

Women Faculty Programs: Advancing Women Faculty Careers at The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center - And Beyond

Presenting author: Elizabeth L Travis, PhD, The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center, USA
Susan Peterson, PhD, MPH The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center, USA
Abby Mitchell, MBA The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center, USA
Muge Simsek, MBA The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center, USA

BACKGROUND: Currently, about 50% of MD and PhD degrees in medicine and science are awarded to women, but women remain under-represented in the professor rank and in leadership positions at U.S. cancer centers. In 2007, MD Anderson established the office of Women Faculty Programs, whose mission is “to create a culture where women physician and scientist choose to be.”

HYPOTHESIS: That a dedicated initiative led by an Associate Vice President reporting directly to the Provost, is necessary to accelerate the advancement of women into senior ranks and specifically leadership positions and that this can only be accomplished by partnering with our leaders and faculty both women and men.

METHODS: A broad integrated approach with four strategies: (1) Promote organizational change by increasing and facilitating women’s participation throughout the institution; (2) Provide learning and mentoring opportunities over the entire career spectrum; (3) Increase the visibility and recognition of women in science and medicine; and (4) Serve as a national model on and contribute to academic medicine’s knowledge-base on creating a gender-balanced culture and on enhancing the advancement of women in science and medicine.

RESULTS: (1) Revision of leadership search committee policy to require (a) women and minorities on every search committee and (b) that the short list of final candidates must include woman or a minority. Resulted in a 13% increase, 27% to 40%, women on search committees and a doubling of the percentage of women in leadership position, from 14% to 29%; (2) Establishment of a) an endowed award, Margaret L. Kripke Legend Award, which recognizes women and men who champion the advancement of women in cancer science and medicine and b) Woman Leading the Way Lecture Series that honors women physician and scientists who have made outstanding contribution to their field, 50% of whom were members of either the National Academy of Medicine or National Academy of Science; (3) Sponsorship of 113 women faculty to attend national career development programs; (4) Aggressive advocacy of a talent management strategy, sponsorship, which is new to academia and might have the potential to increase the number of women in leadership positions, as it has been shown to do in the business world. Sponsorship is a pro-active, intentional approach that links high potential individuals (protégées) with accomplished leaders (sponsors) who publicly use their position, power and credibility in order to accelerate the move of the protégées into senior leadership positions; (5) Establishment of supporting committees on gender inclusiveness in each division, facilitating customization of activities while providing oversight and support; (6) Co-founding of a Women Senior Leaders Network across UT System, a geographically dispersed organization of public higher education with 14 components. The network’s mission is to proactively advance women at leadership levels at these institutions, with attention to diversity and inclusion.

Well-funded and well-staffed, WFP provides a full range of programs that are now integral to institutional life and could be adapted to the specific environment of GAP members. Among the strategies, the highest priority was – and remains – to increase the representation of women in leadership positions.