White paper

from the ADVANCE-CoE Women Faculty Retreat

August 2021

On August 10-12, 2021, 23 members of the College of Engineering came together at Callaway Gardens for the ADVANCE-CoE Women Faculty Retreat (7 CoE units; with 21 faculty, one staff member, one graduate student). We were joined on August 10 by Vice Provost Bonnie Ferri, who is also a CoE faculty member. The goals of the retreat were (1) to rejuvenate after a difficult year; (2) to come together as a community to support each other; (3) to disseminate information about programs and policies at Georgia Tech, and (4) to synthesize and share our ideas in a white paper to inform the ADVANCE program, and more broadly Georgia Tech. Participation in the retreat was contingent on full commitment of 48 hours, to be fully present in the retreat activities. Many members of the retreat indicated that they appreciated having the chance to get together in person at the retreat. While this retreat did not include men, it was noted that faculty members of all genders may appreciate the opportunity to participate in future events like this.

Prior to the retreat, participants were encouraged to read "Every Other Thursday" by Ellen Daniell. While we did not directly discuss the book during the retreat, the group structure of the retreat was inspired by the book. Following the retreat, we may also consider forming "groups."

On August 11, the group considered three questions:

1. What is Georgia Tech doing or not doing to support women faculty?
2. What is Georgia Tech doing or not doing to support all its members?
3. What is the culture that we want?

One observation from the retreat is that communication among the members of the Georgia Tech community is often inefficient, which limits the impact of many existing programs and efforts on campus. While detailed information is available on websites, is emailed out, and is posted in newsletters, as faculty members we are not effectively internalizing this information. One reason may be that we are too busy. Thus, one important role for ADVANCE is to bring together faculty, first to determine what is important to the faculty and then to share the relevant information. The group can then determine whether existing Georgia Tech programs can meet the identified needs, if ADVANCE can partner to support and tailor ongoing programming, or rather if completely new programs are needed. In addition to having retreats, another idea that was suggested is to have a faculty re-orientation about every five years, so that faculty can get access to the up-to-date information that is provided at new faculty orientation. This reorientation could be conducted during a retreat, or it could be accomplished on campus.

In the discussion of Question 1, one discussion topic that surfaced in multiple contexts is the pathway to professional development and leadership for women faculty. In recent years, Georgia Tech has provided many opportunities for training, such as the Emerging Leaders Program and the Adaptive Leadership Program, and more recently professional development training from the Office of Faculty Affairs. Georgia Tech has also supported external opportunities such as ELATE. Faculty at the retreat were not

uniformly aware of these opportunities, providing an opportunity for ADVANCE to curate and disseminate the various programs.

A related topic is the extent to which such training provides the pathway to leadership opportunities at Georgia Tech, or rather if it is the informal mentoring and networking system that provides the pathway. The lack of women chairs in CoE was discussed, as well as the need to consider a broader view of leadership. The external recruiting of women leaders to Georgia Tech was also discussed, in contrast to the internal mentoring and promotion of Georgia Tech's men leaders.

The impacts of COVID on faculty was also discussed, with appreciation noted for measures including extending the clock for promotion and tenure, and the extensive testing and vaccination services provided at Georgia Tech. Participants also shared concerns about added teaching demands during the pandemic, as well as the extensive caregiving responsibilities for some, overall resulting in less time for paper and proposal writing, which will have long-term impacts on the research programs of faculty, and with greater impacts for women faculty. There are real concerns that women faculty could decide to leave Georgia Tech, possibly for new resources elsewhere.

In the discussion of Question 2, there was great interest and passion within the group for helping graduate students. While perhaps not surprising in hindsight, given the close partnership of faculty and graduate students in research, this emphasis was not anticipated in the original framing of the question. Mentorship is important to the group in a broad context, which includes the mentoring of graduate students. Good mentoring is time consuming, and women are more likely to advise graduate students from diverse groups, who may require more customized and expert mentoring. While mentoring is certainly valued at Georgia Tech, it is not explicitly included in annual evaluations or in RPT. A closer alignment of our values with evaluation is recommended. One idea is that graduate students could evaluate the mentorship of their research advisors as input to the faculty annual evaluation.

Our faculty would like to advocate for the state of our graduate students. Many of the difficulties experienced by women faculty are exacerbated for graduate students.

- Graduate students who are hired as GRAs are part-time employees, so unlike faculty they do not have sick leave for situations such as surgery, mental health, or the birth of a child. This lack of sick leave puts both faculty and graduate students in a conflicted position, as GRAs must continue to be supported on a research contract even when they require sick leave. Not all sponsors grant deadline extensions for project deliverables, which adds another challenge for the PIs.
- Graduate students, as well as many staff, cannot afford childcare at the Georgia Tech childcare facilities, which are effectively only available for the privileged faculty.
- The stipend provided to most graduate students at Georgia Tech is below the living wage. Thus, students without the privilege of family financial support or other financial means are in a financially insecure position, adding to their stress and limiting Georgia Tech's recruiting and retention of a diverse cohort of graduate students.
- Graduate student mental health is of concern to faculty. As we mentor students we refer them to Georgia Tech mental health services, particularly CARE.

While it is understood that our financial resources to support graduate students are limited, and the students are in a dual role of earning a degree, many of the systems in place around graduate student

support pre-date our current views on broadening participation and equity, and are at odds with our values and goals at Georgia Tech. A re-examination of our systems is required, to provide a baseline of support for graduate students to ensure broad access to graduate school (especially for students representing the demographics of Georgia), as well as ensuring ethical accounting of graduate student time to external sponsors.

The issue of communication within Georgia Tech intersected with the support of graduate students. For example, the College of Engineering's Center for Engineering Education and Diversity (CEED) provides broad support to graduate students from underrepresented groups. However, in the group discussions several faculty shared heart-wrenching stories of struggling graduate students, who could have been referred to CEED. However, our faculty do not broadly understand what resources are provided by CEED to graduate students. Better integration among the various groups at Georgia Tech is required, rather than "staying in our silos." ADVANCE can play an important role in disseminating such information, through group discussions of interested diverse members of the community.

While many of the communication concerns expressed surround the inefficient propagation of information, in some cases the policies themselves appear to be unclear. There was concern raised about the policies for reporting and tracking faculty misconduct. In some conversations it seemed that for a first offense, a faculty member would be coached, but for additional offenses the consequences would be more severe. The participants supported the need for a written policy including recording of misconduct complaints against faculty. It was discussed that having even a few "bad actors" among the faculty is highly damaging to the overall culture, a nonlinear effect. There was also a discussion about the need to protect faculty against frivolous, inappropriate, and anonymous complaints. More education is needed, for all members of the community, on the purpose of reporting and conflict resolution.

There was substantial discussion at the retreat on culture, both on the current culture and on the culture we desire. The retreat participants appreciate the high energy, productivity, and risk-tasking aspects of our culture at Georgia Tech. Faculty members at Georgia Tech are extremely busy. One aspiration of many of the retreat participants is to find a way to focus on their high-priority goals and projects, rather than being so busy with urgent tasks. Most faculty members do not take the time to go to as many research seminars or training as they wished. Time for faculty development is undervalued. Related issues are the absence of vacation time for faculty and the absence of sabbatical opportunities (which most universities do offer). Such busy-ness was attributed as one factor in the poor understanding about activities on campus. Another hypothesis is that faculty members are assigned committee work that could be handled more efficiently via electronic platforms than via meetings.

A related concept is faculty isolation. Such isolation has been exacerbated during the pandemic, but is a larger concern of the retreat participants. Isolation is connected by some to lack of inclusion, leading to lack of a sense of belonging. Women faculty may be more likely to engage in interdisciplinary work, which leaves them less included in the disciplinary power structure and values associated with our traditional unit structure. Such dynamics may be more dominant in some units compared to others. Transparency in resource allocation and decision making is encouraged as a general principle.

Mentorship was viewed as an important activity in multiple contexts, to mentor faculty and to mentor students. Mentor training is recommended, as well as valuing the work of mentors in terms of workload and evaluations. The College of Engineering's Faculty Mentoring Program has an important role to play to achieve our mentoring goal and should be widely communicated across the college. It was suggested

to create an official faculty mentoring certificate to recognize faculty members who commit to training, mentoring of faculty colleagues, mentor-to-mentor support and participation in roundtable discussions on culture. The format of the training could follow that of the Emerging Leaders program, with a small cohort of faculty members (10-15 to start). We also want to create a collegial and welcoming environment for our students, in which every student can be successful. This culture is at odds with the traditional Georgia Tech culture of "sink or swim," in which students aspire to "get out." More opportunities for faculty and students to interact in informal settings can help to promote an inclusive culture.

Recommendations

The College of Engineering should

- organize events like retreats and reorientation to provide dedicated time for disseminating information and for meaningful discussion and brainstorming. Preferably these events would be off site, with a pace that allows time for reflection and community building. Topics or themes for such events could include (1) paths to leadership, (2) mentorship training and programs, and (3) support and advocacy for graduate students
- examine its reward structure for faculty evaluation, such as time spent on mentorship and on how teaching is measured
- advocate for clear institute policies on documenting faculty misconduct
- reexamine its systems for graduate students, in light of our values of equity and wellness. Aspects including sick leave, childcare, stipend, and mental health are expected to require financial resources.

Appendices

Below are summaries from the small group discussions on the final day of the retreat.

1) What is Georgia Tech doing or not doing to support women faculty?

- Communication – consolidating information on Faculty Affairs website; dispelling misinformation about ASMD and other policies
- COVID flexibility – good and need important clarifications and improvements for RPT
- Improvement in accepting suggestions from women faculty
- Faculty orientation – treat like a renewal; suggest faculty go every five years.
- Retreat for newly-tenured faculty – keep this
- Finding ways to measure mentoring contribution and other intangible service contributions (recommendation letters for students, tenure evaluation letters, etc.)
- Recruiting practices – looking at places where they have been successful in hiring women.
- Faculty-student interaction – keep it going, organize a training session for faculty (maybe women faculty)
- Bringing folks together that feel isolated – normalize the experience

2) What is Georgia Tech doing or not doing to support all its members?

What is Georgia Tech doing to support all its members?

- Implemented effective COVID testing and scheduled vaccination.
- Making resources and tools for online teaching available.
- Trying to make mental health support more available and evolving understanding of the importance of mental health.
- GT Food pantry and clothes closet provides help to food insecure students and staff.
- The research facilities are outstanding, and the national recognition is valuable.
- GT is promoting interdisciplinary research and collaborative initiatives.
- GT has engaged in discussion on DEI, but action is slow. Still, compared with other schools, GT is considered to be at the forefront nationally.

What is Georgia Tech not doing to support all its members?

- Standing up to USG on issues such as masks mandates and switching to a Pass/Fail grading during the pandemic.
- The community, especially students, is concerned about crime around campus.
- To make sure benefits are financially equitable to all members of the community (e.g., childcare, parking) and to make sure salaries are cost of living appropriate.
- We need more consistency across schools. For example, some schools offer parental leave for graduate students and postdocs. Additionally, ASMD expectations are not always uniformly understood.
- GT needs a safety net for emergencies (e.g., health crisis). There do not seem to be programs in place to help faculty/staff/students going through miscarriages or the loss of a child.

- GT needs to be doing a better job of advertising resources available to all members.
- Facilities and space challenges. There is, for example, no dedicated kitchenette in some buildings for graduate students or undergraduates, and the office spaces in older buildings should be retrofitted to improve quality and make space equitable.

3) What is the culture that we want?

We like the energy and productivity of our culture. We embrace collaboration and risk taking. We are also high achievers who are pushed to our maximum abilities. We want a support system to maintain this culture, and we want to create a culture that reduces the workload of its members. As a few suggestions:

- Be transparent in how resources are allocated and how overhead is spent.
- Senior leaders can share information about their decision-making strategies.
- Make information about resources readily available and widely publicized.

Big idea: Create a program to certify mentors in the same way that we certify coaches. Provide mentorship training and formally recognize mentorship as a valuable act of service. Train mentors for each group: faculty, staff, and students. Also, mentors should have their own mentors. Partner with DEI committees to create a handbook and structure to pair mentors to mentees. Find ways to get multiple mentors involved to share the workload. Also consider reducing the teaching load for active mentors. Offer to pair mentors and mentees at various stages between the beginning and the second year. This can be part of the new faculty orientations.

Offer various levels of training and make the basic level mandatory. For example, the Implicit Bias training should be mandatory.

We also want a collegial, welcoming culture for our students. Our students behave as though success is a limited resource or that success is only available to some and not all. We want a culture where all students feel they can access the resources they need, and all students can be successful. We want to ensure that no student is left behind or left out. We want to create an inclusive culture for our students.

As an example, CEE started "have coffee with a professor." Each professor was asked to sign up for 1 or 2 hours per semester. Then students can select which hour they attend.

MSE is having a picnic with different research groups.

We want a culture that incentivizes and makes time for curiosity. We need authorized down time. We need space and resources for creativity. For instance, offer small seed grants for exploration. Have a facilitated process to take a sabbatical of 6 months to 1 year.

Participants

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Tuesday participation and presentation on "Changing the Culture" by Bonnie Ferri, ECE