
Cross Institutional Synergy for Women Scientists

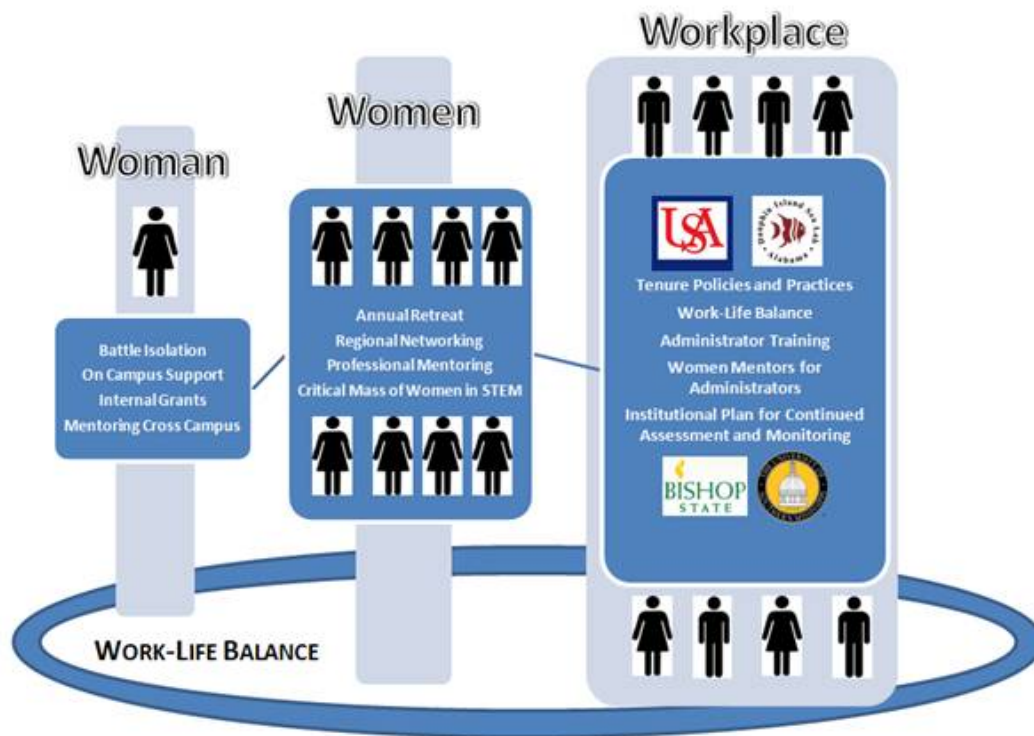
University of Southern Mississippi

www.GulfCoastADVANCE.org

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Project Summary

The University of Southern Mississippi's Gulf Coast ADVANCE partnership was forged to (1) Highlight, promote, and encourage the scientific research and accomplishments of 145 STEM women faculty members across four institutions. (2) Curb the isolation women experience in their work by gathering a critical mass of STEM women in the region to serve as a professional support and collaborative network. And (3) Begin conversations to transform the cultural and institutional landscapes so that work-life integration issues for women and families are addressed to shape a healthier, more productive environment for all scientists. Gulf Coast ADVANCE is in its fourth year and continues its activities, mentoring, brown bag lunches around issues for women in STEM, and policy discussions. Some of leadership team members are in the process of developing the next ADVANCE proposal that would support the same partners, but expand reach and focus specifically on policy work and professional support for leadership around faculty recruitment, tenure review, and retention.



Project Description

The University of Southern Mississippi's Gulf Coast ADVANCE partnership includes the University of Southern Mississippi Gulf Coast campus, the Dauphin Island Sea Lab, Bishop State Community College, and the University of South Alabama. Gulf Coast ADVANCE is just wrapping up a four-year program. Some ADVANCE activities, mentoring, brown bag lunches around issues for women in STEM, and policy discussions are ongoing. \$20,000 in Fellowships are given annually. Gulf Coast ADVANCE Fellowships are intended to support women the careers of women STEM faculty across the four Gulf Coast partner institutions. Examples of projects that may be funded include: (1) attending conferences, workshops, or seminars to enhance professional skills, (2) purchasing supplies, equipment, software, or library resources to enhance course development or research, (3) collaborating with a noted scholar, scientist, or educational expert, (4) supporting page charges and other publication costs associated with refereed articles and books accepted for publication by reputable presses, (5) covering costs of pilot research projects. Some of our leadership team members are in the process of developing the next ADVANCE proposal to support the same partners, but expand to more campuses and focus specifically on policy work and professional support for leadership around faculty recruitment, tenure review, and retention. The next steps include training and professional development for mid and upper level administrators, invited speakers and panelists to address equity issues and financial impacts, a full analysis of current policies with external coaching, among other initiatives.



Context

When Cwikla (PI) was serving as a STEM Center Director at the University of South Alabama she began thinking about ways to support junior women faculty at both USA and USM her former institution. The NSF ADVANCE program has existed for decades and the corpus of work and knowledge around STEM women in the academy is significant. Despite what research tells about supportive work environments for women and families, when women work in departmental isolation, in many cases as the only woman in a department it makes feelings of inclusion and belonging hard to grasp. Cwikla initiated the partnership while at the University of South Alabama as

Founding Director of CISSTEM (Center for Integrative Studies in STEM). This new position was developed to stimulate relationships across STEM colleges and the College of Education as well as community partnerships. With past relationships for 10 years at the University of Southern Mississippi as well as other institutions through STEM outreach programs along the Gulf Coast, the timing was appropriate, the need severe, and the professional relationships in place to begin activities and conversations around women in STEM. Upon her return to USM, she remained PI and the partnership continued to flourish.

Evaluation

An external evaluation firm Education Design Inc. in Boston collected quantitative and qualitative data over the course of four years. These included surveys, event observations, and interviews with institutional leaders, program leadership, faculty participants, and invited speakers. Program impacts and suggestions for next steps are included in the annual and final reports to the NSF. Sometimes decided at the IHL level.

Challenges

The challenge as with many programs around diversity is how to: (1) maintain the “stickiness” of effective programs and at the same time grow new training systems, (2) identify and bring the change agents to the table, and (3) eventually change policies, which at a state institution are In addition to these local social challenges, Mississippi and Alabama are southern states nested in a southern culture which has implications for women as does the financial duress both states and hence their institutions face.