

New STEM Faculty Network
Report to the Sponsoring Deans
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2006-2007 marked the second year of a series of informal dinners for new faculty in the STEM disciplines, organized by Sandy Petersen, Associate Graduate Dean, and Barbara Pearson (of RL&D). Three deans--NSM, NRE, and Engineering--contributed \$600 each to fund these cross-disciplinary, cross-college events.

Key points

- 1. Participants: Dinners are attended by a mix of “regulars” (who attend often) and new people. Two-thirds of new STEM faculty have attended. (Three-quarters of 2006 new STEM faculty.)**
- 2. The cross-college aspect is very attractive to the participants (although most attendees are from NSM, whose faculty is 2 and 3 times larger than Engineering and NRE, respectively).**
- 3. 15 of the 20 attendees who filled out the on-line survey had not participated in any other networking events.**
- 4. Nineteen of twenty respondents said they would attend the events again. All but one reported making meaningful connections with faculty in other colleges.**
- 5. Attendees suggested keeping the research snapshots, but varying the time and place of the events. They also asked that some senior faculty be invited as well.**

Events

There were five: four dinners and one picnic with the average attendance being 14. . The programs included three “research snapshots” (15 minutes plus questions) each evening and some time for introductions and conversation. A professional development activity (a discussion/simulation of a college personnel committee meeting) was planned for the summer, but postponed to the fall. Interest was high, but there were as many people who sent regrets for being out of town as could attend.

Participants

Invitations were emailed to 48 potential participants, based on a list provided by the deans’ offices and the Office of Faculty Development. There were 23 2006 hires, 25 2005 and 2004 hires. Of the 23 2006 faculty, 18 came at least once, 7 came 3-5 times. (Six arrived only for the 2nd semester, so there were only 3 potential events for them.) Ten attendees were women; six were underrepresented minorities.

Budget

Dinners averaged \$230 each time; the picnic was \$475. We would like to earmark the remaining \$400 (of \$1800) for the professional development meeting (mentioned above). Childcare subsidies were made to three two-scientist couples (and part of the cost of the picnic was for a childcare helper and materials to entertain the children).

Website

In response to requests from the attendees, a website for the network was created by the RL&D office. It includes a picture “wheel” that locates everyone by school and year of hire. The picture for each individual links to an information page for each person, which includes contact information, educational background, and a description of research interests. The research interests and education are connected through a database to other members of the network, and their pictures appear along the bottom of the individual’s page. A search page allows queries directly--by department, topic area, school, etc. There is also an explanation of the term “STEM” and a rudimentary “photo album” (in the archive page).

<http://www.umass.edu/research/rld/newstem/index.php>

On-line evaluation/survey

A link to an anonymous on-line evaluation (also linked to the “Contact” page on the website) was sent to all potential participants. An extra mailing was sent to people who came once or not at all asking in particular for their input. The link is <http://www.umass.edu/research/rld/newstem/survey.php>

There were 20 respondents, or 42% of new STEM hires since 2005. Of faculty who attended 2 to 5 events there were 17, or 96%, responses. Two additional respondents attended once, and one respondent never attended. Below is a summary of responses.

Q4: At the NSFN research dinners, have you

1.) met potential		Responses of 20
	Research collaborators	14
	Teaching collaborators	2
	Personal friends	15
2.) engaged in productive conversations with fellow attendees about		
	The tenure process	5
	Research issues	15
	Teaching issues	9
	Other:	Work/life balance, family and childcare, understanding administrative issues, funding, recreational opportunities

Q4-8. (Perceived benefits of attending) Most respondents said they felt they met new faculty, and enjoyed seeing what their research was through the research snapshots. As one said, “I’m sure this would have happened anyway, but it would have taken much

more time.” Others said, “By meeting faculty from other departments and colleges, I feel much more part of a larger university.” “Since [my new partner] is in a different school, it is difficult to see how we would have met without a networking event.”

Specific examples provided:

- One NSF proposal idea was formulated at a dinner
- One potential collaboration is underway
- I met someone in another department who introduced me to another faculty in his/her department with similar interests. We have talked since about possible collaborations.
- This [newSTEM] connection was recently beneficial to my professional life in a direct way. [A participant in another field] had been a recipient of an award I am currently competing for and I felt comfortable contacting her, asking for her application, and hints on how to compete successfully for the same award. I might not have interacted with her otherwise because our fields are so different.
- I have gotten good advice on how to do certain administrative things that might have otherwise taken a while to perform.
- I met 3 people in VASCI (not in my college). One couple has given me a lot of valuable advice on child care issues. I have collaborated with DA whom I met in STEM.
- I found a neighbor whom I now see regularly, and their infant will also be a subject in one of my studies.
- A fellow attendee is interested in using my animal model in his research.
- I learned that someone in a different college is working on something similar, which led us to exchange research ideas.
- On the social side, I have a running partner/friend that I met at a networking dinner.

Q5. Have you participated in other new faculty networking programs?

Attended other programs	No 15	Yes 5
If so, what were they?		New faculty dinner at chancellors house; new faculty orientation New faculty time-management session (OFD) Mutual mentoring program (OFD)—2 people Activities organized by the university and department
Q6. How did the new STEM dinners compare to these other events? NSFN was:		Equally effective.....3 More effective.....1 Less effective.....1

Q 7 Would you attend a NSFN event again: Yes 19 No 1

Reasons given:

YES:

- I like the atmosphere
- Fun and useful way to meet others and chat (11)
- I really like the research snapshots (great idea) (5)
- Website is very informative and interesting to see who connects to who
- Enjoy talking with my peers outside of my building and hearing about issues on campus, research in other labs, and recreational events.
- Loved the picnic with people at the same stage in their career
- I have to eat dinner—why not make it into a networking event.

Negatives:

- I have a young family and it's hard to justify missing another night.
- Time is always an issue.
- The meeting I went to was not well attended. I did not get any networking benefit (but marked “yes, will attend again”)
- Since I was unavailable for the first couple of dinners, I thought maybe it would be too “late” to start going (but I would like to start).

Q8. What could be done to improve this event?

- Nothing that I can think of
- Once or twice discussion fell more into campus gossip than the science. This should be avoided.
- Advertise the program more. I didn't hear about it until my 2nd semester here.
- No more than 3 talks per time.
- Rotate the days and times of the meetings (Fridays are hard).
- Find more “loungy” locations
- More introduction/ background of the individuals giving the short lectures (2)
- Invite more from the 5-colleges (if that's feasible)
- Event shouldn't be restricted to new faculty.
- Would be useful if senior faculty that have been successful in getting funding, publications, and teaching would take me under their wing.

Q9. What other kinds of events would be useful to you?

- Info sessions with senior faculty/administrators on specific topics (5)
 - Navigating OGCA
 - Dealing with money and other new faculty issues
 - More on the personnel process
 - Tenure process
 - New instructor guidelines,
 - General university policies (that are relevant)
- Reading each other's grant proposals.
- Happy hour (3)
- Relaxation therapy—bring in some chair massage therapists.
- Maybe have lunches or coffee breaks in addition to the dinners