

An Assessment of the Working Climate for Science Faculty at the University of British Columbia (UBC) – May 2007

Assessment Advisory Committee (Faculty of Science)¹: Rachel Kuske, Dept. of Mathematics (Chair); Elizabeth Croft, Dept. of Mechanical Engineering; Anne Condon, Dept. of Computer Science; Nancy Heckmann, Dept. of Statistics; Carola Hibschi-Jetter, Faculty of Science; Grant Ingram, when Assoc. Dean, Faculty of Science; Janis McKenna, Dept. of Physics & Astronomy; Wayne Maddison, Depts. of Botany and Zoology; Michiel van de Panne, Dept. of Computer Science

– EXECUTIVE SUMMARY –

Assessment Task Force², Chair: Patricia Vertinsky,
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Background

The Faculty of Science at UBC has undergone a recent growth, rejuvenation and renewal phase reflecting the investment in this Faculty as a key strength to the university, the province, and the nation. Individual faculty members cite this growth among other positive features such as a general sense of fair treatment, collegiality and good leadership. In contrast, a substantial number of concerns were raised by female faculty about the lack of professional support, issues of workplace equity, and career development needs. In response to these concerns the Dean of the Faculty of Science, supported by the Offices of the Provost and the Vice-President, Research, established an advisory committee to assess the institutional environment and differences experienced by female and male faculty in Science.

The first of its kind in Canada, the study soon broadened to consider a number of topics falling under the umbrella of “an assessment of working climate,” building on similar concerns of gender equity, recruitment and retention that had been investigated at many elite universities in the US. The findings of this survey highlight a number of obstacles to high level performance that lie squarely within the control of UBC's administration and the Faculty of Science. To recruit and retain our top faculty members, it is critical that these obstacles are removed. This report and its recommendations provide UBC with a valuable opportunity to lead on this front nationally, increasing its competitiveness and enhancing future innovation in Canada.

¹ The Advisory Committee was initially chaired by then Associate Dean Grant Ingram (now CFIS) and later by Anne Condon and then Rachel Kuske. External members of the Advisory Committee were professors Joan Girgus, Princeton, Jo Handlesman, UW-Madison, and Geri Richmond, U Oregon.

² The Task Force consisted of faculty from all parts of the University of British Columbia. It included all members of the Advisory Committee and Kim Brooks, Faculty of Law, Dawn Currie, Faculty of Arts (Dept. of Sociology), Catherine Dauvergne, Faculty of Law, Anna Kindler, Associate Vice-President, Academic Planning, George Mackie, Associate Vice-President, Academic Programs, Judy Myers, Faculty of Science (Dept. of Zoology), Tom Patch, Associate Vice-President Equity, Dorothy Shaw, Faculty of Medicine (Dept. of Obstetrics & Gynaecology), Rabab Ward, Faculty of Applied Science (Dept. of Electrical & Computer Engineering), and Dominique Weis, Faculty of Science (Dept. of Earth & Ocean Sciences).

Major Findings

The Task Force identified the following major findings, giving examples of related key observations.

- ***In areas where clear policies were applied, such as salaries, there were limited differences by gender. In contrast, significant gender differences were observed, where the data suggested a lack of transparent and equitable procedures and policies. These included differences in time to promotion, in amounts of retention funding, and in awards and merit reviews.***

While the percentage of female faculty increased from 11% to 19% between 1995 and 2006, the percentage of full professors who were female remained nearly static, fluctuating between 2% and 4%.

For faculty cohorts hired as assistant professors in the Faculty of Science since 1991, promotion rates to full professor, 13 years after being hired, were 14% of women and 46% of men.

Salaries were nearly equitable across gender, but the average percentage of retention funding (10%) and internal research awards (10% or less) received by female faculty was consistently well below the actual percentage of female faculty (17%). Comparing the actual amounts in retention funding, females received on average 30% less than males did.

Variable attention to diversity in departmental reviews, hiring, and mentoring was observed.

- ***Overall ratings of departmental climate were more positive at UBC Science than those at US institutions, yet subgroups reported significantly different perceptions in a number of aspects of professional environment.***

Over 17% of faculty survey respondents reported harassment or personal harassment, with significant differences observed between departmental groups.

Significant differences between departmental groups were observed in 7 out of 11 aspects of professional climate, including cooperation, flexibility, and diversity.

- ***Rapid turnover in Dean's position (Faculty of Science), with limited connection, communication and understanding between the faculty members and the upper level administration were evidenced by a combination of perceptions of inequitable resource distribution, lack of effective mentoring programs and gaps in promotion of effective leadership.***

When asked whether their department had a formal mentoring program, 38% of faculty survey respondents answered “don't know” or “no.”

Combined responses on perceived fairness of resource access and allocation were relatively positive (regarding technical and teaching assistance and clerical support), yet unfairness and lack of transparency were reported repeatedly by women and within some departmental subgroups. Perceived fairness of allocation regarding lab space and equipment also varied significantly among departmental subgroups.

Focus groups consistently reported a perceived lack of efficient centralized resources, above the department level, and services to support faculty members in teaching and research.

- *Serious deficiencies in support of work/life balance were reported, including lack of sufficient childcare facilities, shortfall of financial assistance for rising housing costs and limited flexibility and consistency in leave and retirement options.*

UBC offers leave options that are more attractive than many US institutions, but uniform and formal procedures for implementation are lacking.

Access to child care at UBC has decreased exponentially in the last 5–10 years.

Responses from department heads and faculty members emphasize that assistance for partner employment is variable and unclear.

Major Recommendations

The Task Force strongly recommends an oversight body be established in the Faculty of Science with appropriate administrative support to work with the Dean of Science to address the preceding findings. Such a body should consist of representatives from all departments and be led by an Associate Dean of Faculty Affairs, a new position with both a mandate and resources to support the wide range of concerns for Science faculty, from recruitment throughout their career at UBC. Specifically, this body will

- Develop transparent and equitable procedures and policies for hiring, promotion, retention, awards and merit reviews.
- Promote effective leadership and establish effective mentoring programs to maximize faculty potential.
- Review resource distribution in the Faculty of Science and make this knowledge available to faculty members; assist departments in developing clear, equitable allocation schemes for their resources; streamline ways to share resources and provide a centralized infrastructure and administration for appropriate services.
- Work closely with the UBC administration to promote a more supportive environment for work/life balance, with a focus on child care facilities, financial assistance for rising housing costs, and leave and retirement options.