

# INCLUSIVE DEPARTMENTS BEST PRACTICES

## ARE DEPARTMENTS INCLUSIVE?

Most faculty members want to feel respected and included in their departments, engaged in positive professional interactions with colleagues, and consulted and heard by their department Chairs/Heads.

Yet, many faculty members do not feel included in their departments. Research at UMass shows that among STEM faculty, White women, Asian women, and women from underrepresented minority groups feel much less connected to their departments and less valued by their colleagues and Chairs/Heads than men, particularly in the area of research. In addition, women STEM faculty rate their departments as less collegial, respectful, cooperative, supportive, equitable, fair, and inclusive than men STEM faculty.

## WHAT STEPS CAN DEPARTMENTS TAKE TO CREATE MORE INCLUSIVE DEPARTMENTS?

A variety of factors go into creating warm and inclusive departments. There are some factors that are difficult to control: departments with offices in the same building, with gathering spots with whiteboards, kitchens with sinks, and seating that allow people to eat lunch together, are more likely to feel like inclusive spaces.

However, Heads/Chairs and faculty members can set the stage for greater inclusivity in many other ways. These efforts require investing time into inclusivity – but they pay very rich dividends, as faculty are more likely to succeed, develop collaborations, and feel valued when their departments are inclusive.

**Chair Meetings.** Chairs/Heads should meet regularly with faculty members. These meetings are essential to the job, even if they are relatively brief hallway conversations. Groups events such as lunches with non-tenure-track (NTT) or pre-tenured faculty, or department coffee breaks are helpful, but there should also be opportunities for one-on-one interactions. One-on-one meetings help chairs understand diverse faculty perspectives and answer questions that support faculty success.

**Mentoring Plans.** Creating a strong departmental mentoring plan with input from department members, which recognizes the needs for faculty mentoring at many stages of development (e.g., assistant professors, NTT faculty, associate professors, full professors taking on new roles) helps ensure that there are *systems* in

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place. Relying on informal mentoring or friendships to fill in gaps reinforces existing inequalities in departments.

**DPC Meetings.** Department Personnel Committees should schedule yearly meetings with faculty who are moving toward a promotion (Lecturers, Assistant Professors, Senior Lecturers I, Associate Professors). The PC chair or different PC members might meet with specific faculty members. These meetings should provide clear formative assessments that reflect the advice of all PC members and help guide the faculty member toward their goals. They also play a role in informing faculty members about how upcoming promotions are done.

**Service Assignments.** Committee/service assignments are ways to integrate faculty members into the department, and into relationships with one another. Service assignments should be rotated, giving different faculty members opportunities to interact and to learn about different elements of the department or program. Transparency about the responsibilities and time commitment for different service jobs also helps provide important clarity that leads to greater equity.

**Regular Department or Program Meetings.** In departments or programs with regular meetings, faculty report having closer ties to colleagues. Due to care responsibilities and commuting, scheduling these meetings during the workday can help create greater inclusion. Ideally, committee meetings will be scheduled during off-weeks during the same time slot, or during the same time slot on a different day (for example, Tuesday 10-11:15 for department meetings, Thursday 10-11:15 for committee meetings).

**Research Talks.** Scheduling regular “chalk-talks” or “work-in-progress” talks that feature diverse departmental speakers helps create community. Hearing colleagues speak about their research can lead to collaborations, and help faculty feel recognized as researchers – particularly if these events ensure equity and inclusion in speakers. Creating smaller communities

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around shared research interests, such as through small working groups with research-in-progress talks, can also bring people together, particularly in larger departments.

**Social Events.** Regular social events help make departments feel more inclusive. Hosting social events both inside and outside of the workday helps give diverse faculty opportunities to connect. Organizing coffee breaks, receptions, picnics that include family members, celebrations for graduation or holidays, and other events – ideally several times a year – helps connect faculty to their departments.

**Departmental Awards.** Faculty members, particularly STEM women, can feel invisible to their colleagues. Creating departmental awards that recognize the important work that colleagues carry out in a variety of areas can make these contributions more visible and valued.

**Writing Sessions.** Some departments organize opportunities for faculty to meet and write. These communities can help create accountability and support for a valued part of many faculty careers – but one that may often be sacrificed to pressing teaching and service deadlines.

**Teaching & Mentoring Communities.** Creating a space for faculty members to come together and discuss their teaching and mentoring practices and challenges can help build connections that benefit both faculty members and their students.

**Communications & Shared Calendars.** Creating regularly communications highlighting successes or recognizing research can make faculty feel greater respect among colleagues. Shared departmental calendars and social media also help faculty members keep track of meetings and events, and may help develop a shared norm around attending departmental meetings and gatherings.

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## WHAT ARE SOME OTHER APPROACHES DEPARTMENTS TAKE TO CREATE GREATER INCLUSIVITY?

**Inclusive Hiring and Mentoring.** Faculty members are all now required to take [STRIDE training](#), which helps point out the potential biases in how faculty are recruited and hired. Once faculty members are on campus, inclusive mentoring is also important, ensuring that all faculty receive needed information and have opportunities to build connections with colleagues.

**Inclusive DPCs.** Faculty in departments with Personnel Committees that include membership from among NTT, pre-tenure faculty, and associate professors identify promotion processes as clearer and more transparent. In many departments with inclusive PCs, faculty members develop a better understanding of how assessments made by external reviewers, as well as university colleagues, shape outcomes. These practices can help junior colleagues better understand how to successfully develop their own case, and share information to others at their rank.

**Blind Voting.** Where votes are carried out through a show of hands, this can lead to stress, particularly for NTT and pre-tenured faculty members. Using closed-votes, through written ballots or clickers – allow for more open and honest feedback and can improve department climate.

**Back Channels.** Whether departments use voting or consensus models, it can be difficult for NTT or pre-tenured faculty members to share their perspectives in meetings. Providing back channels, for example, trusted mentors, to raise concerns without identifying specific people, can improve faculty members' sense of engagement with departmental decision-making.

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## WHAT OTHER RESOURCES HELP CREATE MORE INCLUSIVE CLIMATES?

- [ADVANCE](#) provides tools for best practices in [faculty mentoring](#), as well as in [equitable decision-making](#).
- The [Office of Equity and Inclusion](#) provides programming meant to address the needs of members of underrepresented groups on campus.
- Mutual mentoring groups funded through [ADVANCE](#), the [Office of Faculty Development](#), or Colleges and Departments, can help faculty develop connections and communities.
- Networking events bring faculty members together to discuss research and connect over shared interests. These are organized by [ADVANCE](#), Centers or Institutes, the [Office of Research Development](#), as well as Associate Deans for Research.

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ADVANCE provides the resources, recognition and relationship building that are critical to equitable and successful collaboration in the 21st century academy. ADVANCE is funded by the National Science Foundation. For more information on ADVANCE and the research on which this brief is based, go to <https://www.umass.edu/advance/>.