Enhancing Department Climate: A Chair’s Role
What is “climate”?  

**Climate**: The atmosphere or ambience of an organization as perceived by its members. An organization's climate is reflected in its structures, policies, and practices; the demographics of its membership; the attitudes and values of its members and leaders; and the quality of personal interactions. *Committee on Women in the University's Work Group on Climate* (Summer, 2002).
What is “climate”?  

- **Climate**: Behaviors within a workplace or learning environment, ranging from subtle to cumulative to dramatic, that can influence whether an individual feels personally safe, listened to, valued, and treated fairly and with respect. *Campus Climate Network Group (2002).*

- *Local* climate is the key!
Why is climate important?

What would be the benefits of creating a departmental climate where members feel “safe, listened to, valued, and treated fairly and with respect”? 
Why pay attention to climate?

- Helps attract and retain students from underrepresented groups
- Helps recruit and retain faculty from underrepresented groups
- Enhances academic excellence
- Increases productivity and well-being of entire department
- Enhances the educational experiences of all students
Measuring “climate”

- Policies and Procedures (work/life balance, promotion & tenure, mentoring, etc.)
- NSF Indicators
- Qualitative Data (Interviews)
- Climate Surveys
Treated With Respect in the Workplace

% Agree Strongly or Somewhat

Colleagues | Students | Staff | Dept. Chair
---|---|---|---
Women | * | * | *
Men | | | |
Dept. Chairs | * | * | *
Solicit Opinions

"Mainstream" Value

% Agree Strongly or Somewhat

Women

Men

Dept. Chair

Colleagues' Valuation of Research

% Agree Strongly or Somewhat

Solicit Opinions

"Mainstream"

Value

Women

Men

Dept. Chairs

*
Isolation and "Fit"

% Agree Strongly or Somewhat

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Dept. Chairs</th>
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<td>&quot;Fit&quot; in Dept.</td>
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* Indicates statistical significance.
Departmental Decision-Making

- Full & Equal Participant
- Voice in Resource Allocation
- All Can Share Views at Meetings
- Committee Assignments Rotated
- Chair Involves

% Agree Strongly or Somewhat

Women
Men
Dept. Chairs

* Statistical significance
Stages of Change Model

- Precontemplation: Unaware a problem exists
- Contemplation: Awareness of problem
- Preparation: Learning about ways to combat problem
- Action: Making a change
- Maintenance: Maintaining new behavior
The climate for women in my department is good

Women Faculty
Men Faculty
Dept. Chairs

% Agree Strongly or Somewhat
The climate for faculty of color in my department is good

% Agree Strongly or Somewhat

Faculty of Color

Majority Faculty

Dept. Chairs

*
What is climate like at NDSU?

Would campus climate survey results look similar?
Climate in the Department

“There are some departments here where you may have a chair who is actively antagonistic towards women, who does not have any tolerance for flexibility of schedule, who is not willing to say ‘Well we know you get your work done, and so if you’re in here on Saturday and Sunday, but you have to be out on Tuesday and Wednesday, that’s okay.’ Instead they say, ‘No, you be here, our hours are from 8 to 4:30, and you be here from 8 to 4:30 every day.’”
“I think as little as four years ago, [the department] was a very unfriendly, hostile environment. But when [the new chair] came in...she seems to have completely changed the tenor of [the department]. It’s very friendly—everyone says that since she came, it’s totally different. I would not have come if she weren’t here.”
What is climate like in your department?

How do you know?
Climate Workshops for Department Chairs

- 3-session workshop series
- Small (4-6) group of department chairs from different schools/colleges
- Session 1: What is climate? How does it manifest in your department?
- Session 2: Confidential report of climate survey results
- Session 3: What did you change and how did it work?
What Have We Learned?

- Most common issues:
  - Basic manners
  - Exclusion from departmental activities
  - Work of department members not valued
  - Lack of communication
  - Lack of professional development opportunities
  - Work/life balance issues
  - Lack of sensitivity to issues raised by underrepresented persons
What Changes Have Chairs Made?

- Implementing new departmental social events
- Moving offices around to reduce isolation
- New maternity leave policy for graduate students
- Changes in department meetings:
  - Changed seating patterns
  - Speaking turns—junior to senior
  - Inviting staff to meetings
Enhancing Department Climate
A Guide for Department Chairs

Campus Climate: Behaviors within a workplace or learning environment, ranging from subtle to cumulative to dramatic, that can influence whether an individual feels personally safe, listened to, valued, and treated fairly and with respect.

Climate: The atmosphere or ambiance of an organization as perceived by its members. An organization’s climate is reflected in its structure, policies, and practices; the demographics of its membership; the attitudes and values of its members and leaders; and the quality of personal interactions.
What Changes Have Chairs Made?

- First ever department retreat
- Moved to fire a disruptive/abusive faculty member
- Improved communication processes:
  - Monthly lunch for staff with the chair
  - Departmental email lists, listserv
- Re-survey department every year
What changes have you made in your departments that has positively impacted the climate?
One Department’s Results….

Differences Among People are Valued in the Department
I Feel Appreciated for the Work I Do in the Department
One Department’s Results….

The Chair of the Department Appropriately Consults or Delegates Decisions to a Group or Committee

- 2004
- 2005
- 2006
- 2007
- 2009
One Department’s Results….

I am Aware of Places or People to go to if I am Faced with a Problem or Issue in the Department

2004 2005 2006 2007 2009
The Climate for Women in My Department is Good

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Campus-Wide Change

Climate for Women is Good
Responses of Women Faculty

% Agree Strongly or Somewhat

Climate Workshop
No Climate Workshop

2003
2006
Campus-Wide Change

Climate for Women is Good
Responses of Department Chairs

% Agree Strongly or Somewhat

Climate Workshop

No Climate Workshop

2003
2006