

Report from the Visit of the External Advisory Committee for the Rice University ADVANCE Grant

January 15-16, 2009

Three of the four members of the External Advisory Committee for the Rice University Advance Grant visited Rice on January 15-16, 2009. We want to express our thanks to the many members of the Rice community, especially President David Lebron and Provost Eugene Levy, who took time to meet with us, and who engaged us in a lively and informative set of conversations. We want particularly to thank Carol Quillen, Vice Provost for Academic Affairs, Kathy Matthews, outgoing Dean of Natural Science, Sallie Keller-McNulty, Dean of Engineering, Kathy Collins, Vice President for Finance, and especially Jan Rinehart, Executive Director of the ADVANCE Program at Rice, for their thoughtful organization of our visit. Finally, we want to thank Julia Amborski, Coordinator of the ADVANCE Program at Rice, for logistics that worked smoothly from the beginning to the end of our visit.

Our report is organized as a series of observations and suggestions in the form of bullets. They are suggestions only, based on what we heard and the impressions that we formed during our visit. Those with whom we met will have to decide which will be most useful for them, and how best to adapt such ideas to Rice. While the list below is not ordered by priority, it is organized from the most general to the more specific. The general issues must be resolved in a positive way in order for the more specific efforts to have a workable context in which to flourish.

- There are 2.5 years remaining on the Rice ADVANCE grant. There are two major tasks that will have to be taken on during this time. It will not be possible to do these tasks seriatim: they will need to be thought about and undertaken in parallel. The first major task is the continued development of the Rice ADVANCE programs, enhancing and expanding the successful programs that have been begun and initiating new programs as appropriate. The second major task is creating an effective plan for the future, so that the splendid work that has been done under the ADVANCE grant can continue to evolve, and the gains already made will not be lost to the university. We believe that any effective plan for the future will require both program funds and staff funds. This second task will be especially challenging in the current economic climate. We believe that the NSF site visit next fall is likely to focus on this second task, and so it must be undertaken at once in preparation for that visit.
- In the report after our previous visit, we urged the senior administration (President, Provost, Board of Trustees) to make it clear that faculty diversity is a major goal and a priority for Rice going forward. It was encouraging to hear from the President and the Provost about their own commitment to this goal and about the work they have done to support efforts across the university to this end, including importantly the work being done by the ADVANCE program. Their public commitment to diversity will be even more important in the current economic climate, especially after the current ADVANCE grant concludes. One concrete way in which they may be able to demonstrate and extend

their commitment would be to consider how to raise funds from private donors to support the programs that have been developed under the ADVANCE grant and the staff that are needed to run them.

- We note that Lisa Frehill, the external evaluator for the Rice ADVANCE program, described the Rice model for participation in their ADVANCE programs as “build it and they will come.” It is our impression as well that Rice has chosen a model that relies on having strong and attractive programs, and that encourages people to participate, rather than a model that requires people to participate in particular programs. We have two points to make about this. First, we think, as the Rice ADVANCE program prepares for the NSF site visit next fall, it will be important for the materials prepared for that visit to be explicit about the model the program is using, about why this model is the most appropriate in the Rice context, and about how well the model is working. Second, we would note that, insofar as our impression about the model is correct, it places a substantial burden on the leaders of programs to persuade people to participate; this time and energy may be difficult to sustain over the coming years.
- The *Negotiating the Ideal Faculty Position* workshops are a stunning success. All of the faculty who have participated in them have had good experiences, and think they should continue. There is some perception that female faculty have been more involved than male faculty, and some sense that some of the faculty who have participated a lot may be ready to have their time commitments eased. Given the uniformly positive view of these workshops, they could provide a good opportunity to reach out to and include a group of faculty who have been less involved in the ADVANCE programs thus far. We did hear from some of the senior faculty that they were under the impression that the workshops could only accommodate a small number of Rice graduate students and postdocs. This is apparently a misperception; clarifying this point could generate substantial additional good will.
- The efforts being made to improve faculty search processes seem to be bearing fruit. The faculty we talked with seemed generally to appreciate the importance of generating a large, diverse applicant pool early in the search process. There seems to be substantial effort to include at least one woman and/or minority candidate on the short list and in the interview group. There seems to be less understanding that increasing the size of the short list and interview group and including more than one woman/minority candidates is likely to result in better decision making and more diversity. The search committee workshops seem to have been generally well-received, although there was some uncertainty, among the senior faculty with whom we talked, about the role that the diversity designee is supposed to fulfill.
- The conversations that we had about mentoring in our meetings with faculty were quite complicated. Different groups of faculty had different views about their mentoring

experiences, both as mentors and as mentees, and everyone had what is in our view a rather narrow view of what mentoring includes. There seemed to be a general assumption that mentoring is about help and advice that senior faculty provide for junior faculty about their research, the most commonly cited role of a mentor being to comment on the draft of a paper or grant proposal or to suggest a journal for publication. There was very little conversation about mentoring for teaching and essentially no recognition that mentoring should be about opening doors and advancing the careers of junior faculty (e.g., by arranging for them to give talks at prestigious conferences and nominating them for awards). Furthermore, the senior faculty – particularly the male senior faculty – seemed to think that good mentoring relationships depended on the junior faculty member initiating requests for help. The junior faculty, on the other hand, were quite explicit about their reluctance to ask for help, especially from senior faculty who were going to determine their fate at reappointment and tenure time. There was a gender divide in our conversations about how satisfied the junior faculty were with the mentoring they have experienced at Rice. The junior women were quite positive. All of those with whom we spoke were heavily involved in ADVANCE activities, and we suspect that this involvement has provided a sense of community and support as well as access to a range of people who can answer specific questions and provide advice. Many (but not all) of the junior men, on the other hand, were very negative about what they viewed as the lack of mentoring in their Rice experience. They were clear that they wanted strong mentoring and equally clear that they did not believe they were getting what they needed. On this particular issue, we do not have specific advice about how to proceed; we only urge you to undertake some systematic efforts to provide better mentoring for both male and female junior faculty.

- We understand that Rice is interested in having a positive climate for everyone who works and studies at Rice. The climate studies that Rice has undertaken have revealed areas in which some groups report less positive experiences than do others. We do not believe that it is possible to address directly how people feel. We do believe, however, that it is important to address the question of what constitutes professional behavior. We think it would be useful to provide coaching about inappropriate behavior and to establish dialogues about what constitutes inappropriate versus appropriate behavior. We think that department chairs are fairly often faced with negative behavior that they don't know how to address, and that help in this regard would be appreciated. It is important for all faculty to understand that the productivity of a group, and the individuals in it, declines when even one person in the group is behaving inappropriately.
- We were somewhat surprised to hear several department chairs express concern about their ability to recruit faculty in an era of dual-career couples where the potential faculty member's spouse/partner will need a professional opportunity as well if the couple is to move to Rice. We had the impression that some chairs at least are not aware of the resources available for spouse/partner placement, and would urge additional emphasis on

what Rice can do in these situations. We would only add that we think it is useful to approach these situations first from the perspective of finding a situation for the spouse/partner that is a good fit both for the individual and the institution, and then to look for the necessary resources. This could become increasingly important as resources become more constrained.

A final word. Jan Rinehart deserves special mention in this report. We heard from so many people about how much they appreciate both the quality and the spirit of her efforts. She has managed to make the work of the ADVANCE program resonate well beyond the walls of the Natural Science and Engineering departments. She is both the glue that holds the program together and the carrier of the program DNA as she moves through the campus. The considerable success of the Rice ADVANCE programs rests on the shoulders of many people, but it is hard to imagine this level of success without Jan's remarkably effective efforts.

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