

# **The Climate for Women Faculty in the Sciences and Engineering: Blueprints for Failure and Success**

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March 22, 2004

# Presentation Overview

- ◆ *The Climate for Women Faculty in the Sciences and Engineering: Their Stories, Successes, and Suggestions, February 2004*

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- ◆ Illustrate examples of negative experiences and provide some ideas of ways to address issues
- ◆ Positive climate defined by *success, satisfaction, and the decision to stay*

# Interview Sample

## ◆ 26 women faculty

- 7 from CALS
- 2 from ENGR
- 8 from L&S
- 7 from MED
- 2 from PHARM/VET

## ◆ Titles

- 10 Assistant Profs
- 4 Associate Profs
- 12 Professors

## ◆ Years on campus

- 1-4 years: 12
- 5-12 years: 8
- 13-30 years: 6
- *Average=8*

# Methods

- ◆ 5 Interviewers, 1-3 hour interviews
- ◆ 22 interviews taped; 4 notes taken
- ◆ Tapes transcribed, and transcriptions and notes coded
- ◆ 2042 quotes, 1000+ codes; collapsed into 367 final codes, with 1-50+ instances in each

# Highlighted Areas

1. The Hiring Process
2. The Department
3. The Tenure Process
4. Leadership Involvement
5. Balancing Work and Family

◆ *NOTE: All quotes are taken directly from the interviewees or from interviewers' notes*

# 1. The Hiring Process: Lack of Support and Resources

*How did the negotiation for your start-up package go?*

Absolutely abysmally from my standpoint; from their standpoint, probably great. I was in a very vulnerable position - I was asking to postpone my start date and I had no post-doc, I was straight out of a Ph.D. [program]. I was so grateful to have the position that I didn't negotiate at all. I had an abysmal start-up package, and I just didn't feel empowered to [negotiate].

*So did you do any kind of negotiating when you were in this process?*

Well, the main concern for me was a job for my husband. And that was what I was fighting for. [I] got nothing.

*Nothing, huh?*

[Another] department told him that if he brings his grant, they'll give him the space. Then he pulled the grant and they gave him the space and actually, he was quite fine for a few years. He's still on soft money, but my department gave me absolutely nothing and would not negotiate with me.

I didn't know it at the time, but the chair wasn't doing his job. It's the chair's job to look out for the assistant professors and fight their battles so they can get a start. So at the end of the tenure process, then you can say, 'well you know they had every chance.' The department chair didn't do that, he didn't do his job.



# 1. The Hiring Process: Ideas for Success

The research group relevant to what I do took me out for lunch and then afterwards, the two most junior members [of the department] took me separately aside, and they were very helpful in saying what they had previously got in their start-up package . . . it was really useful to know what other people had gotten.

Actually my experience overall was very positive. The department chair was very enthusiastic and when I would suggest something he would look into it. When I visited it was very friendly and I had the opportunity to talk to everybody in the department, and find out a little bit about the graduate students and sort of what's expected. So I feel it went well.

They were also quite supportive of my husband. There was no spousal hire program at the time, but they asked questions; 'What does your husband do? Should he need a job we'll try and put him in contact with the right people.' Later on, they did put him in touch with someone who was doing similar research . . . that led into something else and he's been fine here ever since.

*Let's talk about what you think can be done on campus to improve the climate for women...*

I think the tenure and the start-up process are critical. The Graduate School can help with that.

*And what can they do?*

Well, renegotiate the start-up and make sure that the women get their fair share.

*And how would they do that?*

By making sure when they award the start-up packages, that they are equitable.

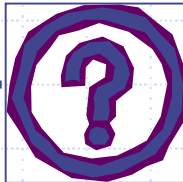
That they're giving as much to the men as to the women.

## 2. The Department: Lack of Support and Encouragement

I had this community of people who all thought that I was a really worthwhile individual and that I had a lot to offer. . . I feel like I showed up, and to the extent that I have opinions, I'm just a pain in the ass and nobody is the slightest bit interested in anything I have to say.

One of the problems with junior women faculty in this environment is that your tenure and your prestige is based on your research. So, if that's the case, why not support the women faculty so that they can be successful in that? That comes down to space, equipment, and having time to do the research, and to not teach or run an undergraduate program [like I did]. The [department] put up a huge roadblock for me to get tenure.

Before I got here, when [X] was chair, two other people had babies under his leadership and [it] was fine! 'Oh! Congratulations! Good. Take the semester off. You have a grad student to fill in. Okay, that's no problem.' Blah blah blah. And it was a handshake and a nod and, 'Of course . . . do what you need to do. Let me know when you can get back on your feet'-type thing. Versus [the new] chair has never had kids, does not think the idea of parental leave is meritorious.





## 2. The Department: Ideas for Success

The most important thing for me was to be encouraged. Salary was not as important. Space was not. Just keep encouraging me. Everybody has their downs – grants and papers coming back rejected. When you are surrounded by women or men who care – it really makes a difference.

I've come out at the other end of the tunnel and I know now what I have and where it ought to go, but in those first few years this was a department that took on someone with a relatively slim publication record . . . and was willing to believe that it had promise . . . They saw something there that I knew was inside and just rode it out with me.

The people I work with are great; the best thing is the support . . . The system has been very responsive to me and my needs, and is very responsive to providing me the resources to build the [research] program I want to build.

She said she would have benefited from discussions at the administrative level that did not require her to be face-to-face with just the department chair to discuss and solve the pregnancy issue. If there had been an external place to get information or help with creative solutions to address the issue without it being so personalized just to her, that would have helped. She re-iterated how the chair and the committee seemed to have no creativity or thoughts about how to proceed. . . . She further explained that she would like to see an 'official mechanism' that helps women know what all of the options are, and helps them to determine the best choices. There needs to be a 'more formalized system' so people have ideas about how to proceed. The [department] didn't know what to do. She wanted official options to consider – that would have made it easier for her to decide what to do.

*(Notes from interview)*

# 3. The Tenure Process: Ambiguity and Policy

I know I have to get publications. Day to day, how do I get publications? How do you make students not leave? How do you? I lost 3 students last spring – graduate students who up and left. Money and time has been invested in these students. Projects were left open, unpublishable. I can't control these and neither can my tenure committee.

Sometimes I wonder about what the policy is . . . I sort of know that the tenure clock can stop if you give birth and then after that it is kind of a vague idea. I know I can do it. I just have to go and find out, but I really don't know how I should start.

Some of them [stopped the tenure clock] and some of them didn't. Some of them felt that that was going to be viewed negatively . . . I think there's still a lot of question marks and uncertainty and just psychological pressure that goes along with that process.

*So [the policy] may not be helpful?*

Well, I would not want say get rid of it. I think it's, in some cases, it's necessary, but it's not viewed as a completely positive thing.



# 3. The Tenure Process: Ideas for Success

I've talked to other people at other universities and they don't have such a formal structure for mentoring new professors, so I can't say enough positive things about it. I thought it was a very positive experience in helping me to assess my priorities and helping me with my game plan in terms of teaching and research and so I feel very positive [about the process].

I was advised not to take on any major thing while I was getting tenure, which was good advice. We are very careful as a department to watch [assistant professors] . . . to make sure that we didn't overload them in the department. We also give them the advice that they shouldn't be accepting editorships and they shouldn't be accepting a lot of committee assignments while they are getting tenure. So we do watch over them here.

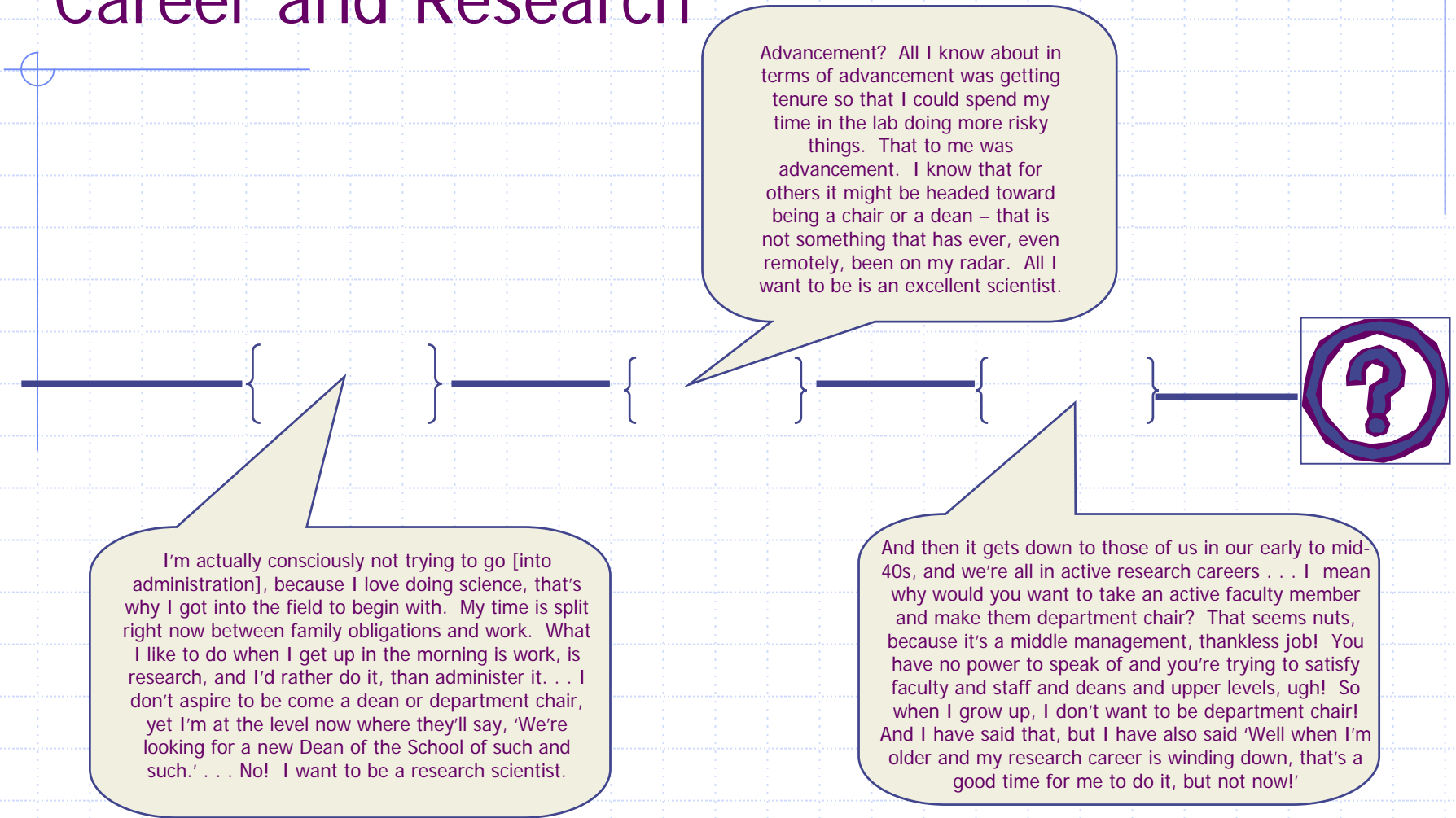
What I would love to see is that tenured faculty as a group deal with untenured faculty as a group, so that if some faculty was seeing that I wasn't getting what I needed from my mentor, they should've stepped in and provided it. You know, 'Where is this study going? What's getting her bogged down or what does she need? Can we offer to read this for her? Let's take her out to lunch.'

*And does she have the right mentor?*

Exactly. You could've asked her [about her mentor], 'How are your research discussions going?' She would've said, 'Well, we don't have very many.'

One of the big underlying issues and misconceptions is that what you do in the next five years is the most important thing . . . that it's rapid production that matters, rather than looking at an investment in a person over the totality of their career . . . I feel like I'm being very productive, I'm bringing income into [the unit name], so they can't argue with that. And I feel like I will get my research done, but I need to do it on my own timeline, and my own timeline isn't their timeline. I think that's true for a lot of women, that we will be productive, but we will do it over a longer period of time.

# 4. Leadership Involvement: Stage of Career and Research



# 4. Leadership Involvement: Ideas for Success

It would be healthy for the university. I think there's a different style of problem-solving that we've been socialized to excel at . . . So I think that having women in administration would enhance the University's ability to use all kinds of resources to solve problems. We have a problem-solving mentality that's [based in] collaboration.

There are limits, I could do nothing but service if I said 'yes' all the time. And again there's a smaller pool of women scientists at the correct level for serving on many of these things. And so the same people are hit up multiple times. And if you have a reputation for being effective, then it's even more so. So I think as a woman you have to actually learn how to say 'no,' and learn to assert yourself while still being a good citizen. I'm not talking about shirking any contribution or shirking responsibilities, but if you said 'yes' all the time, you'd be driven into the ground and you wouldn't get your work done, which is what you need to do for your long-term research, or your long-term academic success.

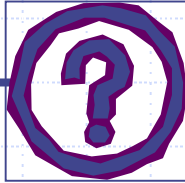
Yeah, I think at some stage you're able to make more of a difference.

*Stage, meaning stage in your career?*

Yeah, in your career. Right now I think I'd opt to do excellent work. At some stage when my grant area is less hot, I have a lot of skills and a lot of insight that I could contribute to an administrative position. And so while that's not what I aspire to, I think that that would be a good thing for women to do at some point – be involved in [administration].

# 5. Balancing Work and Family: Priorities

There are some departments here where you may have a chair who is actively antagonistic towards women, who does not have any tolerance for flexibility of schedule, who is not willing to say 'Well we know you get your work done, and so if you're in here on Saturday and Sunday, but you have to be out on Tuesday and Wednesday, that's okay.' Instead they say, 'No, you be here, our hours are from 8 to 4:30, and you be here from 8 to 4:30 every day.' . . . I would not encourage new faculty members, if I knew the people that they were interviewing, I would not encourage them to go into that department. Because life is too short . . . there's no reason that people should have to deal with that.



When [my children] were younger I did not travel at all. Or, [I would go] once a year to one meeting. That's it. I stayed home. Now I am going whenever I can to make up for lost time, but when they were younger I really was homebound . . . I could have probably progressed a little bit faster and expanded a little bit more if I did travel more. But that's something that families work together. In my family, that's the way I wanted it and I'm sure if I wanted to go, [I could have]. . . . But that's the way I wanted it to be and probably I paid a price.

I think it's not so much what role gender has played in success of my career, but in the next ten years, my ability to continue to do good research will depend on my family. I think that once your family is compromised, your support system is compromised . . . I think if the University wants to retain people mid-career on, which is important for a university because we train them. We put all this money into people. But I think retaining women after you've invested so much . . .

*It's going to be the challenge because, because women are leaving?*

Yeah. Women are leaving if they cannot make it, it's not [that] they're not getting high enough pay and things like that, but that you can't make your whole life work.

# 5. Balancing Work and Family: Ideas for Success

Yeah it's really balanced . . . The pursuit of science is never finished – it could go on for 24 hours if you let it. So I have starting and stopping points, and organize my day almost neurotically and finish at a particular time. I go home and I'm with my family 100%. And I only come back if I'm in the middle of an experiment that needs to be scored that night or there is some paperwork that needs to be done. And I try not to be here on weekends.

I was pregnant the first year that I arrived here, and I never felt that he said, 'Oh, we just hired her and she just went out and got pregnant . . . there goes her research career. There goes our investment.' I never felt that. And in fact, [the chair] was so good and so wonderful about the whole thing that I even attribute the health of my family and being happy in this environment [to him].

My actual experience here was very good . . . for the most part, my colleagues in my department were just super. And it made a tremendous difference to me to have a department chair who was really supportive of that, because I was still relatively new, it was my second or third year here, and to have at least a handful of colleagues who would come over and say, 'How's it going? How are you doing? Oh, it's so fun to have a baby come to the meetings.' You know, they would make nice comments to me.

Whatever mechanisms we can do to support women in particular who are trying to juggle careers and families at that critical point in their life – it's a decade or so worth of time in particular that life is really difficult, and you're pulled in so many different directions. Whatever mechanisms are effective for that, with the recognition that there is not a one-size-fits-all solution.



# Considerations and Limitations

- ◆ Interviewees were asked a variety of questions, not all the same
- ◆ Each woman's story was different
- ◆ Results suggest range of experiences and examples; not pervasiveness
- ◆ Cannot generalize beyond this sample
- ◆ Data should be treated confidentially





# Discussion