WISELI's Climate Workshops for Department Chairs: Evaluation Report

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[Appendices available upon request: wiseli@engr.wisc.edu]

Section I: Introduction and Methods

WISELI's series of *Climate Workshops for Department Chairs* are the culmination of efforts by many faculty and staff at UW-Madison during the past three years. In the original proposal to the NSF, these workshops were proposed as the following:

> UW-Madison has a successful workshop series on leadership designed for department chairs. In the series, chairs meet weekly with presenters who each address an aspect of being a chair. The purpose is not only information transfer but also building relationships that help them do their jobs more effectively. We will introduce a workshop on climate into this forum. This workshop will address the nature of climate, including real experiences of respected women scientists, strategies to address each of the manifestations of climate described above or discovered in our evaluation, and approaches to successful implementation of strategies.[1]

Initially, the topic of department climate was to be introduced within the Academic Leadership Series (ALS), which is a sequence of programmatic offerings for faculty and staff at UW-Madison. Since that time, WISELI's workshops have evolved into a 3-meeting series for current department chairs, which are designed and implemented by WISELI staff, and have only been affiliated with the ALS once. This report chronicles the evolution of the workshops and evaluates them as they are currently being offered.

Participant Observation

A variety of methods were used to evaluate the climate workshops. First and foremost, I used participant observation as a primary evaluation technique. Using this method assumes that "understanding the evaluand will be enhanced by an insider or empathetic view, one that requires assuming at least marginally a position of being in the context."[2] Accordingly, I attended all of the planning committee meetings (Fall 2002-Spring 2003), most of the workshop meetings (Fall 2003-Spring 2005),[3] and was the primary contact for the chairs and respondents when completing the department climate surveys. During these observations, I noted interactions and events, and interviewed participants both formally and informally.

Surveys

One of the key components of the workshops was the "department climate survey." This survey was based on the literature about climate and developed with input from the workshop planning committee. Further, it was pilot tested and revised with a group of three chairs in Fall 2003. The final survey, which had been in use since 2003, is found in Appendix A.

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[1] UW-Madison proposal to the NSF, 2001, pp.12-13.
[2] Mathison, S. (2005). *Encyclopedia of evaluation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
[3] I was unable to attend two meetings due to a prior commitment and maternity leave. In these cases, I relied on WISELI staff for their observations and notes.

As a means to understand their experience in the workshops, I also surveyed all of the participants in May of 2005. Nineteen out of 20 completed this survey for a response rate of 95%. The results from this survey are interwoven throughout the report. (A copy of the survey is found in Appendix B.)

Formative Evaluation and Ongoing Feedback

After the first series of meetings with three chairs who served as the "pilot" group in Fall 2003, I interviewed this group and wrote a report of my observations and recommendations. This report is found in Appendix C. WISELI staff enacted the suggestions and recommendations during the subsequent sessions. Further, through informal interactions after meetings and through email and phone discussions, I provided feedback to both Eve Fine and Jo Handelsman as they implemented the workshops.

Section II: The Department Climate Workshops

According to WISELI publicity materials, the following describes the *Climate Workshops for Department Chairs:*

> Based on the concepts of active learning, a series of three workshops will engage small groups of department chairs in discussions about climate in their own departments, and will provide chairs with the opportunity to learn from each others' experiences and ideas. A brief departmental climate survey administered between the first and second workshops will allow chairs to identify specific issues of concern for their departments and develop a plan to address these issues.

The Workshop Participants

Chairs were invited to participate in the "climate workshops" by the Deans of their respective Colleges and Schools at UW-Madison. They also received email announcements and publicity about the upcoming workshops directly from WISELI staff. In the follow-up survey of the chairs, 58% indicated that they participated due to WISELI's promotional material and 42% said they heard about it from their respective Deans. Two respondents attended the Academic Leadership Series and continued with the workshop after that event. One respondent said they heard about it from someone who previously participated. The following table indicates which School or College the participants ultimately came from.

UW School or College	
School/College 1	9
School/College 2	7
School/College 3	2
School/College 4	1
School/College 5	1
School/College 6	1
Total	**21**

Table 1: Participant's school or college affiliation

Including the pilot group, 21 faculty members, who were department chairs at the time, began the workshops. Of these, one withdrew after the initial meeting, leaving 20 who attended the full workshop series of three, and occasionally four, meetings.

Nineteen of the participants are men and one is a woman. Most of the participants indicated that their position as chair is an "elected" position (79%). On average, the participants have been chair of their departments for seven years. The length of time that a chair serves in the department is typically eight years. Ranges for these data are found in tables 2 and 3.

0-4 years	8
5-10 years	7
11-14 years	2
15+ years	2
Total	**19**

Table 2: Length of time that the participant is or will be department chair

0-4 years	8
5-10 years	7
11-14 years	1
15+ years	2
Total	**18**

Table 3: Typical length of time an individual serves as chair in their departments

Workshop Sessions and Goals

According to the WISELI website,[4] the following are listed as goals of the workshops:

- To increase awareness of climate and its influence on the research and teaching missions of a department;
- To identify various issues that can influence climate in a department;
- To present research on how unconscious assumptions and biases may influence climate;
- To enable chairs to assess climate in their own departments;
- To provide chairs with opportunities to enhance climate in their departments by learning from each others' experiences and ideas; and
- To provide chairs with advice and resources they can use to enhance climate in their departments.

The following description is provided about each session of the series:
Session 1:
- o Department chairs will engage in a general discussion of climate and the importance of fostering positive climates.
- o Introduction to web-based departmental climate survey.

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[4] http://wiseli.engr.wisc.edu/initiatives/climate/workshops_deptchairs.html

- o Presentation of resources to assist chairs in their efforts to enhance departmental climate.

Session 2:
Chairs will receive survey results for their individual departments, spend some time reviewing these results and have the opportunity to discuss survey findings. The main objective of this session will be to share experiences and expertise with other chairs and to learn from each other. Chairs will discuss and develop an action plan to address issues revealed by the survey. Chairs will also learn about resources and people on campus who can help them in their efforts to enhance climate.

Session 3:
Chairs will meet to discuss how they shared survey findings with their departments, what activities they engaged in to enhance the climate in their departments, and how successful they were. Chairs will also address specific topics such as the influence of leadership styles, organizational structure, and decision-making styles on departmental climate.

When asked to identify the value of each of the workshop components, they indicated that the facilitator (Jo Handelsman), interaction with other chairs, and the department surveys and results/report of the department survey were the most valuable components (see table 4).

	Extremely valuable	Somewhat valuable	Not at all valuable
The facilitator (Jo Handelsman)	17 (89%)	2 (11%)	0
Interaction with other chairs	15 (79%)	4 (21%)	0
Campus resources	3 (17%)	12 (67%)	3 (17%)
Reading resources and bibliography	3 (17%)	13 (72%)	2 (11%)
The department survey	16 (84%)	2 (11%)	1 (5%)
The results and report of responses from the survey	15 (79%)	4 (21%)	0
Meeting in a series of three sessions	10 (56%)	8 (44%)	0

Table 4: Responses to "How valuable was each of the components of the workshop series?"

When the workshop participants were asked to identify the level to which each of the workshop goals were met, they provided the responses found in table 5.

	This goal was definitely met	This goal was somewhat met	This goal was not at all met
Increased awareness of climate and its influence on the research and teaching missions	14 (74%)	5 (26%)	0
Identification of various issues that can influence climate in a department	15 (79%)	3 (16%)	1 (5%)
Understanding of research on how unconscious biases and assumptions may influence climate	8 (42%)	10 (53%)	1 (5%)
Assessing climate in your department	16 (84%)	3 (16%)	0
Enhanced climate in your department	7 (37%)	9 (47%)	3 (16%)
Learning from the other participants and the facilitator	16 (84%)	3 (16%)	0
Access to advice and resources to improve climate	7 (39%)	10 (56%)	1 (6%)

Table 5: Responses to the statement, "Please indicate the level to which each of the following goals was met:"

Clearly, identifying climate issues, assessing their department's climate and learning from the other participants and the facilitator were goals that were achieved, as indicated by most chairs.

Almost all of the respondents (95%) said that they would recommend others to attend the workshops. When asked *if* and *how* their expectations of the workshop were met, a sampling of the responses they provided included:

- I expected to (and did) obtain better understanding of climate-related issues and how to deal with them constructively.
- To be confident I was not missing something in my attempts to provide a good work climate.
- I had no expectations going in. I have had so much exposure to this area from various sources that I did not expect to learn much that I didn't already know.
- Basic ways to identify problems and formulate solutions.
- Better understanding of climate issues and departmental climate
- Understanding of how departments in other schools were organized and did or did not work.
- I simply felt this was an important activity and the workshops made the survey doable.
- I really wanted to know whether the climate in my dept was as positive and supportive as I perceived it to be. The workshop reinforced this idea but also pointed out a couple of problem areas that we are addressing.
- No pre-existing goals or expectations other than a general interest in fostering a nurturing climate.

- I hoped to gain input from other units on campus and this was achieved.
- I didn't have expectations but was pleased with what I learned.
- I hoped to get a validation of my assessment of our climate. This expectation was met.
- Information on experiences in other departments regarding issues affecting work environment climate, and means to improve it.

Most of the chairs indicated that after participating the workshops, the climate in their department has improved positively (see table 6).

The climate is:	
Significantly more positive	2 (11%)
Somewhat more positive	12 (63%)
The same as it was before	5 (26%)
Somewhat more negative	0
Significantly more negative	0

Table 6: Reponses to the question, "Since attending the workshops and doing the survey, how has the climate in your department changed?"

When asked what the WISELI staff could do to improve the workshops, the following responses from some of the participants included:

- The coordinators of the workshop should not require department chairs to do the survey. They should first discuss literature showing that surveys without follow up can do damage. I learned this AFTER the survey was distributed. I felt pressured to respond to the survey in ways that did not feel right. In the end I ignored the workshop coordinators and did what felt right for me.
- Better insight into interpreting survey results. Better advice on including or excluding academic and classified (or separate surveys from survey professors).
- Learn the environment of medical school department, understand the culture, interview chairs and directors, plan a process that looks at the complex issues of clinical work/education/scholarship.
- More information about what other departments at UW or elsewhere have done to enhance work climate.
- One thing that would help chairs of large departments would be to provide as additional service of summarizing the individual comments using social science analysis tools. I would even pay for it.
- It might be useful to add a follow-up session 6-9 months after the workshop.
- Get them to make time to attend. Suggest strong support from Dean.
- Possibly have departments present case studies of how units have improved climate. Examples are very powerful to illustrate the impact of relatively small changes. Sharing is very important as departments vary so much across campus.
- Greater structure to portions for sharing of experience between departments.

Section III: The Department Climate Survey

In this next section, aggregated data from the surveys of departments are described. When appropriate, quantitative data are portrayed using descriptive measures or statistical tests. Qualitative data are shown using bulleted items and lists.

The Departments and Participants

One of the key components of the workshop series was the surveying of the participating chairs' departments. Twenty-one UW-Madison departments were surveyed, which included approximately 2260 individuals, of which 1121 responded (see table 7).

Departments Surveyed	Survey Population	Final n=	Response Rate
Department 1	26	13	50%
Department 2	101	30	30%
Department 3	Listserv	39	N/A
Department 4	415	126	30%
Department 5	16	9	56%
Department 6	45	24	53%
Department 7	~60	41	~68%
Department 8	88	61	69%
Department 9	25	15	60%
Department 10	~650	182	~30%
Department 11	46	34	74%
Department 12	95/?	63/30	66%/?
Department 13	Listserv	28	N/A
Department 14	89/82	54/51	61%/62%
Department 15	?/39	28/31	N/A
Department 16	240	107	45%
Department 17	92	60	65%
Department 18	25	13	52%
Department 19	42	25	60%
Department 20	19	15	79%
Department 21	62	36	58%
TOTALS	**~2260**	**1121**	

Table 7: Departments, number of individuals surveyed and responded, and response rates

The department chairs were able to identify the groups that they wished to survey. Most elected to survey faculty, unclassified staff (including scientists, post-docs, etc), and classified staff. One chose to survey faculty only and a few chose to include graduate students. Most of the respondents were faculty, followed by graduate students, unclassified staff and classified staff (see table 8).

Title	N	%
Classified Staff	168	15%
Unclassified Staff	218	19%
Faculty Member	357	32%
Scientist	34	3%
Instructor/Adjunct	22	2%
Post-doc	59	5%
Graduate Student	232	21%
No response/blank	31	3%
Total	**1121**	**100%**

Table 8:Title of respondents, number responding, and percentage of survey population

Results of the Department Climate Surveys

All of the respondents were asked to indicate the climate in their departments by responding to the following:

On a scale from 1 (very negative) to 5 (very positive), please rate the climate in your department:

Very Negative	Negative	Mediocre	Positive	Very Positive
1	2	3	4	5

When all responses are averaged, the mean score is 3.72, which falls on the "positive" side. Breaking these data down even further, post-docs indicated the highest perceived climate. Faculty, classified and unclassified staff averages were almost identical (see table 9).

Title	N	Mean
Classified Staff	168	3.64
Unclassified Staff	218	3.65
Faculty Member	357	3.66
Scientist	34	3.76
Instructor/Adjunct	22	4.05
Post-doc	59	4.07
Graduate Student	232	3.88
Total	**1090**	

Table 9: Mean overall department climate score by title

The respondents were also asked to identify their level of agreement with statements about their department using the following scale. Averages to each statement are found in table 10.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
	1	2	3	4	5

Average	
3.96	My department is a welcoming place to work.
4.19	I understand my role and responsibilities as a member of the department.
3.76	I have the resources I need to be productive in my job.
3.58	I feel appreciated for the work I do in the department.
4.01	The Chair of the department or my supervisor respects my opinions and contributions.
3.82	Others in the department respect my opinions.
3.50	I trust the people who make decisions that affect me.
3.10	I am able to influence the decisions that are made in the department.
3.68	The Chair of the department appropriately consults or delegates decisions to a group or committee.
3.53	I feel safe voicing my feelings in front of others.
4.28	My work contributes to the mission or purpose of my department.
3.74	Others recognize how my work contributes to the mission or purpose of my department.
3.92	I am happy with the professional relationships I've formed with others in the department.
3.15	I have had a thorough performance review in the last year.
3.26	There is somebody in the department who promotes my professional development.
3.38	Resources and other benefits are allocated fairly within the department.
2.42	Even though other people are around, I feel isolated.
3.88	My work is commensurate with my training and experience.
3.57	I have the same level of responsibility and recognition as those whom I consider my peers.
1.68	I experience subtle or overt forms of harassment or discrimination due to my gender, race or other personal attributes.
3.87	I feel reasonably accommodated when personal and professional responsibilities are in conflict.
3.74	I am aware of places or people to go to if I am faced with a problem or issue in the department.
3.54	Differences among people are valued in the department.

Table 10: Average responses to statements, N=1121

In general, the statements fell on the "positive" side, with the ones in red found to be particularly good. Statistical between-group differences in response rates were found with only three statements:[5]

➢ Others in the department respect my opinions.

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[5] ANOVA test of between-subject effects, *p<.05*

➢ There is somebody in the department who promotes my professional development.
➢ Differences among people are valued in the department.

The survey participants were also asked a series of open-ended questions about their departments. The following common themes emerged from these questions:

➢ Please list up to five aspects of your department that contribute to a positive climate:
  o Collegial, professional, good teamwork, good conflict resolution process
  o Quality scholarship, research, highly skilled people, good reputation
  o Good supervisor
  o Care for the work being done, passion for the work
  o Ethical behaviors
  o Social opportunities and activities
  o Reasonable workload
  o Welcoming, friendly
  o Common goals, mission
  o Respect for others
  o Helpful faculty, staff, mentoring resources, grants assistance
  o Diversity
  o "Open doors," Open-mindedness, open discussion encouraged, information readily available
  o Supportive atmosphere, positive environment
  o Stability
  o Professional development, career advancement opportunities
  o Included in decision-making, representation on committees
  o Sufficient monetary resources
  o Variety, flexibility, autonomy
  o Good work space, good location

➢ Please list up to five aspects of your department that contribute to a negative climate:
  o External pressures from College, Univ. administrators, Dean
  o Gossip
  o Negative feelings, unenthusiastic workers, low morale, feeling underappreciated
  o Unethical, unprofessional behaviors, lack of accountability or responsibility, cutting corners, quality concerns
  o Budget/financial issues, lack of raises
  o Lack of unified vision, goals, lack of direction, self-interest
  o Politics
  o Inequitable allocation of resources, inequitable treatment of department members
  o Lack of polite behaviors (smile, acknowledging a person)
  o Harassment, discrimination, lack of respect

- o Individuals who single-handedly affect the climate
- o Inflexibility
- o Feeling left out, isolated, lack of communication, lack of teamwork
- o Hierarchy, people acting as if they are "better" than others, poor leadership structure
- o Turf wars within departments
- o Lack of interest in teaching
- o Graduate student issues, funding
- o Lack of trust
- o Left out of decision-making process, lack of participation in meetings by everyone
- o Poor conflict resolution process
- o Short-staffed
- o Inefficiency, disorganization, ineffective leadership, poor leadership style (punitive, unsupportive), poor management style
- o Lack of performance evaluations
- o Few opportunities for career advancement, difficult to find out about advancement opportunities
- o Department not "evolving" or moving forward
- o Overworked, workload too large, time constraints
- o Space is too small, overcrowding

- ➢ What are the expectations you have for the Chair as the leader of your department?
    - o Building community, fostering relationships, connect with faculty and staff
    - o Be a leader
    - o Hire competent faculty and staff
    - o Candid, honest
    - o Well-informed
    - o Fair, treats others equally, support for all regardless of differences, allow all to contribute to decision-making process
    - o Distribute power and responsibilities fairly, hold people accountable
    - o Provide goals and directions to the department, visionary, inspiration, lead by example, advance the department, be proactive
    - o Lobby University, schools and colleges for money
    - o Be the department representative, department advocate, especially to outsiders
    - o Communicate clearly, listen, be open-minded, be visible, be approachable
    - o Foster positive climate
    - o Resolve conflicts
    - o Be organized, efficient, be a good businessperson
    - o Increase diversity
    - o Mentoring, promoting career development
    - o Supportive, appreciative of people's work
    - o Promote merit compensation, job security

➢ Please identify one thing the Chair could do to improve the climate in your department:
  o Communicate better, listen more
  o Be present, visible, know everyone
  o Be proactive, lead by example, be positive
  o Be organized
  o Foster respectful behavior
  o Bring people together, initiate events
  o Model professional behavior
  o Recognize good work, hold people accountable
  o Get more resources
  o Delegate
  o Treat everyone equally, respect and value everyone
  o Encourage participation in committees from staff, grad students
  o Include everyone in decision-making process
  o Foster career development
  o Create an effective leadership structure
  o Address "micro-climate"—e.g., lab climate, area/discipline climate
  o Encourage collaboration
  o Communicate common goals, mission of the department
  o Represent, support all people in the department, not just faculty

Section IV: Re-surveying Departments

When the workshop participants were asked if they would like their departments resurveyed, 10 (56%) said "yes," while eight (44%) indicated "no." Open-ended responses included:

- This would depend on timing. To date, I haven't taken any action as a result of the meetings and survey, primarily because I only completed this recently.
- It is likely that my tenure as chair will be up in 3-6 months. It is too soon to see major change. The new chair will need tome to "get on her/his feet" before another survey.
- The results of the survey were very positive. It would be useful to survey again after more time has elapsed.
- Overall I did not find it to be a useful exercise. The response rate especially for faculty and staff was terrible (<30%). The big climate issue right now is that grant funding is down and people are losing their funding and people are going to be laid off. I don't need a survey to tell me how they feel about this issue.
- Always helps to use the yardstick from time to time to see how things measure up.
- This does not seem needed.
- After some time has passed, perhaps 2-3 years, it would be interesting and re-energizing.
- Same problems would exist as did in the initial survey - the SURVEY problems, not the climate problems.
- I think these should be done about every three years.

- I would like to do this at a longer interval, say 3 years, to assess systematic, long-term changes in climate. Right now, I am aware of communication issues among a few faculty, which for now have made the dept a less pleasant place to be, but am working toward resolution. I am hopeful that this is a very temporary situation.
- This would need to be discussed with our new Dept Chair, [NAME]. I would be in favor or another survey but [NAME] needs to be consulted first.
- This would be welcome. I believe that departmental climate is somewhat improved, but only a survey could determine this objectively.
- Not sure - I've thought about it. Do not like to impose upon people's time with the survey, although information is useful.
- Our climate is quite good and I expect it to continue to improve based on what we are already doing.
- Good benchmark for new chair incoming.
- Next year would be the appropriate time.

One chair requested that we re-survey his department. The first climate survey for this department was sent out on April 30, 2004 and 23 people responded. The second survey was sent on May 9, 2005 and 55 people responded. For this department, the average climate score increased in a positive direction—from 3.21 to 3.71. We have to be cautious when attributing this change to the workshop itself, as the Chair was new in 2004 and some of the respondents may have been evaluating the former chair. The change may also be due to an increase in respondents overall, and who the respondents were for each survey. Further study of the use of pre/post tests to evaluate the workshops is needed and will be possible when other chairs volunteer to have their departments re-surveyed.

Section V: Recommendations

The data reported herein suggest that the participants find value in the workshops, that many of the goals are being met, and that the survey allows the chairs to understand climate in their department at one point in time. Based on the data provided in this report and from my observations, the following suggestions are provided regarding the structure and content of the workshops, and the department climate survey.

Structure and Content of the Workshop

➢ *Maintain the 3-meeting series.*
Despite scheduling difficulties, it appears as though the participants appreciated meeting in a series, and occasionally asked for a fourth session. Rarely did a participant miss a meeting and from their evaluation of the workshop, 56% of the chairs noted that the 3-meeting series was "very valuable."

➢ *Further develop session 3 to meet the goals of the workshop.*
When asked, the chairs indicated that the following three goals were met:
- o Learning from other participants and the facilitator;
- o Assessing climate in their department; and
- o Identifying issues that influence climate.

They were less likely to feel that the following two goals were met:
- o Enhancing climate in their department; and
- o Gaining access to advice and resources to improve climate.

It is in session 3 that the participants are to discuss specific ways to enhance climate in their department and use various campus resources to improve it. Case studies or action plans may be a way to structure the discussion in session 3 and provide the chairs with resources and specific ideas to implement.

➤ *Encourage cross-college/school participation.*
From my observations, cross-college discussions provide the optimum learning environment. Chairs are more likely to share their experiences and explain the environment in which they work because they cannot assume that a chair from a different college understands this context. They may also feel as if they can be honest about their department without the fear of "gossiping" about a college/school. Further, the traditions or advice that they describe may be completely new to a chair from a different college, which may provide him/her with new ideas to consider.

➤ *Ensure skilled facilitation.*
The sessions appear to be the most effective when the facilitator strikes a balance between allowing discussion and providing information and resources. Jo and Eve were able to do this by moderating the discussion, asking questions to keep it moving, and offering advice when needed. A skilled facilitator, and not necessarily a current or former chair, is needed to maintain the pace and effectiveness of the workshop series. The chairs needed to the facilitator as an "expert" in climate, not in leading a department.

The Department Climate Survey

➤ *Discuss limitations of the survey, such as response rates, extensively.*
Even though we spent some time in session 1 identifying issues with the survey, they still surfaced. We now know that response rates and number of department members surveyed is negatively correlated. That is, "larger" departments had lower response rates. Knowing this can reassure participants about their departments' response rates and explain why they should not discount the findings.

➤ *Discuss limitations of the results extensively.*
Approximately one-third of the participants asked to have their results further broken down by title. Due to the conditions of our IRB/informed consent approval, we were unable to do this. At the same time, the underlying request needs to be addressed. Why do they want to know this? What will this information provide? How can they get the data they need through other means (e.g., focus groups, departmental committees)? All of these questions need to be discussed up front to address misconceptions about the goals of the survey.

➤ *Code open-ended responses for larger departments.*
With larger departments (>50 respondents), coding the open-ended responses appeared to be helpful to the chairs. Unfortunately, this adds a significant amount of time to creating the report but appears to enhance the chairs understanding of the data. Consequently, this may be a beneficial trade-off.

➢ ***Re-survey a department if requested.***
  For those who would like to re-survey, one to three years appears to be the
  optimum amount of time. We currently have a group of chairs that now fall into
  this category. What we do with these results need to be discussed. To date, only
  one chair has elected to re-do his climate survey. Meeting with him in October
  will enable us to hear about the value of this activity.

These preceding suggestions stem from the analysis of data collected from fall of 2003 to
May of 2005. Hopefully, these ideas will serve to enhance an already successful WISELI
program.