



WPI

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Summer working groups: A strategy to engage multi-level stakeholders in cross-cutting efforts that advance equity in STEM

Presenters: Chrys Demetry and Elizabeth Lingo

Co-Authors: Natalie Farny, Kim Hollan, Susan Roberts, Jeanine Skorinko

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Introductions

- Name, institution, role
- What brought you to this session?

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WPI's Institutional Context

- Research-intensive, tradition of project-based education
- Enrollment: 5000 undergraduate, 2000 graduate
- 400 full-time faculty

ADVANCE Adaptation Grant (2018-2022)

- Enact new university-wide Associate-to-Full promotion policy
 - Defined and welcomed multiple forms of scholarship for tenured faculty
 - Sought to elevate the evaluation of teaching, mitigate biases, and improve clarity
- Improve promotion clarity and guidance for teaching faculty on contract

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Two issues have been the main focus of our ADVANCE grant: progressive new policy, but how to enact it?

Lack of clarity and guidance for teaching faculty had also been identified as problematic.

More Institutional Context

- Strong “town hall” faculty governance model
- “Flat” P&T systems: university-wide Promotion and Tenure committees
- All P&T policy changes go through Committee on Governance
- 4 schools and 16 departments
- Dept Heads shape practices and influence faculty more than Deans

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Common challenges for faculty equity initiatives aiming for sustained institutional change

- Assuring balance of bottom-up and top-down approaches
- Engagement and alignment across multiple levels and units (i.e., across schools and/or departments within schools)
- Input from and alignment of multiple governance committees, stakeholders, experts

Need cross-cutting coordination and time for this alignment work

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Motivating challenges:

Change work needs to engage and integrate faculty at the grass roots as well as a range of leadership, but it's often difficult to shoehorn into the pace of the 9-month academic calendar on top of other service/leadership duties and core teaching and research.

We found that access to resources and feelings of inclusion/belonging vary widely across dept/field, track/appt type, and more, as did practices across those groups.

In our institutional context, issues we were addressing cut across multiple faculty governance/P&T committees that would find it very difficult to collaborate during the academic year.

We also needed the perspectives of department heads. It's very common for policies and practices to be implemented in different ways across departments without transparent rationale. That results in confusion and inequities across departments and faculty tracks.

How to share/exchange best practices and work toward more uniformity and better communication?

Driving question

How can we catalyze *and sustain* this coordination and alignment work in strategic ways that honor the time and workload constraints of faculty and leaders at multiple levels?

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Humane. Realistic. ONGOING mechanism to normalize and institutionalize equity work.

Key features of one strategy: Summer working groups

- Provide groups with equity foundations (e.g., audit and workshop by external expert)
- Pay faculty for manageable commitment (~1 week total)
- Undertake bite-size goals that aim for “small wins”
- Compose groups strategically to pave way forward
- Use facilitation approach that empowers members to make choices and do the work
- Decide on clear deliverables and disseminate in existing communication channels

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Showing this amount of engagement gives credibility and confidence.
Mix of returnees and new people in consecutive years for both continuity and strategic considerations.

Outcomes of WPI's ADVANCE Summer Working Groups

Policy-Related

Policy Revisions & Motions

Valuing of Service in Promotion

Revision of Instructions to Letter Writers

Resources & Tools

Collection of Sample Dossiers

"Guides" to Promotion

Matrix of Multiple Forms of Scholarship

Evaluation of Teaching

Teaching Portfolio Guidelines

Teaching Evaluation Rubric

Peer Review of Teaching Guidelines

How working groups have unfolded over time

2019: Equity foundations and agenda setting for next several years

1. Promotion for tenured faculty
2. Promotion for teaching faculty on contract

2020: Highest priority achievable agenda items from 2019

1. Early career guidance mechanism for contract teaching faculty
2. Clarifying promotion practices for contract faculty
3. Teaching portfolio guidelines
4. Scholarship matrix, consideration of service
5. Guide to Promotion

2021: Alignment across promotion and tenure systems

1. Teaching portfolio guidelines
2. Definition of scholarship
3. Rationale and practices for internal and external letter writers

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Example working group: Writing a “Guide to Promotion”

- Goal:
 - Create a resource to provide universal access to guidance and advice for multiple stakeholders about Assoc-Full promotion (early Assoc Profs, Assoc Profs close to promotion, nominators and advocates)
- Strategy for group composition:
 - Promotion committee members
 - Experienced/successful dept head nominator
 - Recent promotion recipient
 - Associate professors (early and declined for promotion)
- Outcome:
 - *Guide to Promotion* approved and published by promotion committee in next academic year, advertised in annual info sessions and website

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Vision: Institutionalizing summer working groups as an equity habit

Emergent Proposals for Summer 2022

1. Creating practices for new teaching track to tenure (funded by Provost)
2. How to include contract teaching faculty on promotion committee
3. Aligning level of promotion policy detail across tracks

Other Possibilities

1. Equitable response to COVID-19 impacts
2. Faculty recruitment and hiring practices
3. More...

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This is our vision. Stay tuned!

Roundtable Discussions

1. Identify an equity-related change need(s) at your own institution that might benefit from adapting a summer working group model
 - Think strategically about group composition: what constituencies and levels of the organization should be represented?
 - Can you envision a bite-size small win for summer work?
2. Are variations of this model used at your institution? What might other institutions learn from yours?

Individual work: 3 min

Identify note-taker/reporter

Share: 10 min

Report-out: Themes, examples, differences

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Depending on the size and operations of your institutions, this could be at the school/college level or university level.

This model could be applied to an array of equity initiatives beyond tenure and promotion:

- Faculty search and hiring practices
- Annual review processes
- Equitable responses to COVID and mental health crises

Resources

- O'Meara, K. & Templeton, L. (2022). [Equity-Minded Reform of Faculty Evaluation: A Call to Action](#). American Council on Education.
- American Council on Education (2022). [Equity-Minded Reform of Faculty Evaluation Policies: Audit Resource](#).
- Stewart, A.J. & Valian, V. (2018). *An Inclusive Academy: Achieving Diversity and Excellence*. MIT Press.
- Demetry, C., & Lingo, E. L., & Skorinko, J. L. M. (2020, June), *What is Valued and Who is Valued for Promotion? Enacting and Sustaining a Policy that Rewards Multiple Forms of Scholarship*. Paper presented at 2020 ASEE Virtual Annual Conference. [Content access](#), 10.18260/1-2--35503

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