

Survey Results on the New STEM Faculty Networking Dinner

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The Office of Academic Planning and Assessment contacted all 35 faculty members who had attended at least one of the New STEM Faculty Networking Dinner events, and asked them to provide feedback about their experiences with the dinner sessions. The survey was first administered in person at the March 10, 2006 dinner, with several attendees completing it at that time. The following week, the remainder of attendees were contacted by e-mail, and asked to return the survey by e-mail attachment or interoffice mail. In total, 23 faculty members responded to the survey, resulting in a 66% response rate. The results of the survey are summarized below. Following the summary, all survey questions and their responses are presented.

Profile of survey respondents

The 23 survey respondents hold appointments in many different STEM departments, their diverse backgrounds indicative of the interdisciplinarity of the networking dinners. While the Biology Department had the greatest representation among respondents, with four faculty members returning completed surveys, faculty from an additional 14 departments provided input. There is variation as well in terms of the years of appointment of individual survey respondents. A majority of respondents – a total of 14 out of 22, or 64%, had begun their appointments in the last year or in this current year. Respondents also vary in the number of dinners they attended, from as few as one to as many as four dinners.

Types of networking experienced through the program

The survey respondents were asked to indicate the sorts of networking opportunities that they have had through the New STEM Faculty Networking Dinners. When asked to indicate if they have met potential research collaborators, potential teaching collaborators, and potential friends (with instructions to check all that apply), the majority of respondents indicated that they made research (68.2%) and/or personal (72.7%) connections. Though a goal of the dinner organizers was to facilitate the formation of research and personal connections, two (9.1%) attendees also reported meeting potential teaching collaborators during the dinner as well.

Respondents were then asked about the substance of the conversations they had engaged in. Specifically, they were asked to indicate if they talked about the tenure process, research issues, teaching issues, or other issues (with additional space given for them to write in other subjects of conversation). The most frequently reported subject of conversation was that of research issues (68.2%). In addition, a number of faculty mentioned talking about the tenure process (22.7%) and teaching issues (22.7%). Finally, individuals listed other topics discussed, including UMass resources, and funding/grant development opportunities.

The survey respondents were also asked to provide an example that illustrates the type of connection they have made as a result of the networking dinners. Eight individuals provided examples or otherwise elaborated on their experiences. Respondents' descriptions reveal a continuum of experience, from more preliminary contacts to the beginnings of substantive collaboration. One attendee noted, "I realized that an area of my research that I was stuck on could be greatly assisted by a faculty member from engineering after hearing a short presentation", while another stated an interest in pursuing collaboration with computational colleagues from the STEM dinners.

Evaluations on the program's usefulness, and suggestions for the future

The survey respondents were asked to identify any other new faculty networking programs they had attended, and if they had attended any, to compare this program to those others. Only five faculty members indicated that they had attended other such events, including dinner with the Chancellor (2), an introductory workshop by CET (1, possibly referring to the Center for Teaching), a grant writing seminar held by Bruce McCandless (1), and a proposal workshop (1). When comparing this event to the other events they attended, three respondents (60%) said that the New STEM Faculty Networking Dinner was more effective in meeting the goal of networking, one respondent (20%) said that the other event he/she attended was more effective, and one faculty member answered "more and less", stating, "This is more effective because I hear research, but this event is less effective at establishing personal connections because we don't have as much time to chat." Because the number of people who attended other faculty networking events was so small, it is not possible to speak of a pattern or draw any generalizations comparing this event to the others. **It is worth noting that the majority of respondents have not participated in any other faculty networking opportunity. This suggests the important role programs like this can play in facilitating faculty members' transition to UMass.**

The survey respondents were also asked if they would come to this event again, and 22 of the 23 respondents answered this question directly. Out of the 22 respondents, 17 (77.3%) said that they would attend another dinner, 3 (13.6%) said they would not do so, and 2 (9.1%) added "maybe" to the response possibilities. Many of those who would attend subsequent dinners identified exposure to the research of their colleagues, as well as the more general opportunity to meet others, as their principle reasons. Their comments highlight the expanded opportunities offered by the dinner, as well as the widespread need for such events. In the words of one attendee, "academe can be quite isolating". Those who were not interested in attending future dinners seemed to have already established the sorts of connections that suited them, with one attendee noting that the level of networking and meeting other new faculty would have been more appropriate in the first year, and another stating that his/her *intradepartmental* collaborations were sufficient.

The survey included a request for suggestions on how the program might be improved, along with a separate question requesting suggestions for other sorts of events that attendees think would be useful. Eight individuals indicated that they had difficulties with the days or times for which the dinners were scheduled. There also appears to be a widely-held interest in having opportunities for more informal interaction with fellow colleagues, as indicated in numerous response to both questions. Some faculty members also expressed an interest in having other topics addressed during the meeting, including grants, teaching, outreach, and the tenure process.

New STEM Faculty Networking Dinner Evaluation

Please help us assess the effectiveness of this new program. Your feedback will help contribute to its improvement. Be assured that we will protect your identity – reporting will be done in the aggregate; no individually identifiable results will be disseminated.

1) What is your UMass Amherst Program/Department?

Department	Respondents (n=23)
Biochemistry and Molecular Biology	2
Biology	4
Chemical Engineering	1
Chemistry	1
Civil and Environmental Engineering	1
Computer Science	1
Electrical and Computer Engineering	2
Food Science	1
Mechanical and Industrial Engineering	1
Microbiology	2
Nutrition	1
Physics	2
Plant, Soil and Insect Sciences	1
Psychology	1
Veterinary and Animal Sciences	2

2) What year did you begin your faculty appointment at UMass Amherst?

Year of appointment	Respondents (n=22)	Percent of respondents
2006	2	9.1%
2005	12	54.5%
2004	4	18.2%
2003	3	13.6%
2002	1	4.5%
missing	1	--

3) How many of these STEM new faculty dinners have you attended?

Times attended	Respondents (n=23)	Percent of respondents
1 time	6	26.1%
2 times	5	21.7%
3 times	6	26.1%
4 times	6	26.1%

4) **What sorts of networking opportunities has the New STEM Faculty Dinner provided to you?**
(please check all that apply):

a. I have met:

- potential research collaborators
- potential teaching collaborators
- potential personal friends

Type of networking contact	Respondents (n=22)	Percent of respondents
Met potential research collaborators	15	68.2%
Met potential teaching collaborators	2	9.1%
Met potential personal friends	16	72.7%

b. I have engaged in productive conversations with fellow attendees about:

- the tenure process
- research issues
- teaching issues
- other issues relevant to faculty life at UMass Amherst (specify): _____

Conversation topics	Respondents (n=22)	Percent of respondents
Tenure process	5	22.7%
Research issues	15	68.2%
Teaching issues	5	22.7%
Other issues relevant to faculty life (specify): -life in Amherst -grant applications -computational facilities -resources at UMass (e.g. funding sources, people to talk to) -how to survive -how to manage lab -how to advise graduate students -getting together at other times -funding opportunities -conferences	7	31.8%

c. Please provide an example or anecdote that illustrates the kinds of connections you have made as a result of the Networking Dinners:

- I have discussed setting up a collaboration to examine someone else's protein family of interest in my animal system.
- I gave a 10-minute presentation during one of the STEM dinners; afterward I had an interesting conversation about potential applications of my work with one of the attendees.
- [] and I are collaborating. [] and I have discussed collaborating. [] and I discuss lots of stuff.

- I was able to attend only one dinner thus far. During this dinner, I shared my work and learned about the research of others. Had I attended more, I'm sure I could have made research connections.
- I visited the XRay crystallography lab later.
- I am interested in pursuing a collaboration with computational colleagues I met at the STEM dinner.
- Since I was only able to attend a few dinners, I can't claim to have made any strong connections.
- I realized that an area of my research that was stuck on could be greatly assisted by a faculty member from engineering after hearing a short presentation. I also discovered a new direction for a major research study that I am just getting into because of a presentation of one of the faculty members from Vet & Animal Science.

5) a. Have you participated in other new faculty networking programs?

Yes No (go to question 7)

b. If yes, what were those activities?

Response	Respondents (n=22)	Percent of respondents	Other events attended
No	17	77.3%	--
Yes	5	22.7%	2 – dinner with the Chancellor (2) 1 – “CET” introductory workshop (possibly referring to Center for Teaching) 1 – grant writing seminar held by Bruce McCandless 1 – proposal workshop

6) A central goal of the STEM Networking Dinner is to provide an opportunity for new faculty to build connections with other faculty members on campus. In comparison to the other event(s) you listed in question 5, how effective are the Dinners in meeting this networking goal?

This event is more effective This event is equally effective This event is less effective

Response	Respondents (n=22)	Percent of respondents
More effective	3	60%
Less effective	1	20%
“More AND less”*	1	20%

*Respondent stated: “This is more effective because I hear research, but this event is less effective at establishing personal connections because we don't have as much time to chat.”

7) a. Would you come to this event again? Yes No

Response	Respondents (n=22)	Percent of respondents
Yes	17	77.3%
No	3	13.6%
Maybe	2	9.1%

b. Why or why not?

“Yes” answers:

- It is a useful forum to find out what research is occurring around me.
- I think it is a great way to be exposed to research going on in other departments in which potential collaborations could be formed.
- I like to hear more about my colleagues’ research activity and possible future research and teaching collaborations. Also, to discuss other campus life and tenure issues that will benefit me as a new faculty.
- I have found these very effective in meeting other faculties and getting a good overview of research activities that I can use to decide on possible collaborations. Unfortunately, business travel allowed me to attend two of these only.
- Meet people
- I found these events very useful in meeting other junior faculty and also seeing the colleagues I already know. It was also useful that dinner was provided.
- I would like to meet more faculties in other disciplines.
- Because of the valuable information regarding research collaborations and resources shared with faculty members in other departments. It is also an opportunity to learn other scientific disciplines beyond collaborations.
- I find they are fun and interesting.
- For various reasons I could attend only one of the dinners, but I found an open atmosphere and I had an idea of what is going on. So I would like to give myself more chances to know more colleagues.
- I think it’s been a great view of some of the great research that is going on on campus, even though nothing I have seen will directly impact my research.
- The dinners provide a great opportunity to learn what everyone else is doing, as well as to make new contacts on campus that I wouldn’t otherwise have made. Having more than one dinner is important for solidifying these new friendships. To be honest, given the nature of what I work on, it’s pretty unlikely that I will ever collaborate on research or teaching with other participants, but having contacts outside of my own department is valuable.
- It is great to meet people and hear about cool research. It’s fun.
- I want to meet more people on campus. Academe can be quite isolating. Plus, I really hope to exploit UMass talent through collaborations with other STEM members.
- I really like the interaction with other faculty who are experiencing similar challenges, fears, opportunities, and joys. On a large campus like this it can be very difficult to meet people and find a way to connect. This venue provides this type of environment. I think that keeping the morale of faculty high should be a priority for the University in terms of improving productivity. This forum certainly does that for me.
- I thought the meetings were very interesting to see the wide range of research on campus. Also a good occasion to meet people that you may not have otherwise. I was happy to present my research.

“No” answers:

- I guess I didn’t realize the purpose of the seminars was simply networking and meeting other new faculty. This might have been good my first year, but was not a productive use of my time this year.
- I have met those I would like to know of.
- I believe that the grant situation requires a very focused research program so I was not looking for collaboration outside of my field since I already have that in my department.

“Maybe” answers:

- Yes because it is a good way to get research sound bites from various faculty on campus. No because the group is too diverse, not likely to find collaborator, or to get research feedback, hence the meeting tends to turn into a show-and-tell competition, trying to impress everyone about your work.
- The goal is great but I think the talks are too difficult to share with such a broad audience. Maybe having fewer talks might help. In particular, spreading out the disciplines for each event, i.e. one from Biology, one from Computer Science, might help to keep the broad audience interested. Alternatively, the events could have a Biology focus, a Computer Science focus, etc...so that attendance can be decided on what one might understand. It's difficult to prepare well for this even so that everyone can understand each other's research.

8) What could be done to improve this event?

- Friday evening is an inconvenient time. A lunch hour might be better – or fewer talks.
- There didn't seem to be enough time to discuss issues with others.
- More interaction, less research presentation.
- Nothing much.
- It may be a good idea to change the time (another night).
- If available, create a STEM website including attendees' directory and research interests.
- Apart from research talks, there should be more discussion about the issues that we all as new faculty face, like teaching, outreach, grants, mini-tenure and tenure process, issues related with tenure. Maybe they should invite some Deans or Provost or other administrator or MSP representative who can explain the process.
- I am not sure. The fact that I only went to one meeting is the too many things you have to do. Having a family and a little child, on Fridays after work you just want to go home.
- Informal even (i.e. picnic type) may improve relationship friendlier than now.
- I was happy with the way it is now. Since I have attended only once, I need to attend more often.
- The time of the dinner (Friday evening) is not ideal, perhaps it could be earlier in the week, or even a lunch event.
- I wasn't able to go to all the meetings because I was out of town, my husband was out of town and I was responsible for the kids, or I was doing experiments. I noticed that the organizers had made child care available after I explained that I couldn't come because I lacked it, which would have been very helpful if I had needed it subsequently. Other than making more hours in the day, I can't think of what the organizers could have done to resolve the scheduling issues.
- I was not on the list for my first year here. I only was invited when another colleague put me on the email list. I wish I had been invited for my first year here.
- I think it fine as is – the dinners are really enjoyable, and a great way to feel more connected to the university.
- Have lunches instead of dinners. Friday nights were not an appealing time and I enjoy having dinner with my family.
- The around-the-table self-introduction at the start is not very useful.
- Happy 30 minutes in the middle.
- I like how the program is set up. I can't think of ways in which it could be improved. I have only attended one dinner, not due to lack of interest, but scheduling conflicts.
- I know it is difficult to find a time when everyone can meet. It was a challenge for me to meet on Friday evenings since this is one of the busiest days for me.

9) What other kinds of events would be useful to you?

- Perhaps a new faculty symposium.
- Perhaps more of a social event which may lead to interesting science conversation.
- Not sure yet!
- Not sure, but the STEM dinner is a great idea!
- Event that coordinates grant applications or interest in certain areas.
- I would like a place and/or time to meet new faculty informally. A happy hour or coffee/tea break?
- More frequent and less formal events (e.g. lunch, coffee).
- No idea.
- It would be useful to hear about specific services provided on campus, such as the Mass Spec. facility or the Imaging facility. I hear about them, but it would help to know from them what they can do, how much they charge, how the sample has to be provided, etc... There will be a cell sorter coming to campus shortly – perhaps other faculty members would be interested in hearing how it might be useful to their research.
- This is great. I can't think of any format I'd like more.
- Amusingly, I can't really answer this question. I don't know what I don't know. I'm sure in a couple of years I will be able to answer this question for the newly-minted faculty.
- The presentations by different faculty members was very effective. I think from time to time we could have presentations on how to write an effective proposal or how to prepare for the tenure process. There could also be workshops on effective teaching methods.