



W I S E L I

*Women in Science & Engineering Leadership Institute  
University of Wisconsin-Madison*

# **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?

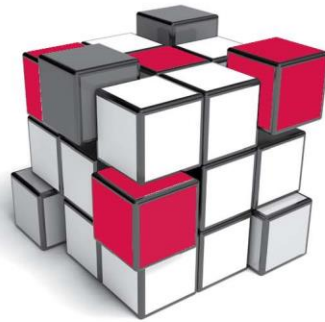
What would be the benefits of creating a departmental climate where members feel “safe, listened to, valued, and treated fairly and with respect”?



## Why pay attention to climate?

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- 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



**Benefits and Challenges  
of Diversity  
in Academic Settings**



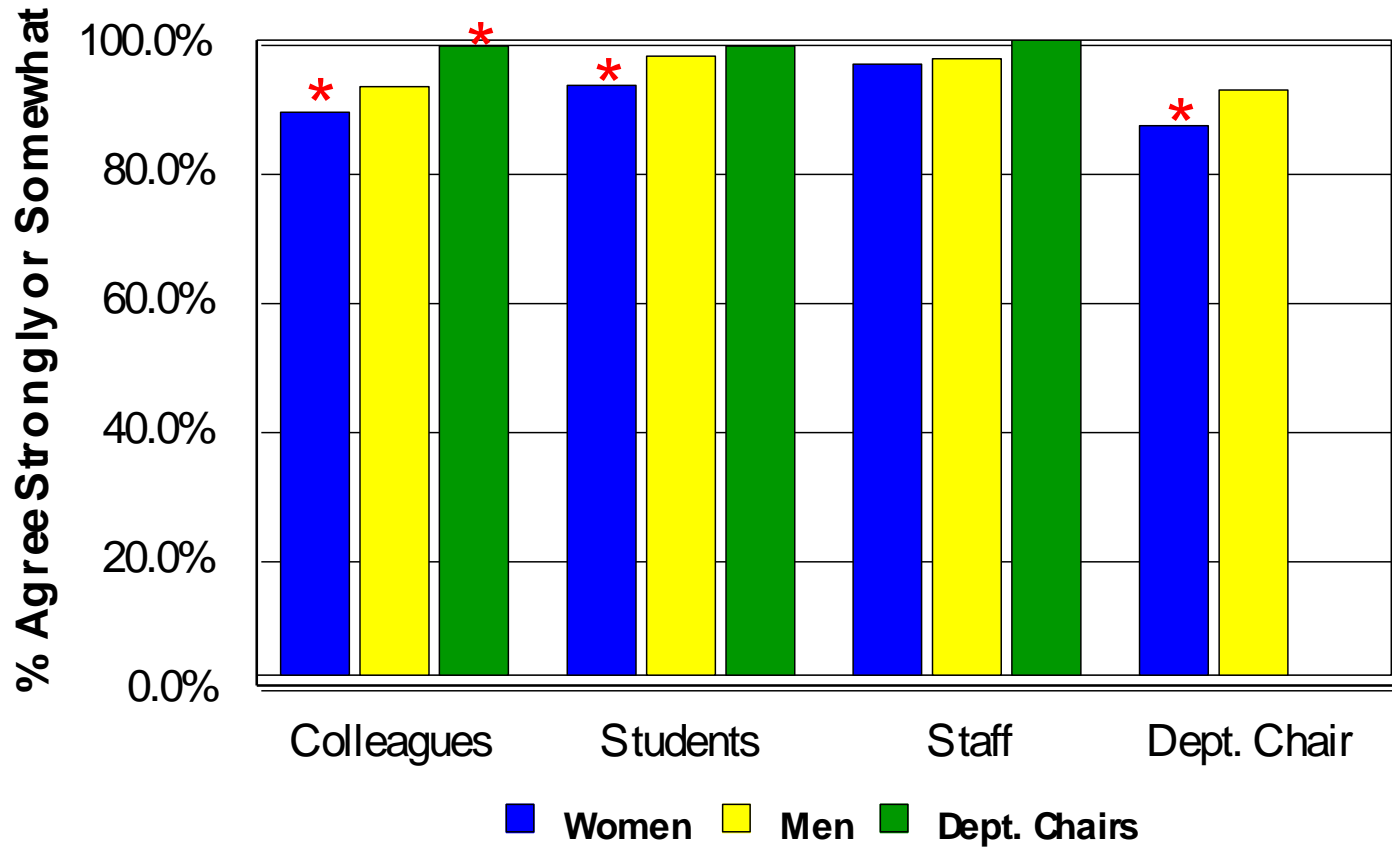
## Measuring “climate”

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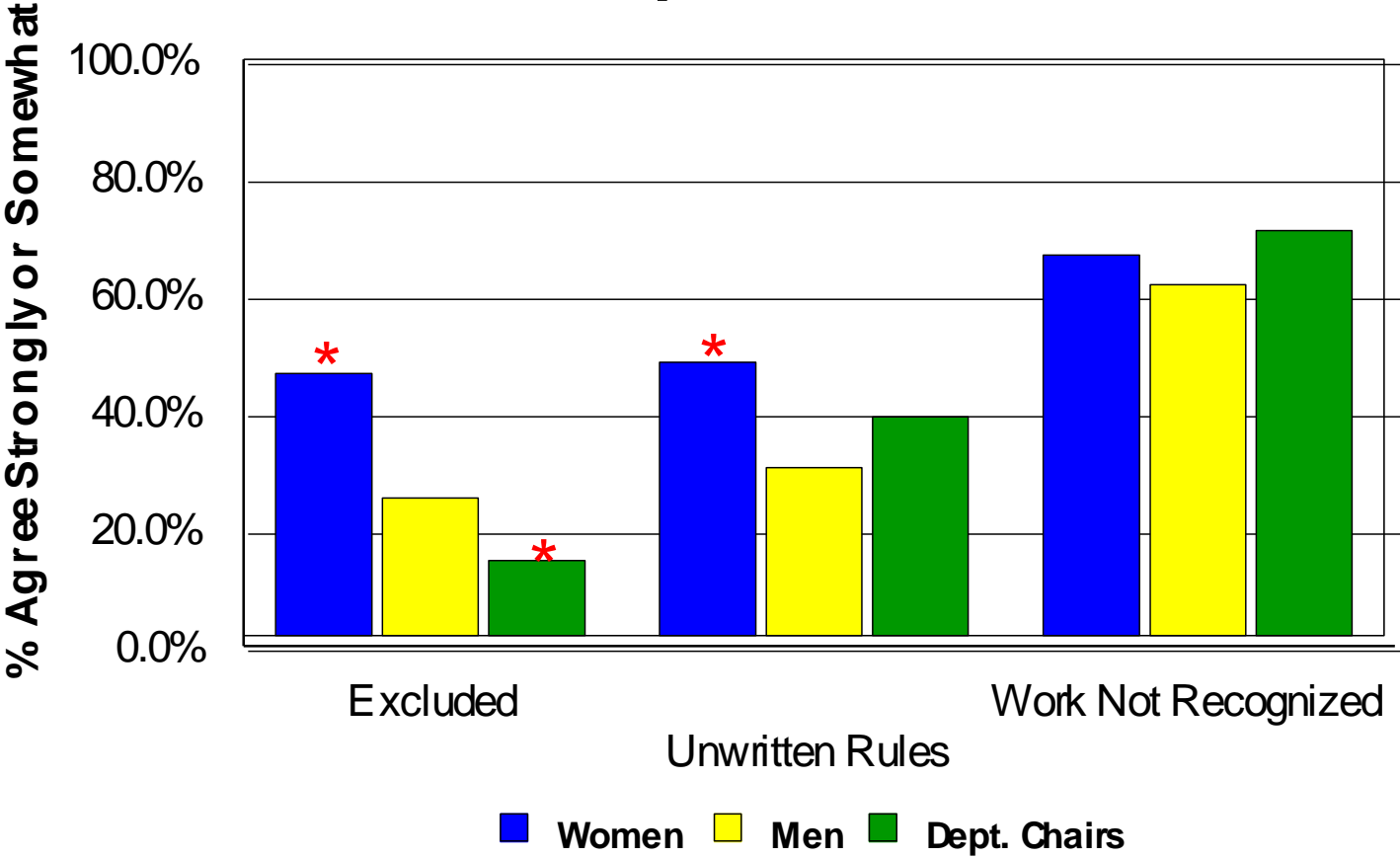
- Policies and Procedures (work/life balance, promotion & tenure, mentoring, etc.)
- NSF Indicators
- Qualitative Data (Interviews)
- Climate Surveys



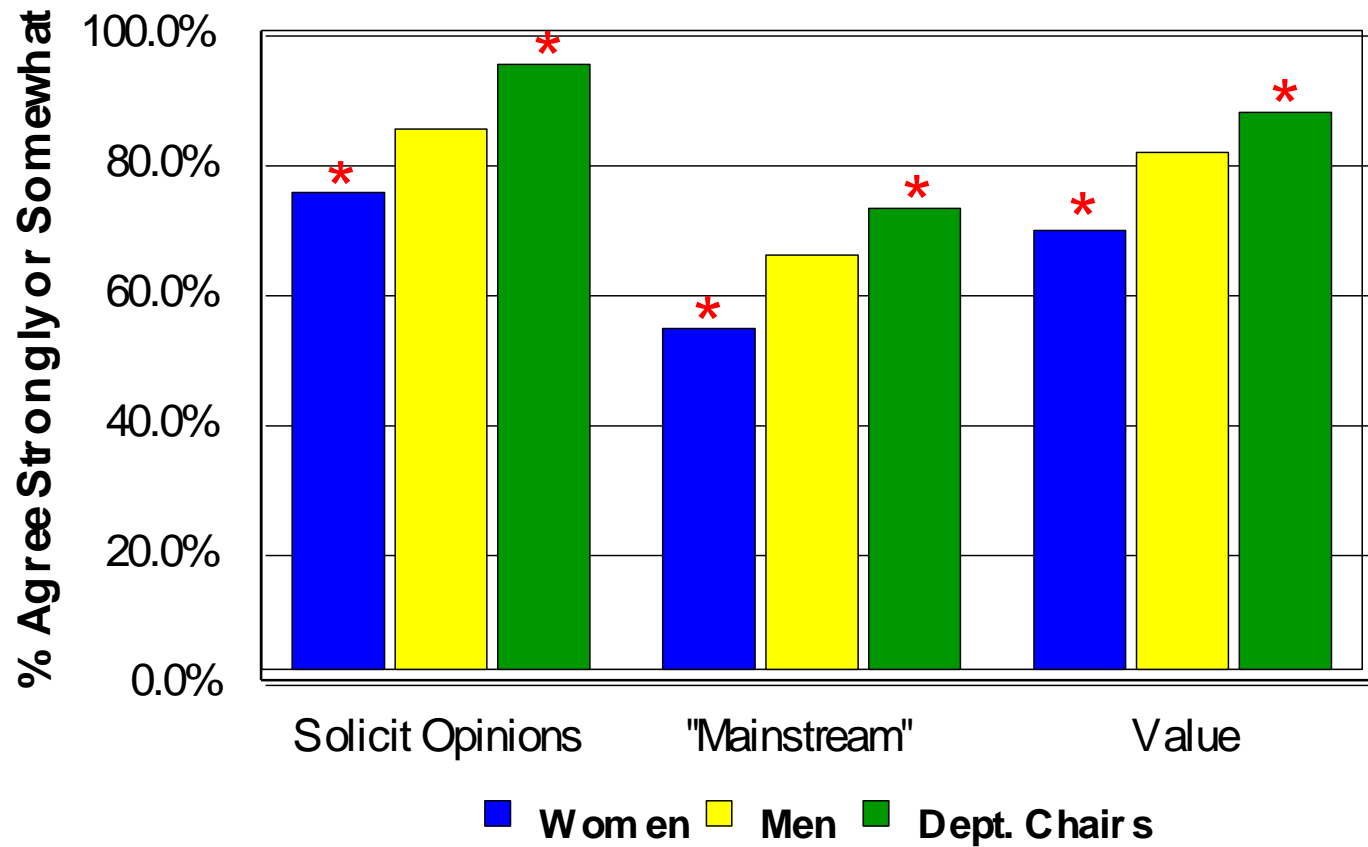
# Treated With Respect in the Workplace



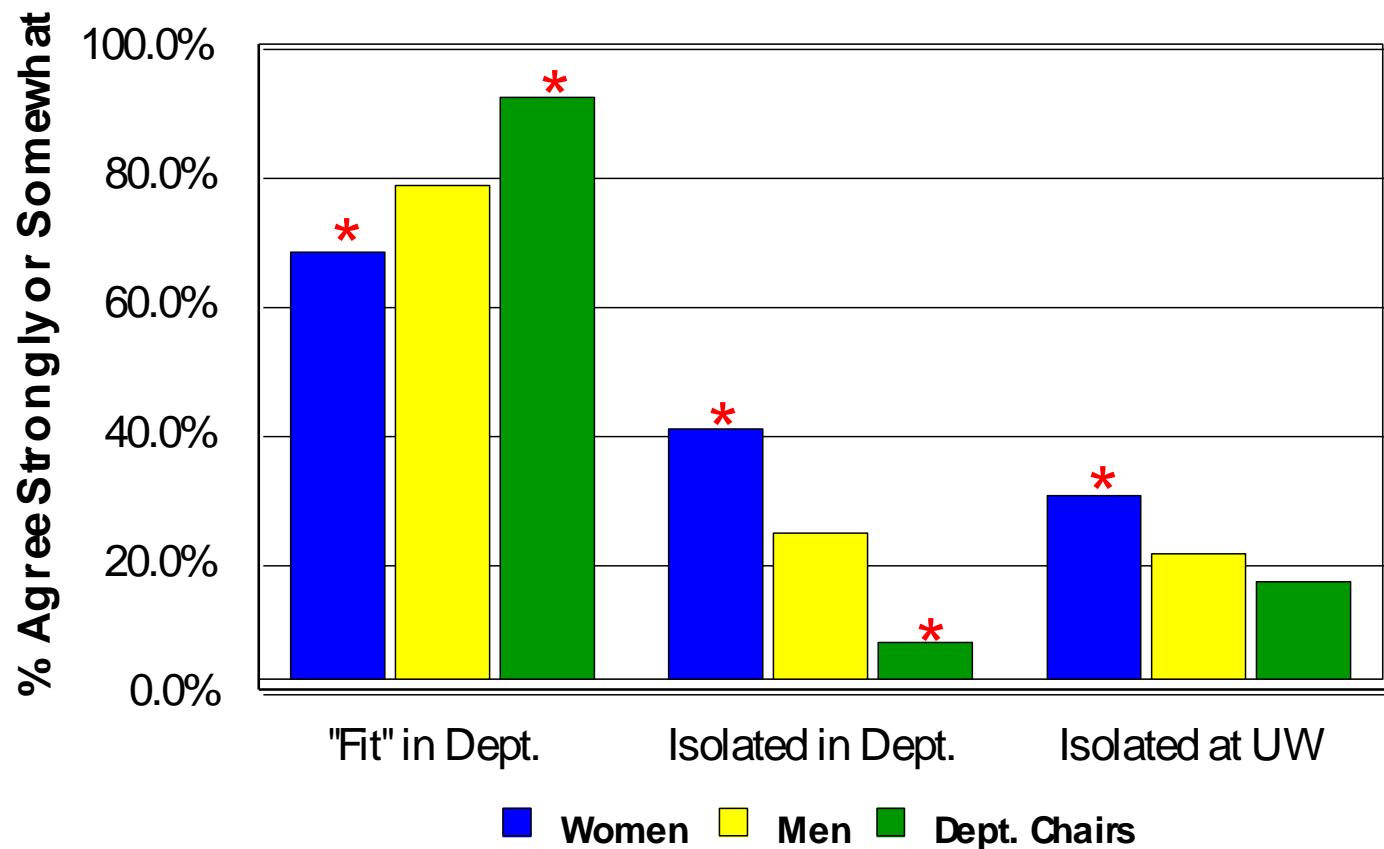
# Informal Departmental Interactions



# Colleagues' Valuation of Research

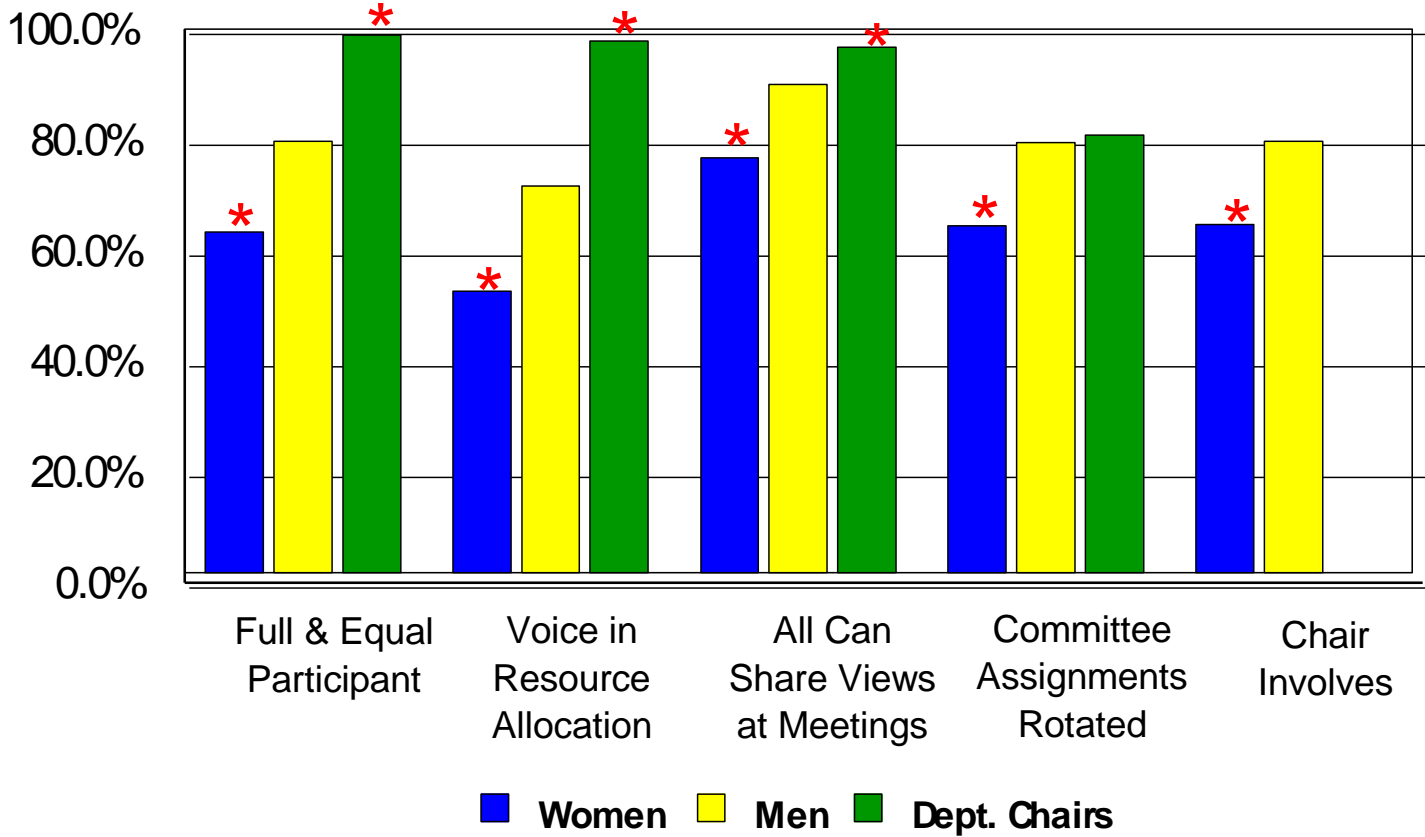


# Isolation and "Fit"



# Departmental Decision-Making

% Agree Strongly or Somewhat



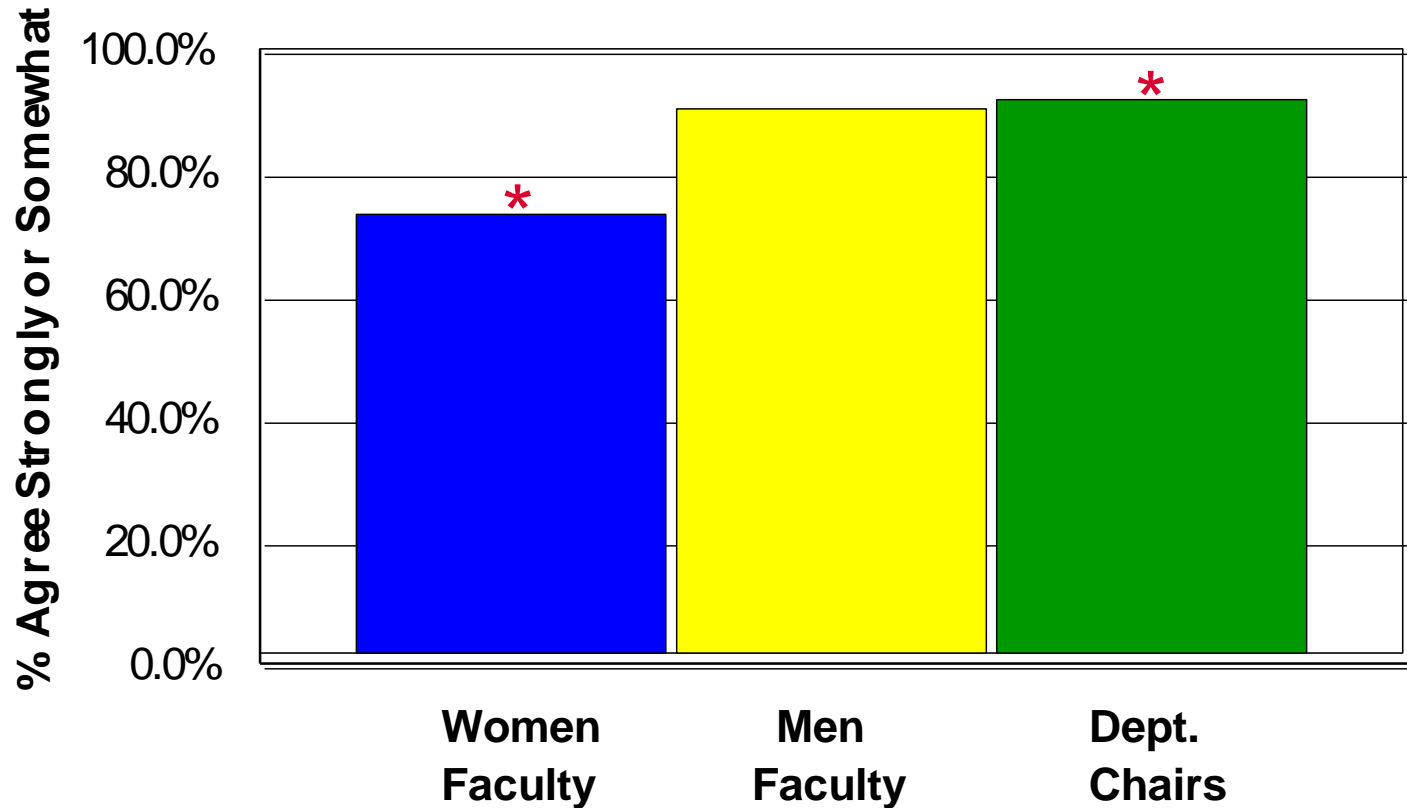


## Stages of Change Model

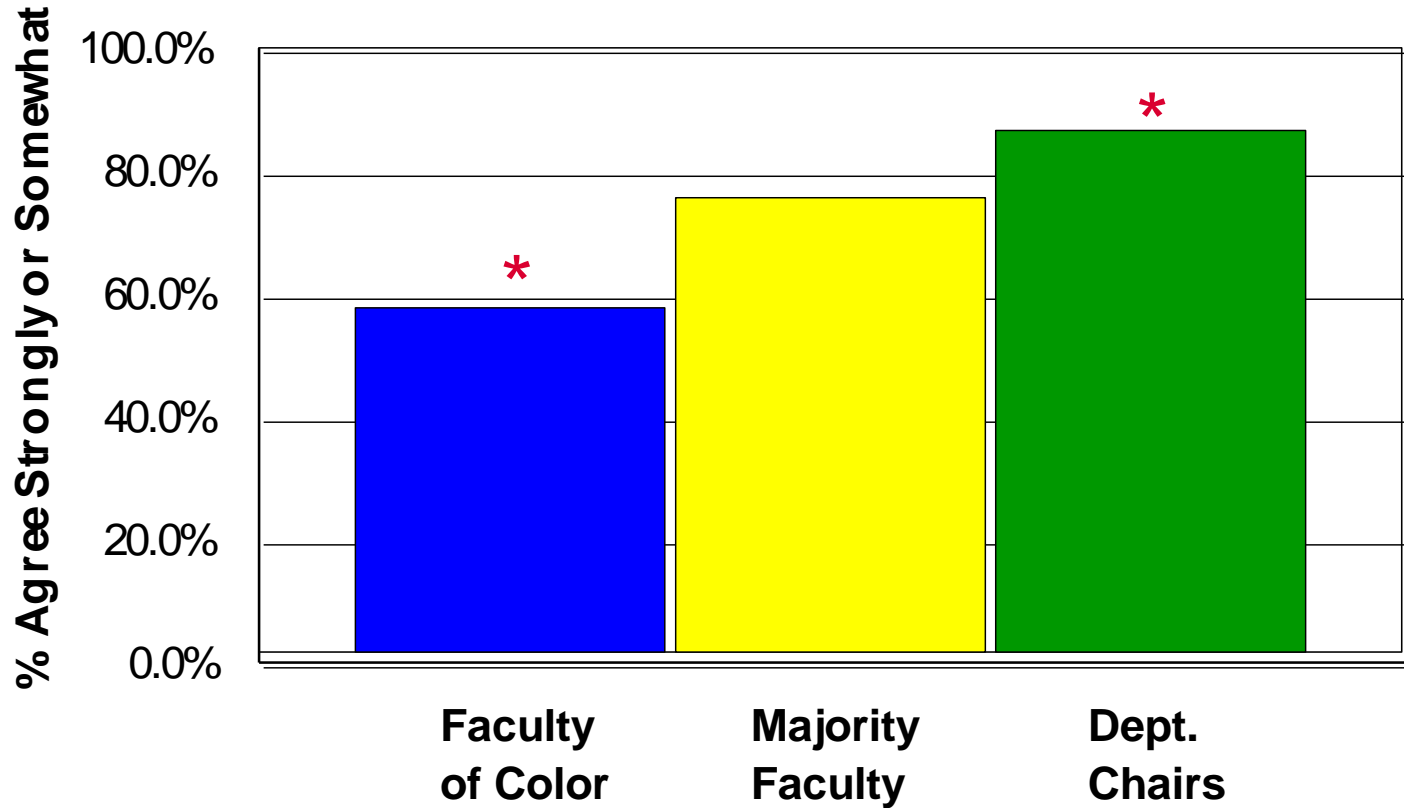
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- Precontemplation: Unaware a problem exists
- Contemplation: Awareness of problem
- Preparation: Learning about ways to combat problem
- Action: Making a change
- Maintenance: Maintaining new behavior

# The climate for women in my department is good



# The climate for faculty of color in my department is good





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.’”



## Climate in the Department

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- “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?

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- 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?

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- 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.<sup>1</sup>

**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.<sup>2</sup>





## What Changes Have Chairs Made?

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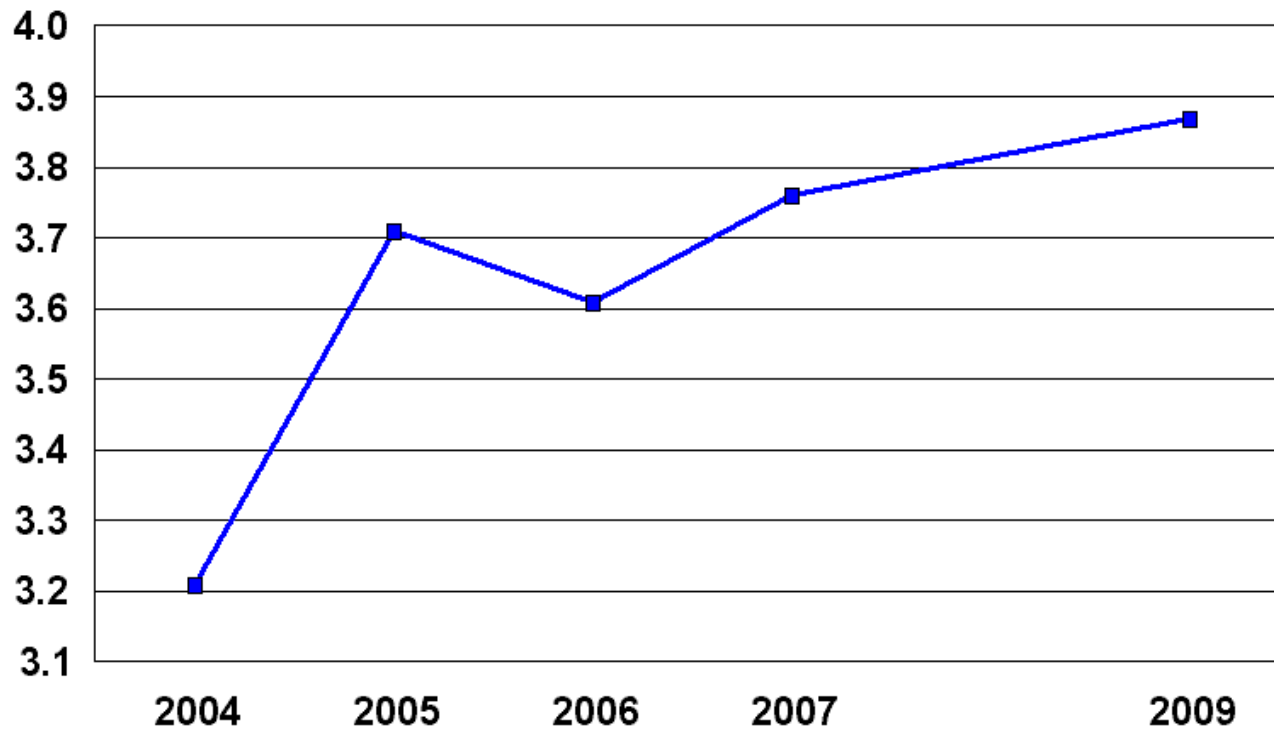
- First ever department retreat
- Moved to fire a disruptive/abusive faculty member
- Improved communication processes:
  - Monthly lunch for staff with the chair
  - Departmental email lists, listserv
- Re-survey department every year

What changes have you made in your departments that has positively impacted the climate?



## One Department's Results....

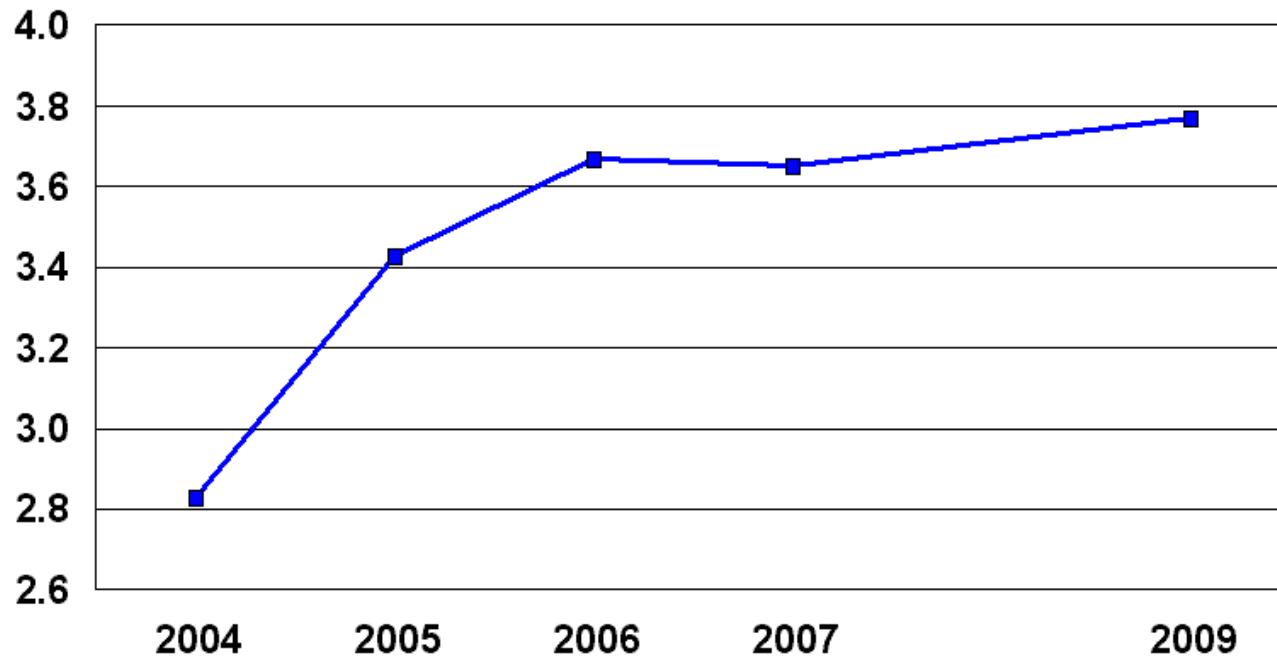
### Overall Rating of Department Climate





## One Department's Results....

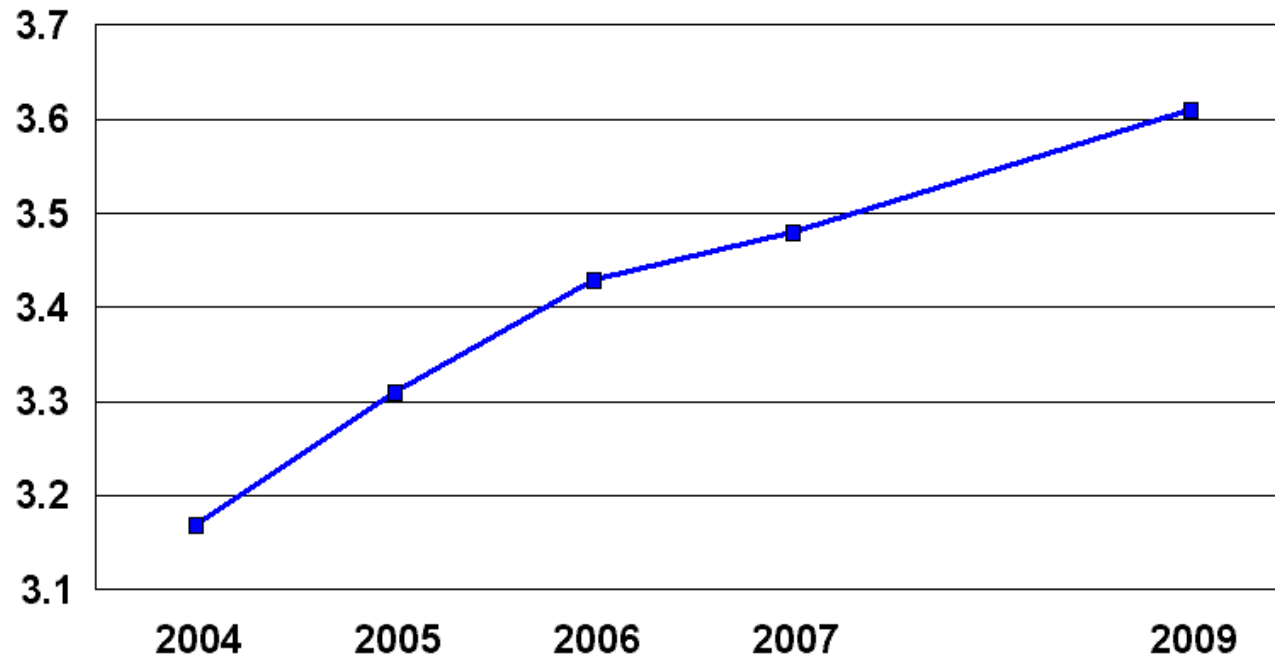
### Differences Among People are Valued in the Department





## One Department's Results....

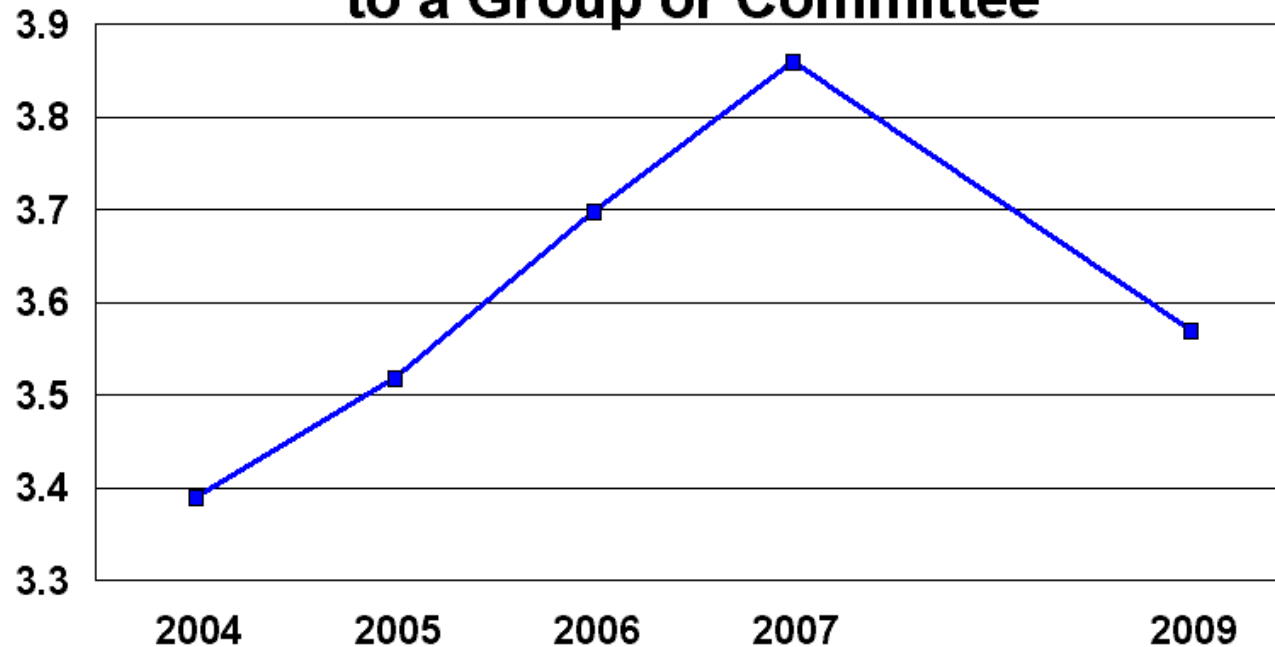
### I Feel Appreciated for the Work I Do in the Department





## One Department's Results....

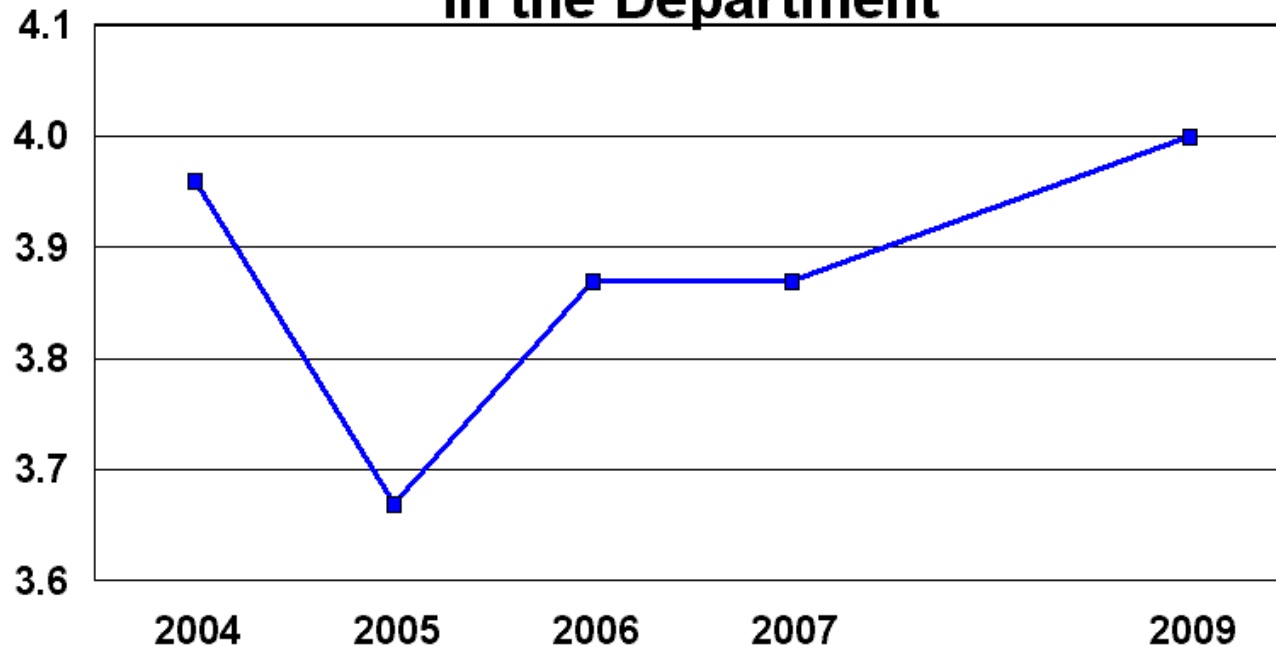
### The Chair of the Department Appropriately Consults or Delegates Decisions to a Group or Committee





## One Department's Results....

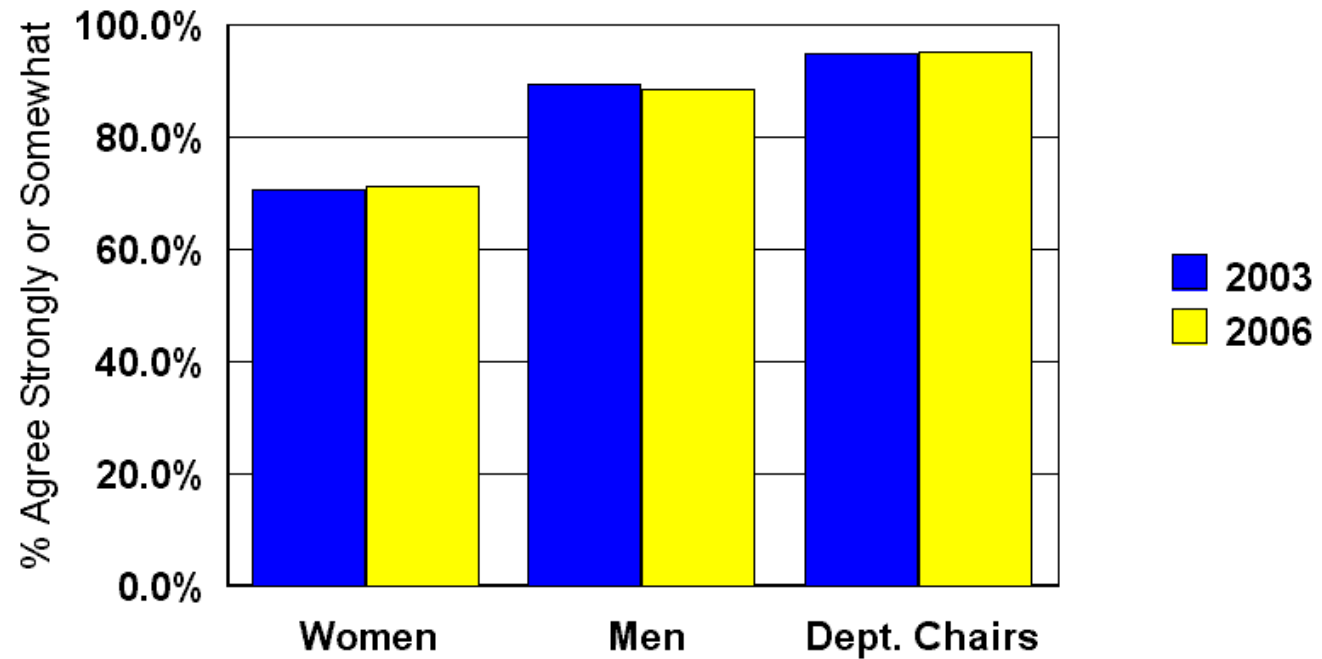
**I am Aware of Places or People to go to  
if I am Faced with a Problem or Issue  
in the Department**





## Campus-Wide Change

### The Climate for Women in My Department is Good

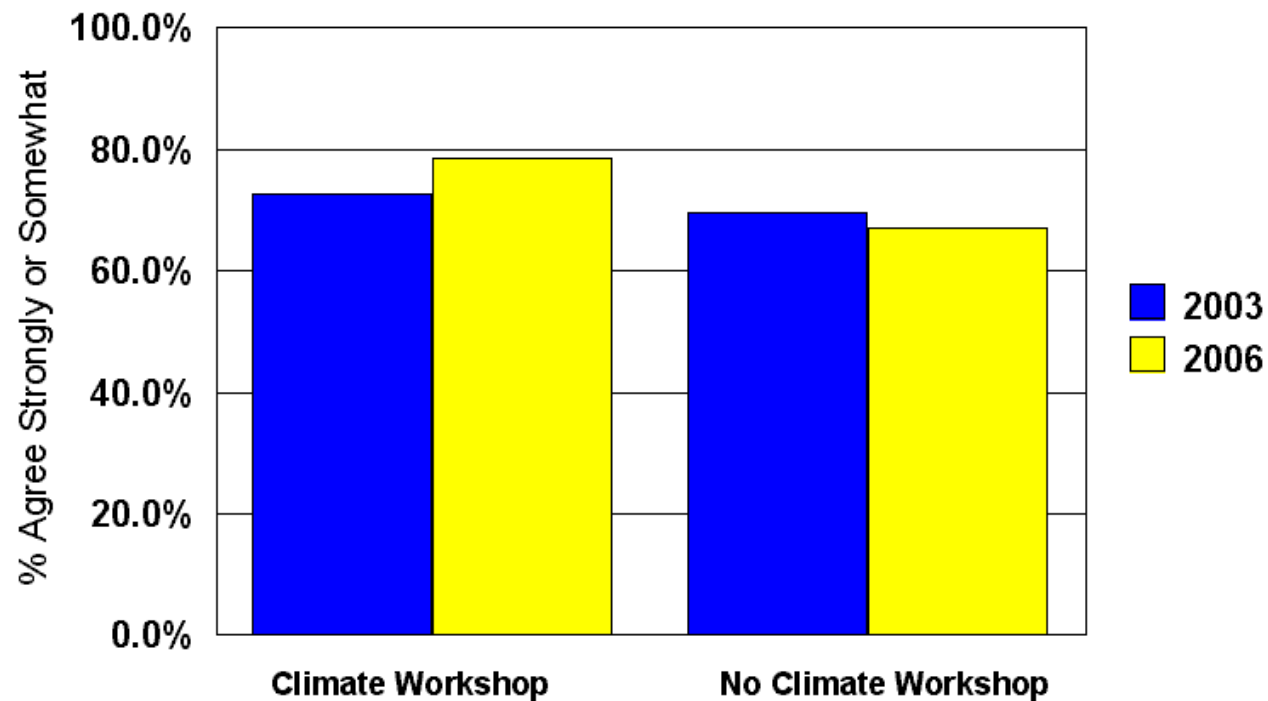






# Campus-Wide Change

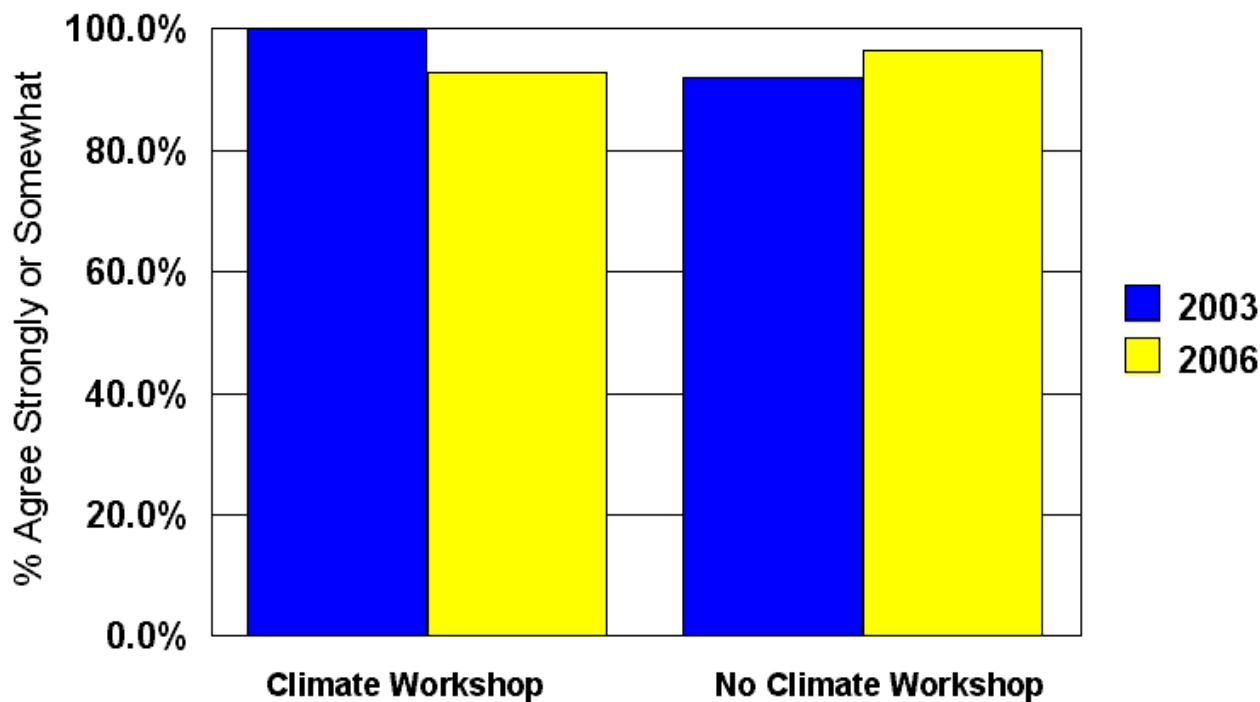
## Climate for Women is Good Responses of Women Faculty





# Campus-Wide Change

## Climate for Women is Good Responses of Department Chairs





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