, or for faculty and graduate students, ensure that other events are open to all departmental members.
- Create a communal space – coffee room/lunch room

## **Engaging Everyone in the Life of the Department**

“Getting lost in the crowd” is a common problem faced by new faculty and staff, and particularly women and people of color. These individuals may be overlooked for departmental assignments that would bring them into a collegial circle. Often an intentional effort is made to shield a new faculty member from departmental duties, but it is worthwhile to consider how to involve them without jeopardizing their scholarship.

Women in traditionally male departments and people of color are often in high demand for campus committees and efforts because of the diverse perspectives they bring. Ask to be made aware of these campus activities and wherever possible help those involved bring back to the department what they are doing at the campus level.

The grid below is a format that department chairs can customize. Use this chart when assigning people to various roles and committees to ensure those opportunities are well distributed and that each person has some role in the life of the department. The column on the far left includes standing committees, task forces, ad hoc work, and on-going activities in your department. All faculty/staff

members are written at the top of each column. Check an individual's column when they are assigned a departmental duty.

Committee/Activity	Faculty A	Faculty B	Faculty C
Personnel Committee			
Budget Committee			
Research Committee			
Undergraduate Committee			
Equity Committee			
Graduate Committee			
Search Committee			
Symposium Committee			
Receptions & Social Events			
Faculty Senate Representative			
Departmental representative to Campus ___ Committee			
Member of ___ Professional Organization			
Conference Planning Committee			

Consider creating a similar worksheet that includes teaching responsibilities (e.g. large introductory lecture courses, small upper-level seminar courses, laboratory intensive courses, etc.) and other functions pertinent to your department.