

Affecting Climate/Culture Change — Using Multiple Points of Entry

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In order to improve the climate/culture for women in academic science and engineering, we have found it essential to pursue change through multiple “points of entry.” Our efforts at the University of Wisconsin-Madison include:

- [Leadership Development/Mentoring for Senior Women](#)
- [Develop Networks, Promote Communication, Increase Visibility of Women](#)
- [Life Cycle Research Grants](#)
- [Celebrating Women in Science and Engineering Grants](#)
- [Climate Workshops for Department Chairs](#)
- [Workshops for Search Committees](#)

Some of these efforts have been/will be discussed in other panels. For this panel presentation we will focus on a specific tenure-review case in a particular department to illustrate how multiple points of entry are necessary to exert influence.

Tenure-review Case:

A female junior faculty member comes to you for help. She has prepared her tenure packet, her committee has solicited 10 outside letters, and everything is looking good. Suddenly, the chair of her tenure committee solicits two more letters, which turn out to be quite negative and “coincidentally”, both of these additional letter writers are affiliated with the department from which the chair obtained his Ph.D.

Cases such as this are knotty, complicated, and highly political. One could become an advocate for the individual in such a case, but there are larger issues about culture and climate change in the department that, if solved, can benefit not just the assistant professor in your office asking for help, but all the women like her that will follow. How do you help this particular assistant professor, and how do you dig deeper into her environment to ignite change in a departmental culture that would allow this kind of thing to happen?

It is our experience that an approach to such change requires multiple “points of entry.” These points of entry include specific programs such as those listed above, but also more informal efforts such as:

- Enlisting senior women faculty to exert their power and influence.
- Providing support and mentoring for the individuals who need it—especially keeping up their morale and giving them hope when they are under attack.
- Finding supportive men in the department and encouraging them to speak up and support their women colleagues under fire.
- Using connections with deans, the provost and even the chancellor if necessary to intervene in a situation.

- Convincing a department chair that change is essential (if necessary, with persuasion from higher-level administrators), and that s/he has the ability to make change in the department.

Our work with this troubled department is just beginning, but the wheels outlined above are in motion. In previous intercessions, we have found that all of the above are necessary to making change; just approaching the problems from one or two points of entry won't make lasting change.