

*CCAS case study for inclusion in the Department Chairs Seminar***STEM Faculty Retention Dilemma at Up-and-Coming State University**

Crystal Lattice is a tenure-track Assistant Professor in the Department of Physics at Up-and-Coming State University (UCSU). Over the past decade, UCSU, a mid-sized regional university that had traditionally focused on instruction, has aggressively expanded its research emphasis to enhance its national reputation and diversify its funding through extramural grants. Dr. Lattice was recruited three-and-a-half years ago following the loss of the department's one female tenure-track faculty member, who tendered her resignation for unspecified reasons one year prior to applying for tenure. The five other members of the department consist of four Professors, the most recently hired of which joined the faculty in 1985, and the department chair, Bill Leaguered, an Associate Professor recruited nationally five years ago with the charge of enhancing the program's scholarly engagement and grant support. That charge has proven to be a tall order, as the four tenured faculty members have long since discontinued their research agendas. With the baccalaureate as the unit's sole degree, the senior faculty members argue that their time is better spent by providing quality instruction and institutional service. Besides Leaguered's own engagement in funded research through a national collaboration, the department's bright spot is Lattice, who shortly after her UCSU arrival secured a major NSF grant to support her research and has involved several of the physics undergraduate majors in that work. With a growing reputation on campus as an innovative and effective teacher and increasing recognition in her discipline for her original research and work in her professional association, Lattice is well on her way to establishing a strong academic portfolio.

On a blustery January day, Lattice asks to meet with Leaguered and informs him that she has been offered a faculty position from a peer institution out of state. Lattice notes that she had not sought the position, but had been recruited by a former colleague with whom she had worked while on her post-doc. While the salary differential is not large, the position is being offered at the rank of Associate Professor with eligibility to apply for tenure in her first year of appointment. Lattice tells Leaguered that she finds very appealing the opportunity to earn tenure within the year, because she and her husband are anxious to start a family, and the nature of her research means that, during her pregnancy, she will need to minimize her exposure to certain chemical compounds used in her lab, which will affect her scholarly productivity. As well, while she feels that her work at UCSU is progressing well, remarks by some of her tenured colleagues - one has made pointed comments about her research and professional activity taking time away from instruction and institutional service - make her anxious about her application for advancement, which by UCSU rules is considered "early" if made prior to year five.

Leaguered is dismayed by Lattice's revelations and the prospect of losing the program's most promising faculty member, not to mention its only woman. He knows it's possible for Lattice to apply for promotion and tenure in the coming year, and he would support her. However, he feels certain that the notion of early consideration will not be embraced by the tenured faculty, whose support is required for the application to advance. Complicating matters is Leaguered's plan to make his own application for promotion in the coming year which, given his status as chair, he knows will be a touchy process. He worries that advocating among the senior faculty for an early application by Lattice might jeopardize his own case. How should he proceed?

Questions:

1. Multiple factors are identified as having led to Lattice's interest in leaving UCSU. What appear to be the key factors relevant to her retention?
2. Several elements in this scenario suggest the possibility of gender bias in this unit. What are they?
3. What strategies might Leaguered employ to retain Lattice?
4. What suggestions do you have for Leaguered with regard to his application for promotion?
5. If retention efforts are unsuccessful and Physics loses its second female faculty member, what actions should be taken to recruit a third female faculty member and retain her once recruited?

Acknowledgement of Support and Disclaimer

This material is based upon work supported by the National Science Foundation under Grant No. 0930138. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation.