April 9, 2015

To: University of Houston ADVANCE

From: ADVANCE EAB visitors (Cepeda-Benito, Claiborn, Comedy, Glick, Kramer)

Re: Thoughts on project progress

Thanks for a welcoming, well-planned and executed visit. We are excited about your project and pleased to be involved in it. The following does not follow the organization of the questions you posed, but we think you will find it useful as you reflect on those questions. Please be in touch if we can provide any clarification.

Accomplishments and progress

- Strong commitment among the participants in the many initiatives.
- High levels of energy and excitement among those with whom we met (at all levels).
- Broad representation of units.
- Impressive buy-in from the highest administrative levels.
- Membership of HR and legal offices on the internal advisory board is a strength.
- Big programming splash in the fall semester, with four different events and collaboration with other units.
- The project’s goals are clear and well chosen. The COACHE data were well used in the initial design of the project.
- The social science research project is strong and well thought-out, with a positive combination of basic and applied foci. Maximizing the response rate is important, and the research team should be the judge of timing that to do so.

Opportunities and challenges

- While participation is broad, there are significant gaps. More inclusive involvement across NSF fields will strengthen dissemination, and will bring salient expertise to the project’s efforts.
- The two advocates from a college should come from two different departments.
- Going directly to faculty groups for outreach (whether it is to recruit advocates or participation at other levels) is a labor-intensive approach but is likely to supplement the pool that is yielded by working through deans and chairs.
- The organizational plan of the project continues to evolve. It is important to clarify the roles of each position or group. It is essential that leaders have adequate resources for their roles; preventing burnout for project leaders should be a priority. The external evaluator’s scope of work could explicitly include input on the structure of the project management.
- Coordinating the project’s work and clearly communicating it (both to participants and to the university community) will benefit from settling on a more-or-less final organizational plan.
• Beyond the central benefit of increased diversity, communications to the whole University should also emphasize specific initiatives (e.g., dual career assistance, work-life initiatives), and the reality that benefits of ADVANCE are likely to accrue to all faculty.
• We see the new position of Associate Provost for Faculty Development and Faculty Affairs as critical to the institutionalization and long-term effectiveness of the ADVANCE programs. We suggest the individual holding this position be intimately familiar and engaged with the ADVANCE project.
• A wide range of activities is underway. It is important that the team prioritize the tasks being tackled, with tasks leading to structural institutional change central. With clear communication among leaders of the various strategic initiative groups and other activities, the team will be able to assess the use of resources (human and otherwise) early enough to avoid serious overextension.
• ADVANCE-related professional development of department chairs is recommended; in particular, the goal of increasing the recruitment and retention of women of color faculty will be affected by a department leader’s having a nuanced understanding of the related factors.
• The advocates are expected to help in departmental climate and use of best practices.
• Members of each strategic initiative group should be kept updated on plans for training of search committee members and chairs and department leaders.
• The recruitment of associate professors into department chair positions should be reduced.
• The project team should explore ways of making use of the well-constituted Internal Advisory Board in implementation of the initiatives. It is potentially an important source of resources, including the organizational influence of its members.
• Mentoring is a critical project focus, and we look forward to rapid progress on internal as well as external mentoring after the coming visit of the mentoring consultant.
• It is not too soon to be thinking about institutionalization of the project, further engaging other high-level University offices (such as HR and legal affairs) in addition to the academic deans.

Overall

You are doing a lot, very well. Keep up the momentum, roll out what is ready (and where possible move it to partnering offices on campus). Build collaborations with other units and individuals. We were pleased to learn, after our visit, that the course release for your lead co-PI is to be adjusted to make it more appropriate to the commitments she has in her ADVANCE position; it is important, more generally, that the home departments of team members not be bearing the weight of underwriting the ADVANCE project.