A Rising Tide: Advancing Women and Leadership at the University of Maine

The University of Maine (UMaine) proposes a three-pronged approach to improve the status of women faculty in STEM and the social-behavioral sciences (SBS) through innovative and previously recognized (1) professional development programs to support networking, expand collaboration, and reduce isolation of women faculty; (2) training modules that inform candidate screening and hiring processes, provide assistance to departments to improve climate, and train mentors who will support women faculty; and (3) program elements to produce policies and structures to sustain work-life balance and ensure equitable outcomes. These initiatives have full administrative buy-in, grow out of prior ad hoc efforts to produce policy and climate change, and are spearheaded by highly motivated and engaged faculty, staff, and administrators. Rising Tide supports strategic initiatives at UMaine and the University of Maine System (UMS) and embeds transformation in a focused, sustainable institutional regime which will create “a rising tide that will lift all boats.” Program goals and objectives are:

1. Increase the percentage of women in STEM/SBS fields throughout the academic pipeline by attracting a larger pool of women candidates, increasing the number of women faculty at all ranks and facilitating promotion of women associates to full professor.
2. Support facilitative policies, programs, and professional development opportunities for recruiting, retaining, and advancing STEM/SBS women faculty. Initiatives include search committee training to increase the diversity of the pool and ensure equitable evaluation, implementation of work-life balance policies to increase satisfaction and support retention, and the training of department chairs and departmental evaluation committees.
3. Decrease isolation and facilitate recruitment, retention, and advancement by creating a positive work environment with training and climate workshops, pursuing diversity and partner relocation assistance, lowering barriers to success with best practices to resolve problems at the departmental level, increasing networking and collaborative opportunities within and outside of Maine, and supporting women faculty with experienced mentors.
4. Engage other UMS campuses and the faculty union by disseminating ADVANCE outcomes and defined best practices at sessions designed to facilitate integration of effective programs and supportive policies into the union contract and to sustain the advancement of women faculty at all levels and at every campus in the UMS.

Intellectual Merit

Rising Tide programs are embedded in a conceptual framework focused on the norms and practices of organizational culture most related to faculty job satisfaction, which plays a prime role in retention. Critical characteristics of UMaine taken into account in implementing and evaluating policies and programs include its situation as a geographically isolated, striving institution, low levels of gender representation in STEM-SBS fields, and its place in a unionized university system. Social science studies will focus on unique characteristics that affect satisfaction and illuminate change at all levels to identify effective policies, programs, and activities. Quantitative and qualitative data will enhance understanding of academic culture and more clearly delineate the role training, mentoring, and professional networking and development play in faculty recruitment, retention, and satisfaction across Maine’s university system.

Broader Impact

This program seeks to increase the number of women faculty in STEM/SBS and to define practices that attract and support their retention, facilitate promotion through academic ranks and to administrative positions, and provide professional satisfaction. Advancing STEM/SBS women faculty will create a rising tide for UMaine, increasing research output and equity in the state. Training and best practices in hiring, peer evaluation, and work-life balance will be shared across the UMS to diversify faculty at the seven campuses and meet university and system strategic goals. Building on others’ ADVANCE efforts, Rising Tide introduces innovative means of supporting professional development, improving intra-institutional problem resolution, focusing on departments with no or few female faculty members, and addressing and implementing policy change across campuses. Findings will be disseminated and thereby contribute to scholarly literatures and institutional transformation efforts elsewhere.